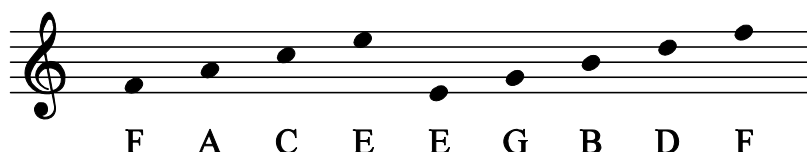


Modern Notation for Plainchant

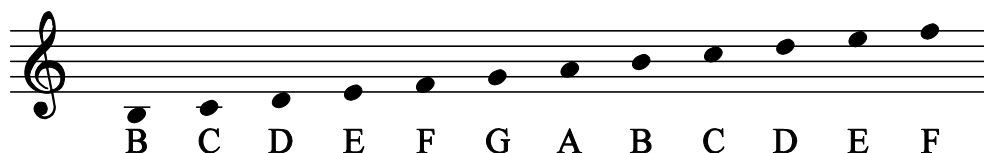
Until the beginning of the 20th century, our plainchant was notated either in the neumes of znamenny chant, or in four-line Kievan notation. The 1906 *Prostopinije* of Bokšai and Malinič inaugurated the use of modern “Italian” musical notation for recording our chant. This handout describes the form of this notation that is used in the official chant publications of the Byzantine Catholic Church.

The Staff

Chant is transcribed on a five line **staff**, with the lines and spaces corresponding to the notes of the diatonic scale. In almost all cases, the G clef is used to show that the note “G” is on the second line of the staff. (Lines and spaces are numbered from bottom to top.)

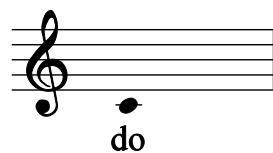


Small **ledger lines** are used to extend the staff to include notes outside its normal range:

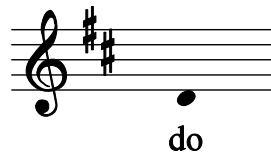


A **key signature** consisting of accidental signs (see below) is used to specify the **tonic**, the first degree or “do” of the scale to be sung. For example:

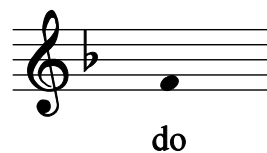
Key of C:



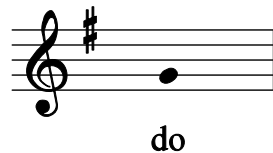
Key of D:



Key of F:



Key of G:



Key of A flat:



Key of B flat:



Of these key signatures, the most commonly used are D, F, and G; these should be memorized

Notes

The position of a **note** on the staff determines its pitch (how high or low it is); the shape of the note specifies how long it is sung.



The basic rhythmic unit is either a **half note** or a **quarter note**. A **whole note** is equal in duration to two half notes, or four quarter notes; an **eighth note** is equal in duration to half a quarter note.

A **dot** immediately after a note increases its duration by half, so a dotted half note is equal to three quarter notes. Notes can also be “tied” together to make up a single longer note. And eighth notes can be “barred” together to show how they are grouped together, even if sung separately.



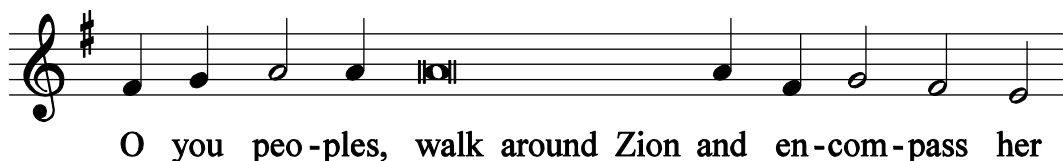
In almost every case, however, the rhythmic values of the notes are only *approximate guides*. They must be matched by the cantor to the natural flow of the text, in which each syllable may be slightly longer or shorter in duration than the syllables before and after. It is this suppleness that lends both grace and intelligibility to chanting and singing.

Text

The text being chanted is normally placed below the staff, divided into syllables to match the music. In some cases, the division of words into syllables may be used to provide an aid to singing the text properly.

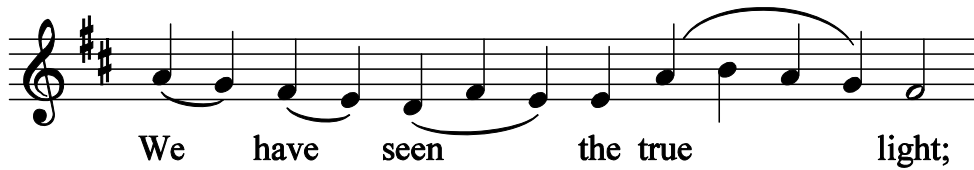


When more than three syllables are sung on a single pitch, they may be placed under a **slashed note** which marks a recitative passage. The rhythm of the recitative may be either free (that is, to the natural pace of the text if were spoken) or regular (that is, chanted to a regular pulse, as in a procession).



Avoid the temptation to speed up when singing text under a slashed note; the purpose of the notation is simply to indicate to the cantor that a natural flowing rhythm should be used.

When a syllable is sung through more than one note, a slur is used to group these notes together visually:



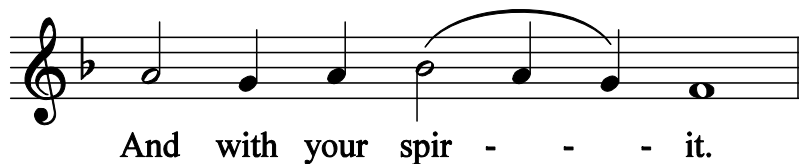
Bar lines

Unlike most vocal and instrumental music, plainchant is divided into “measures” of varying length, corresponding to phrases of text being sung. This division is indicated by vertical **bar lines**. A single bar line marks the end of a phrase:



The bar line normally implies a brief pause, at which a breath may be taken. The length of the pause depends on the text being sung, but the music should never come to a complete stop except at the end of a particular chant. (Rest marks are not normally used in our chant.)

A **double bar line** marks either the end of a particular chant, or the point at which the singing of the chant may go from one person or group to another: for example, from cantor to people, or from one side of the church to the other.



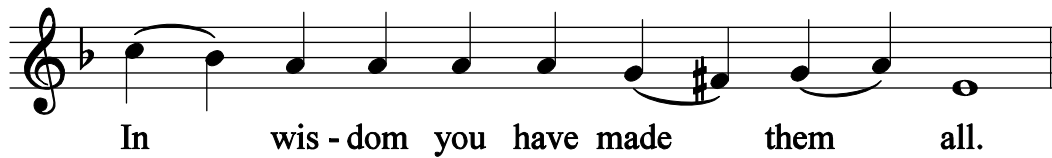
A **final bar line** may be used to mark the end of a longer chant, especially one that concludes a portion of a service.



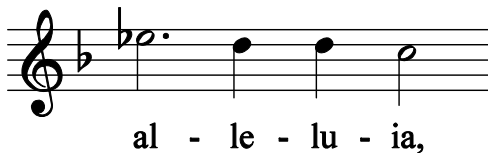
Accidentals

Prosopinije makes use of the normal pitches of the diatonic scale (do – re – mi – fa – so – la – ti – do), with only occasional exceptions. Where a note must be raised or lowered a half step, a mark called an accidental is placed before the note head, on the line or space whose pitch is being modified. The accidental lasts until the next bar line, or until the end of the current stave (line of music), whichever comes first.

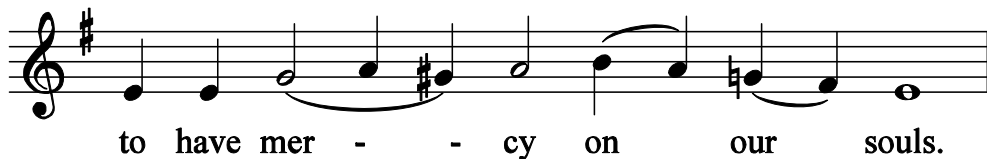
A sharp raises the pitch by a half step:



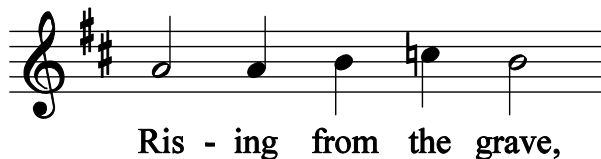
A flat lowers the pitch by a half step:



A natural cancels the effect of a previous sharp or flat:



The sharps or flats which define the current tonic or key (that is, the position of “do” for the chant being sung) may be grouped together at the start of each line of music to form the key signature.



Most accidentals occur in stylized phrases which will become familiar as you learn the chant repertoire.

Repeats

A final bar with two dots marks a repeat – a point at which the cantor and people go back to the beginning of the section to be repeated and continue singing. The beginning of the repeat is marked by a repeat bar facing the other way. If the section of the chant is repeated more than once, there will usually be a notation over the section, or at the end, indicating how many times the section is to be sung.



The Italian phrase *da capo* (“from the top”) directs the singer repeat the current chant from the beginning. The phrase *da capo al fine* (“from the top, to the end”) tells the singers to return to the beginning and sing as far as the end (which is marked with the word *fine*, “the end”).

In our chant, this usually occurs only at the singing of the Trisagion (and its replacement hymns) at the Divine Liturgy; see pages 27-33 of the *Divine Liturgies* book.

Tempo and dynamics

Chant publications of the Byzantine Catholic Church seldom prescribe an explicit tempo, since the pace of the singing varies somewhat, with the slowest chants being used for processions.

In the same way, increases in volume (crescendos) and decreases (decrecendos) are not normally indicated; the dynamic volume will often form an arc over the course of particular phrases, but must always match the sense of the text.