



THE DAILY OFFICE

A Guide for Beginners

Morning and Evening Prayer
in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer



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For individuals, households, and parishes

A received inheritance

Morning and Evening Prayer give Christians a regular form in which to pray the Psalms, hear Holy Scripture, confess the faith, and intercede for the Church and the world. This guide introduces their history and explains how to begin using the American Book of Common Prayer of 1928 at home.

Prayer at appointed hours belongs to the inheritance the Church received from Israel. The Psalms speak of prayer in the evening, morning, and at noon; Daniel prayed three times a day. In Acts, Peter and John go to the Temple at the ninth hour of prayer, while Peter prays at about the sixth hour. These passages show a life in which particular times were set apart for God. [1]

The earliest Christians continued to give the day a pattern of prayer. The Didache directs Christians to say the Lord's Prayer three times daily. In the third century, St Cyprian commends prayer in the morning in remembrance of the Resurrection, and again at sunset, looking to Christ as the light that does not fail. [2]

These witnesses do not describe a single, fully developed Office identical to ours. They show the roots from which the Church's daily prayer grew. Its later forms took shape through centuries of worship, under the care of bishops, saints, religious communities, and ordinary Christians.

The Office in the West

As Christian daily prayer developed, psalms, readings, hymns, and intercessions were ordered into services at particular hours. In the West, St Benedict's sixth-century Rule is an enduring witness to this work. It orders prayer through the day and night and provides for all 150 Psalms to be sung each week. His arrangement served a monastic household; the wider Church also had its own forms of daily common prayer. [3]

The medieval Western offices included Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. England received this inheritance in several local uses, including the Use of Salisbury, commonly called Sarum. Their books and calendars ordered a rich round of worship, though navigating the services could be demanding.

The first English Book of Common Prayer, published in 1549 under Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, substantially revised and simplified these services. Morning Prayer drew upon Matins, Lauds, and Prime; Evening Prayer drew chiefly upon Vespers and Compline. Psalms, lessons, ancient canticles, and collects remained central, now arranged in English within two principal offices. [4]

The Prayer Book's preface explained its concern for intelligible worship and an ordered reading of Scripture. Its changes were substantial, but its daily prayer had older roots. The Prayer Book tradition, including the American book of 1928, hands on an inheritance shaped by many generations before Cranmer as well as by those who followed him.

The prayer of the Church at home

One of the particular gifts of the Prayer Book tradition is that the Church's daily liturgy is placed directly into the hands of the laity. Morning and Evening Prayer can be said in a parish church, by a household, or by one person. Their psalms, lessons, canticles, and collects join the prayer of the home to the common worship of the Church.

The Office belongs to a larger rhythm of prayer, fasting, and feasting. The calendar marks the seasons and holy days; the collects express their petitions; the appointed readings bring the Scriptures into daily life. Sunday worship, the keeping of feasts, and the Church's disciplines of fasting give that daily prayer its wider setting.

Continuing Anglicanism preserves this as a living inheritance. The Prayer Book can guide ordinary life throughout the week, allowing the household to participate more fully in the Church's worship and observance. Advent and Easter, a Friday fast and a Sunday feast, can become recognizable parts of family life.

Household prayer is sustained by the parish's sacramental life. The Office leads us towards the Church's common worship and carries its prayer into the days between our gatherings. A modest beginning is enough: choose one Office, at a time that can ordinarily be kept, and learn its pattern through use.

What you need

Begin with a 1928 Book of Common Prayer and a Bible. The Prayer Book contains the services, Psalter, collects, and tables of readings, but usually not the full text of the daily lessons. The Authorized Version is a natural companion to its language; your parish priest can advise about another translation.

Mark the places

The Order for Daily Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer. These begin on pages 3 and 21 in standard pagination.

The Psalter, with the psalms appointed for your Office.

The daily lectionary near the front of the book, and the Collect for the Day among the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels.

The two lessons in your Bible. Mark both before beginning.

Pagination varies in some editions, so the names of the sections are the safest guide. A few ribbons or slips of paper make the necessary turns easier.

Read the directions

The small directions in the service are called rubrics. They tell you what to do; you do not read them aloud. An “Or” generally introduces an alternative, not another prayer to add. A canticle is a hymn of praise; a collect is a short prayer. The remaining terms will become familiar as you use the book.

This guide follows the 1928 book. Other Prayer Books and the Anglican Office Book have their own directions. Use the calendar and customs received in your parish.

The shape of Morning Prayer

The following order describes a straightforward use of Morning Prayer with confession and two lessons. The Prayer Book also provides alternatives and certain permitted omissions. Learn one ordinary pattern before trying to use every option.

Opening sentences and confession

A sentence of Scripture; the invitation to confession; the General Confession; the Absolution when a priest is officiating; the Lord's Prayer.

Praise and psalms

The opening versicles and responses; Venite, or the appointed alternative; the psalms for the Office, with the Gloria Patri as directed.

Lessons and canticles

The First Lesson and one of its canticles; the Second Lesson and one of its canticles. A lesson is read from the Bible, followed by praise from the Prayer Book.

Creed and prayers

The Apostles' Creed, or the permitted alternative; the prayers and responses; the Collect for the Day; the Collects for Peace and Grace; the concluding prayers.

The Lord's Prayer is said once in this 1928 pattern. If it was not said at the beginning, the rubric places it among the prayers after the Creed. A layperson omits the priest's Absolution.

Beginning the Office

Find the Order for Daily Morning Prayer and read one of the opening sentences. Choose a seasonal sentence when appropriate, or one of the general sentences. There is no need to read the whole selection.

For a simple beginning with confession, use the short invitation printed as an alternative to the longer exhortation. Then say the General Confession. It brings before God both what we have done and what we have left undone, and asks for the grace to live faithfully.

When a layperson leads

The Prayer Book reserves the Declaration of Absolution to a priest. When praying alone or leading your household as a layperson, omit it and continue to the Lord's Prayer. Do not read the Absolution as though you were officiating as a priest. [5]

Continue with the opening versicles and responses. These are short exchanges between the leader and those praying with him. When alone, say both parts. In a household, one person can lead while the others make the responses and join in the common prayers.

The rubrics give directions for standing and kneeling. Follow them as your circumstances and physical ability permit. When beginning with young children, explain the postures briefly and help them learn by taking part.

This guide retains the confession in its ordinary morning pattern. The book permits its omission in specified circumstances; those permissions differ between Morning and Evening Prayer.

Praying the Psalms

At Morning Prayer, the opening responses lead to Venite. This invitation to worship is followed by the psalms appointed for the Office. The 1928 book also permits Psalm 95 in its place and makes special provision for certain days. On Easter Day, use the Easter anthems as directed by the book.

Read the psalms from the Prayer Book's Psalter. Its language may differ from the Psalms in your Bible; this is expected. If you are praying with others, agree how to share the verses. Reading alternate whole verses is a simple household practice. When alone, read every verse.

The asterisk divides a verse into two parts and provides a natural place for a slight pause. You do not need to chant. Read at a pace that allows the words to be heard and considered.

The Psalms contain thanksgiving, lament, repentance, and petitions for judgment. You will encounter prayers that do not describe your own circumstances that morning. They enlarge our prayer beyond its immediate concerns. Read them as Scripture, in the light of Christ and in fellowship with his Church.

Follow the printed directions for the Gloria Patri, the brief praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Saying it after each psalm is a familiar practice; the 1928 morning rubric requires it at the end of the whole portion. [5]

Lessons and canticles

After the psalms, read the First Lesson appointed for Morning Prayer. It is ordinarily taken from the Old Testament; the lectionary also appoints readings from the books commonly called the Apocrypha. You may find that these are absent from your Bible. Ask your priest to help you obtain an edition containing the appointed books.

Return to Morning Prayer for the canticle after the First Lesson. The book provides *Te Deum laudamus*, *Benedictus es*, *Domine*, and *Benedicite*, *omnia opera Domini*. Say one of these, not all three. *Te Deum* confesses and praises the Triune God; the other canticles bless God and call his creation to praise him.

Read the Second Lesson from the New Testament. Return to the Prayer Book for *Benedictus*, the song of Zacharias from St Luke 1, or *Jubilate Deo*, Psalm 100. *Benedictus* praises God for visiting and redeeming his people and for the coming of the Saviour. *Jubilate* is an alternative here, after the second lesson, rather than a substitute for the opening *Venite*. [5]

The Latin headings are the first words of the canticles. They are titles, not a requirement to pray in Latin. Follow the seasonal directions and the instructions for the *Gloria Patri*. If you are unsure which alternative to use, learn the practice of your parish.

Scripture is heard, then answered with praise. A brief silence after a lesson can help you attend to what has been read; a separate commentary is not necessary.

The Creed and the prayers

After the lessons and canticles, say the Apostles' Creed. It sets the faith confessed in baptism within our daily prayer. The book permits the Nicene Creed as an alternative; use one Creed, not both.

Continue to the exchange beginning "The Lord be with you" and then "Let us pray." If the Lord's Prayer has already been said at the beginning, do not repeat it here. If it has not, this is its appointed place. Then say the short petitions and responses, sometimes called suffrages. [5]

The collects

At the direction for the Collect for the Day, turn to the collect appointed for the Sunday or holy day being observed. This is found in the section containing the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels. Return to Morning Prayer for the Collect for Peace and the Collect for Grace.

A collect gathers a petition into a brief prayer addressed to God. The Collect for the Day carries the Church's season or feast into the Office; the morning collects ask for peace and for God's guidance through the coming day.

The conclusion

For your first use, continue through the concluding prayers as printed. They provide intercession, thanksgiving, the Prayer of St Chrysostom, and the Grace from 2 Corinthians 13. The rubrics allow certain shorter conclusions. Follow their directions rather than trying to include every additional prayer in the book.

Evening Prayer

Evening Prayer follows the same broad movement as Morning Prayer. It has its own opening sentences and directions, then psalms, lessons and canticles, the Creed, and prayers. Begin at the Order for Daily Evening Prayer rather than using the morning service with different readings.

There is no opening Venite at Evening Prayer. After the opening responses, continue to the appointed psalms. Following the First Lesson, say Magnificat, the song of the Blessed Virgin Mary from St Luke 1, or one of the printed alternatives. Following the Second Lesson, say Nunc dimittis, the song of Simeon from St Luke 2, or a permitted alternative. [6]

In Magnificat, the Church praises the God who has remembered his mercy and fulfilled his promises. In Nunc dimittis, Simeon receives the promised salvation and asks to depart in peace. These songs are particularly fitting at the close of the day.

After the Creed and responses come the Collect for the Day, the evening Collect for Peace, and the Collect for Aid against Perils. Return to the evening service after finding the day's collect; its fixed collects differ from those at Morning Prayer.

Evening Prayer can be kept before or after supper, or later in the evening. It need not wait until everyone is ready for bed. Choose a time at which the household is ordinarily able to gather.

When led by a layperson, omit the Absolution here also. As at Morning Prayer, say the Lord's Prayer once, in the place directed by the rubrics.

Finding the psalms and lessons

The psalms

The Prayer Book Psalter is divided into thirty days, with a morning and an evening portion for each day. For the monthly course, find today's number: on the fifth of the month, use Day 5, Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer. The book also provides proper psalms and other permitted appointments. Follow its directions for holy days and for months of different lengths.

Some editions include the revised lectionary with psalms appointed alongside the lessons. Choose a permitted course under your parish's guidance; do not add the monthly portion to the lectionary portion simply because both are printed.

The lessons

Find the table for the current week of the Church year and then the weekday. Read across the Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer columns for the First and Second Lessons. Check the separate appointments for holy days. A reference such as "St Luke 1:26-38" means the Gospel according to St Luke, chapter 1, verses 26 through 38.

The Office lessons are distinct from the Epistle and Gospel printed beside the Sunday collect. Those readings belong to Holy Communion; the daily lessons come from the Office lectionary.

Not every volume called the "1928 Prayer Book" prints the same lectionary. Many include the revision adopted in 1943 and printed from 1945. Follow the table in your book, or the one your parish directs you to use. A parish calendar can help identify the week, feast, and collect. [7]

Your first Morning Prayer

Before beginning, identify today's psalms, two lessons, and collect using the directions on the preceding page. Mark each place. The following walkthrough uses confession, two lessons, Te Deum, and Benedictus on an ordinary morning. On special days, follow the book's provisions.

1. Open Morning Prayer. Read one opening sentence, the short invitation to confession, and the General Confession. If you are a layperson, pass over the Absolution. Say the Lord's Prayer and the opening responses.
2. Say Venite. At the direction for the psalms, turn to your marked place in the Psalter. Read the portion and say the Gloria Patri as directed.
3. Read the marked First Lesson from your Bible. Return to Morning Prayer and say Te Deum. Pass over the alternative canticles.
4. Read the Second Lesson. Return to Morning Prayer and say Benedictus, following its directions. Pass over Jubilate and continue to the Apostles' Creed.
5. Continue with the prayers and responses. The Lord's Prayer has already been said, so do not repeat it.
6. At the Collect for the Day, turn to your marked collect. Read it, return to Morning Prayer, and continue with the Collects for Peace and Grace and the concluding prayers.

Keep a finger or ribbon in the Office whenever you turn away. Most of the apparent complexity is simply learning to leave the service for a psalm, lesson, or collect and then return.

Establishing a steady rule

Begin with one Office at a time you can ordinarily keep. Morning Prayer before work or Evening Prayer around supper may fit more naturally than a rule that depends upon ideal conditions. Allow enough time to read attentively; the length varies with the psalms, lessons, and permitted choices.

For the first few days, use the same ordinary pattern and become familiar with the page turns. As the habit settles, learn the seasonal provisions and consider adding the other Office. If you miss a day, resume with the current appointments. You need not read the missed portions before you can pray again.

When time is short

The Prayer Book provides some permissions for shortening its services. Evening Prayer, for example, permits one lesson to be omitted, with the lesson read followed by an evening canticle. Such permissions belong to the rubrics and should be learned in their context. [6]

If a full Office is presently beyond what your household can keep, the 1928 book also contains Forms of Prayer to be used in Families, including shorter forms. These offer a received provision for household prayer while you work towards a fuller rule. They are a distinct form of prayer, and can be named accordingly. [8]

Discuss a lasting rule with your parish priest. He can help you choose a beginning suited to your responsibilities and understand the Church's directions. The aim is a habit of attentive prayer that can endure through the ordinary changes of life.

With children, share the responses and let an older child read a lesson. Explain unfamiliar words after the Office. Young children can join in the prayers they know before they can follow the whole book.



A reference to keep nearby

Before the Office

Find the day in your calendar. Mark the service, psalms, two Bible lessons, and Collect for the Day. Use one permitted course of psalms and the lectionary followed by your parish.

Morning Prayer

Sentence and confession → Lord's Prayer and responses → Venite → Psalms → First Lesson and canticle → Second Lesson and canticle → Creed → Responses and collects → Concluding prayers.

Evening Prayer

Sentence and confession → Lord's Prayer and responses → Psalms → First Lesson and Magnificat or alternative → Second Lesson and Nunc dimittis or alternative → Creed → Responses and collects → Concluding prayers.

These outlines assume confession and two lessons. A layperson omits the priest's Absolution. Say the Lord's Prayer once; where an opening omission is permitted, follow the rubric for its later place. "Or" introduces a choice.

A few familiar terms

Office: an appointed service of prayer. Psalter: the Book of Psalms arranged for worship. Lesson: a passage of Scripture read in the service. Lectionary: the table appointing those passages. Canticle: a hymn of praise. Collect: a short prayer. Rubric: a direction for the service. Versicle and response: a short exchange of prayer. Mattins and Evensong: traditional names for Morning and Evening Prayer.



Sources and further reading

The numbered references identify the sources behind the historical account and practical directions. Prayer Book passages are referred to by section as well as by standard page number; pagination can vary.

1. Holy Scripture: Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; Acts 3:1 and 10:9. For the evening canticles, see St Luke 1:46–55 and 2:29–32; for Benedictus, St Luke 1:68–79.

2. The Didache, chapter 8; St Cyprian of Carthage, On the Lord's Prayer, sections 34–36. Texts: newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm and newadvent.org/fathers/050704.htm.

3. The Rule of St Benedict, chapters 8–20, especially 16 and 18. An English text is available at ccel.org/ccel/benedict/rule/rule.toc.html.

4. The Book of Common Prayer, 1549, Preface and the orders of Mattins and Evensong. The preface is available at prayerbook.ca/bcp-online/original-preface/. The comparison of offices is a summary of their structures, not a claim that the later services reproduce the older ones unchanged.

5–8. The American Book of Common Prayer, 1928: Morning Prayer, pp. 3–20; Evening Prayer, pp. 21–34; Concerning the Service of the Church and the lectionary; Forms of Prayer to be used in Families, pp. 587–600. The text, including both lectionary versions, is available through aocinternational.org/1928-book-of-common-prayer/.

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