



Invest time each week to expand your vocabulary and deepen your faith.

28 January 2024

WORD OF THE WEEK

Benedictus \be-nə-'dik-təs\

From Latin meaning "blessed," the hymn sung by Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, an elder priest, who became mute on learning that he and Elizabeth would become parents late in life. After John's birth, Zechariah's tongue is loosed and he praises God with this canticle beginning: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to his people and set them free" (Luke 1:68).

Pronunciation: <http://tinyurl.com/Take5-benedictus>

CONTEXT

Since the early centuries, the **Benedictus** has been sung in the morning prayer of the church's liturgy because of its praise for the coming of the Redeemer and its allusion to Christ coming as the dawn to give light to those in darkness. —*Stephen J. Binz*

May I have the courage today/
To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer,
But do at last what I came here for/
And waste my heart on fear no more.
—*John O'Donohue*, **Benedictus**: A Book of Blessings

WHY IT MATTERS

The **Benedictus** is one of four canticles sung at the start of Luke's gospel, including Mary's Magnificat, (*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord*), the song of the angels to the shepherds (*Glory to God in the highest!*), and Simeon's prayer at the presentation of Jesus in the temple (*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace*). Together these songs remind us that, in the face of good news, the most reasonable response is to sing. Joyful people know this. It is the most natural response to the graciousness of God who truly has "come to the people and set them free!"

From The General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours: The Gospel canticles, the *Benedictus*, the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc dimittis*, should be accorded the same solemnity and dignity as is usual for the hearing of the Gospel (138).

RELATED WORDS

Magnificat | Nunc dimittis | Beatitudes

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Why do we sing at Mass?

Saint Augustine, who said many things well, insisted: "Singing is for one who loves." This is the same Bishop Augustine who considered banning music from his church altogether. In the end he adhered to an older proverb: "Whoever sings well prays twice over." So pass out the song sheets.

Saint Paul was an earlier proponent of church music, back when church still gathered in somebody's house. He advocated that believers sing "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). While Augustine got it right that singing is for lovers, happy people in general whistle while they work, and grateful people know they have something to sing about. This may explain why some folks in church are reluctant to sing. Without a significant increase in the spirit of joy and gratitude, don't expect an increase in responsive singers. Yet to those who love, feel joy, and are grateful, a little frivolity in public is in order.

—*Alice Camille*, from *Questions Catholics Ask* <https://tinyurl.com/QCA-sing-Mass>

REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD (FEBRUARY 2)

Listen to your elders

Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews and desired their son to be raised in the faith that had sustained them. They took Jesus to the Temple to be consecrated and presented to God, where they met Simeon and Anna, elders of the community. The elders immediately recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel.

READINGS: Malachi 3:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40 (524 <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/020224.cfm>). "My eyes have seen your salvation."

FAITH IN ACTION

Follow the wisdom of our biblical elders and call forth the gifts of a child to give light to the world.