Setting Liturgical Texts to Music

Vladimir Morosan

If one of the fundamental goals of "reasonable" liturgical worship is the effective proclamation of the Gospel in spoken and sung words, the effective audible communication must be the concern of every liturgical musician. Effective audible communication is dependent on many factors—among them, voices of good quality, well developed diction skills, favorable acoustics. But even more basic, the starting point, if you will, is a good musical setting of the text—one that takes into account

1. the cognitive meaning and theological content of the text
2. the grammatical structure if the text
3. the sound and cadence of the words themselvers

In the context of tonight's discussion we will be focusing specifically upon musical settings in English, although in some respects the principles we will talk about could be applied to any language. When considering English text settings used in Orthodox worship we recognize, first of all, that in the overwhelming majority of cases, we are dealing not with original English texts set from the outset to newly composed music, but with translations set to various melodic and harmonic patterns initially composed elsewhere, with another language in mind. In other words, we are dealing with **adaptations**.

I. Three "generations" of adaptation – Example 1
   a. 1st generation: earliest efforts (1920s and '30s) — Literal note-for-note adaptation
   b. 2nd generation: (1950s, '60s, '70s) —mechanical "accommodation" of English text
   c. 3rd generation (1980s and '90s to present)—creative awareness of the sound and cadence of the English language

II. Basic responses – Examples 2a and 2b (Litanies)

III. Other examples—"Magnify, O my soul"; Refrain on Paschal Canon—Examples 3 and 4

IV. "Holy God"—Hierarchal and Processional—Examples 5 and 6

V. "Rejoice, O Isaiah"—Examples 7a and 7b

VI. "Masculine" and "feminine" endings: problems and solutions—Example 8

Concluding thoughts:

The history and tradition of singing Orthodox liturgical texts in English is still relatively young.

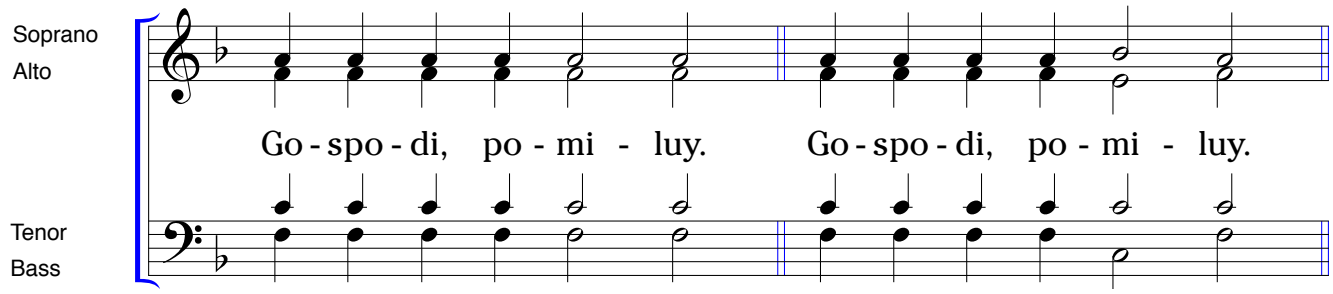
The best places to learn good principles of English text setting are, in most instances, outside the realm of Orthodox music, .e.g. English composers such as Thomas Tallis, William Byrd, John Dowland, Henry Purcell, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten, to name just a few. Good models for handling text can be found in English anthems, hymnody, art songs, and even opera opera,. We cannot ignore a 500-year-old tradition of sacred choral singing in English as practiced in non-Orthodox churches, and expect to establish a meaningful practice of our own within English-speaking Orthodoxy.

New generations of composers and editors are continuing to create 3rd-generation adaptations of "received" settings, and will eventually create 4th-generation settings: original melodies and harmonies as vehicles for English texts; some are already doing so (Fr. Sergei Glagolev, Mark Bailey, John Tavener, Ivan Moody, to name just a few)

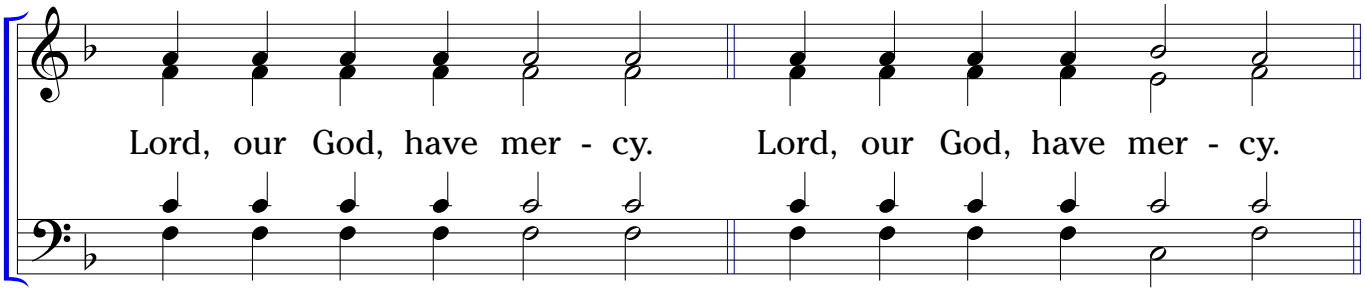
Ex. 1

Three “Generations” of English Adaptation

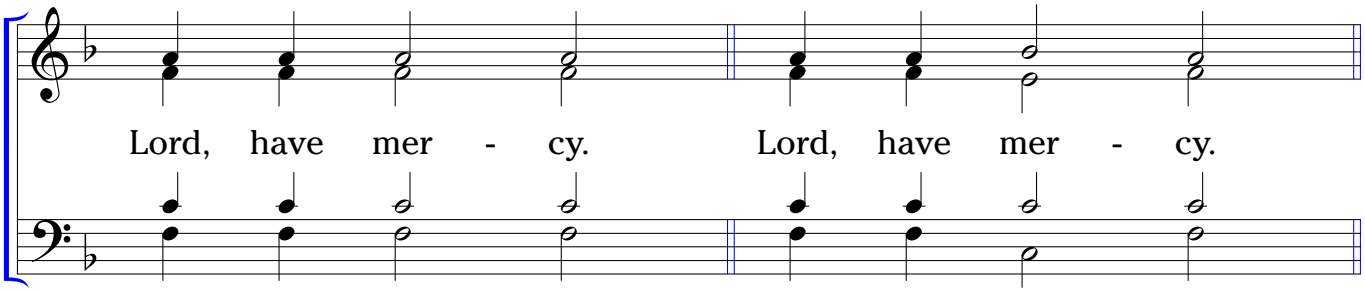
Original Church Slavonic



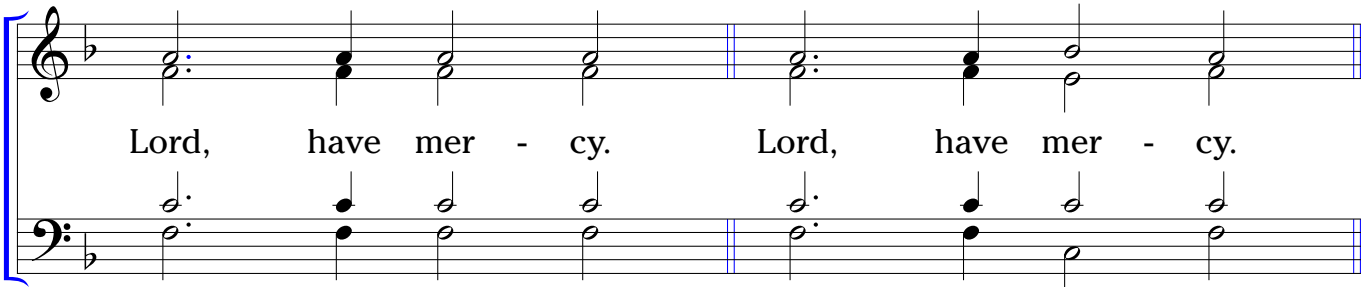
1st Generation: Literal, note for note adaptation



2nd Generation: Mechanical adjustment to fit English text



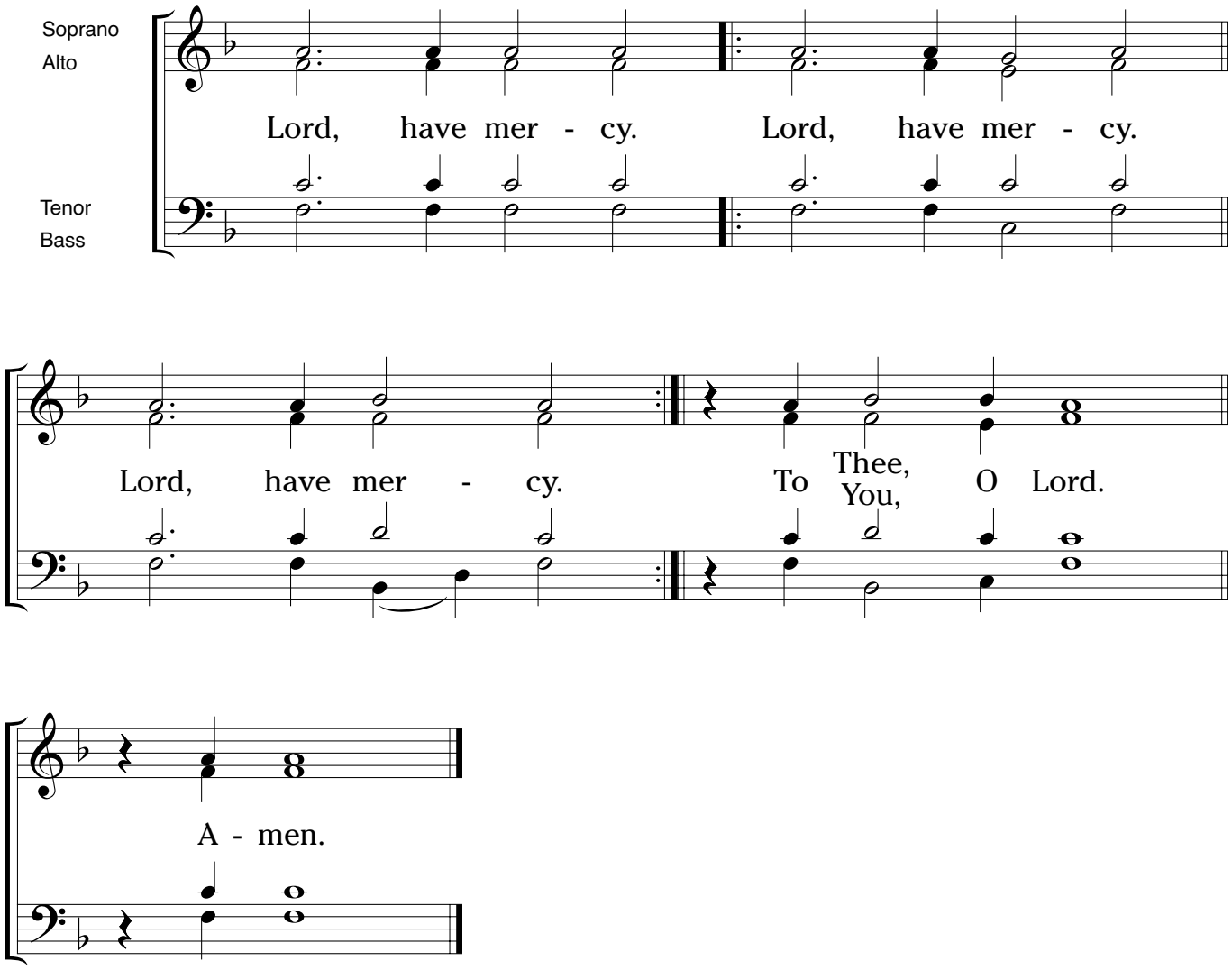
3rd Generation: Awareness of sound and cadence of English text



Ex. 2a

The Great Litany

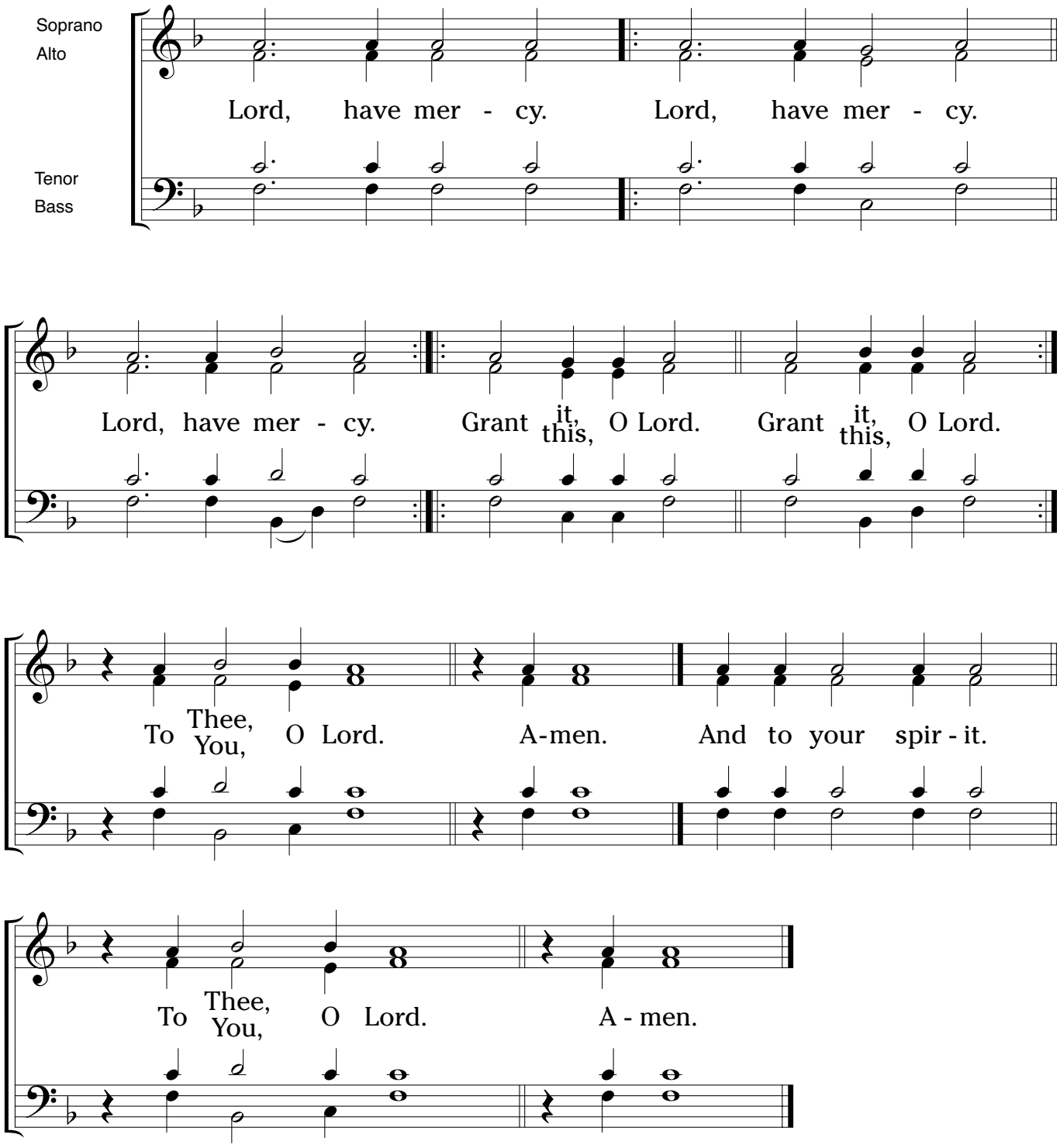
Plain



Ex. 2b

The Litany of Supplication

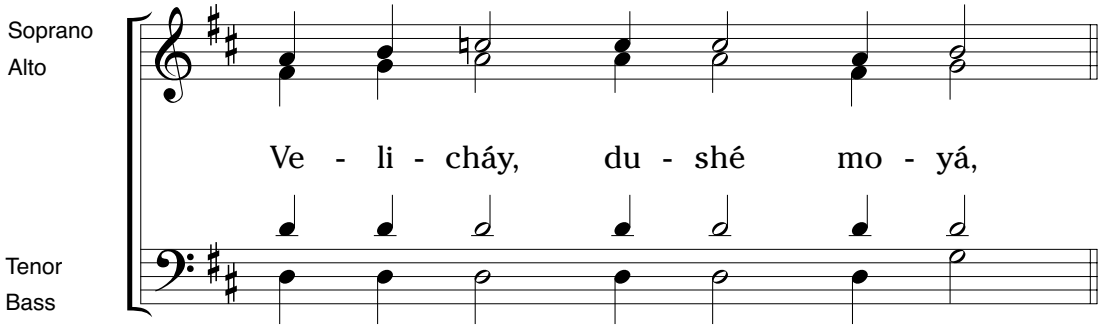
Plain



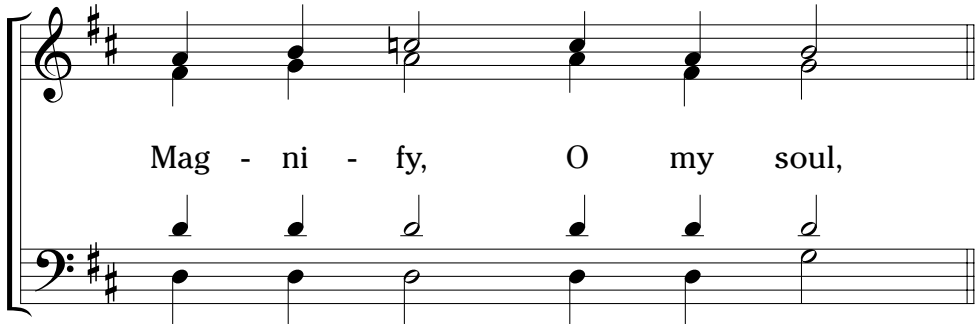
Ex. 3

Refrain to festal Hymns to the Theotokos

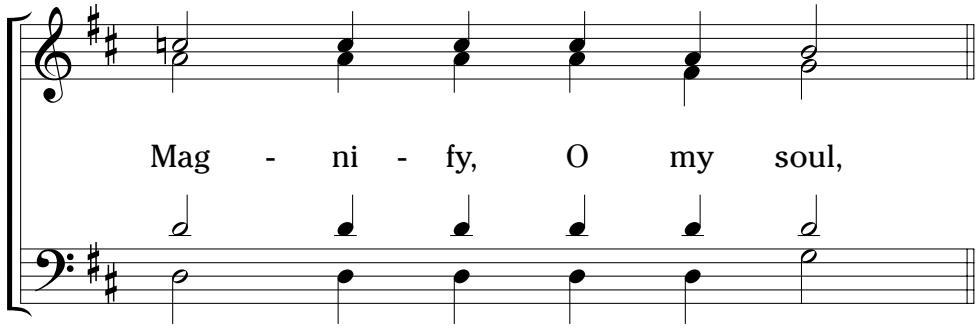
A.



B.

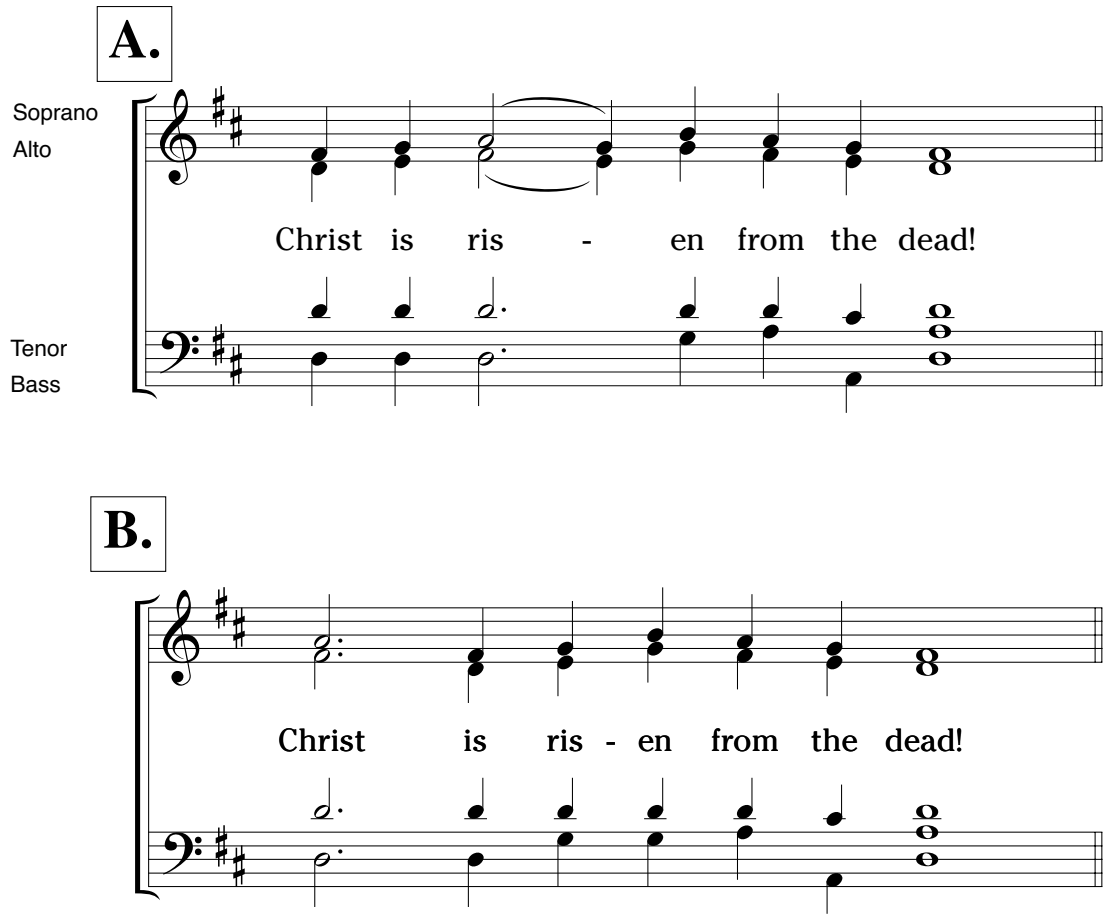


C.



Ex. 4

Refrain on the Paschal Canon



Holy God

(HIERARCHAL)

Common Chant
arr. V Morosan (2003)

1. *Choir:*

Soprano
Alto

A - men. Ho - ly God, Ho - ly

Tenor
Bass

Might - y, Ho - ly Im - mor - tal, have mer - cy on us!

2. *Clergy: Repeat No. 1*

3. *Choir:*

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mer - cy on us!

4. *Trio:*

Soprano 1
Soprano 2

Ho - ly God, Ho - ly Might - y,

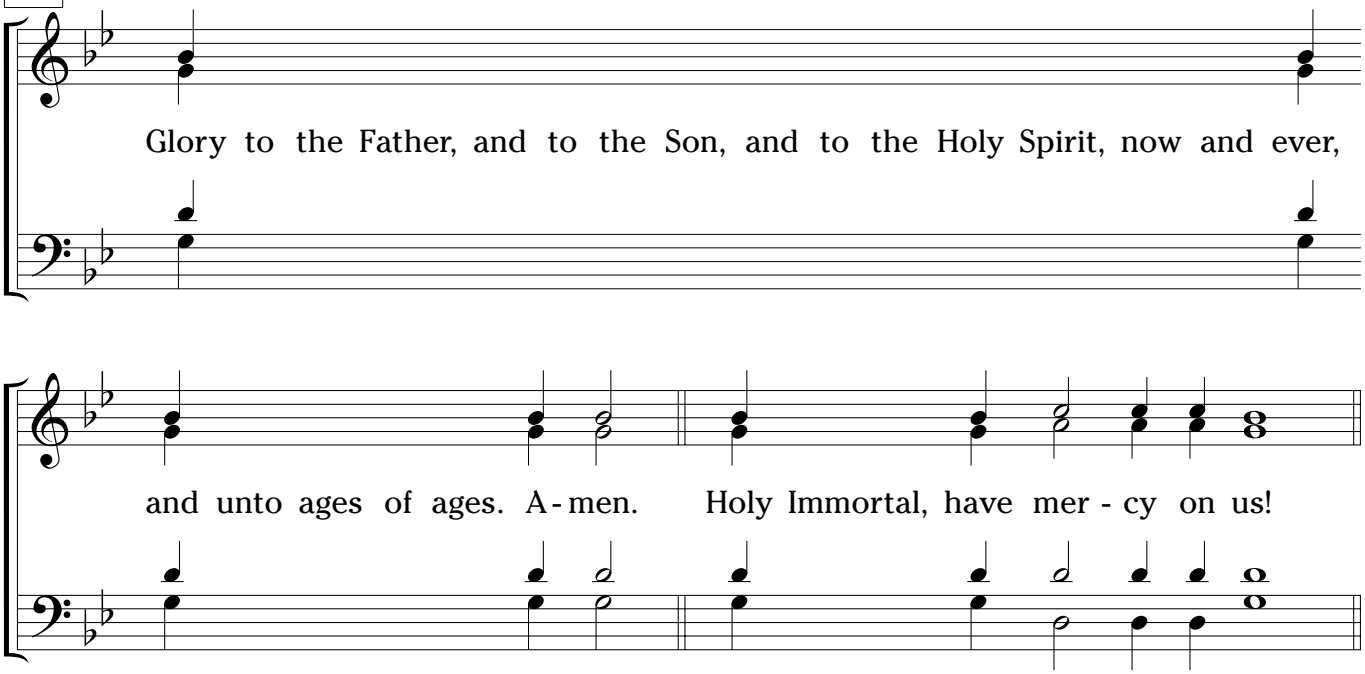
Alto

Ho - ly Im - mor - tal, have mer - cy on us!

5. *Choir: Repeat No. 3*

6. *Clergy: Repeat No. 1*

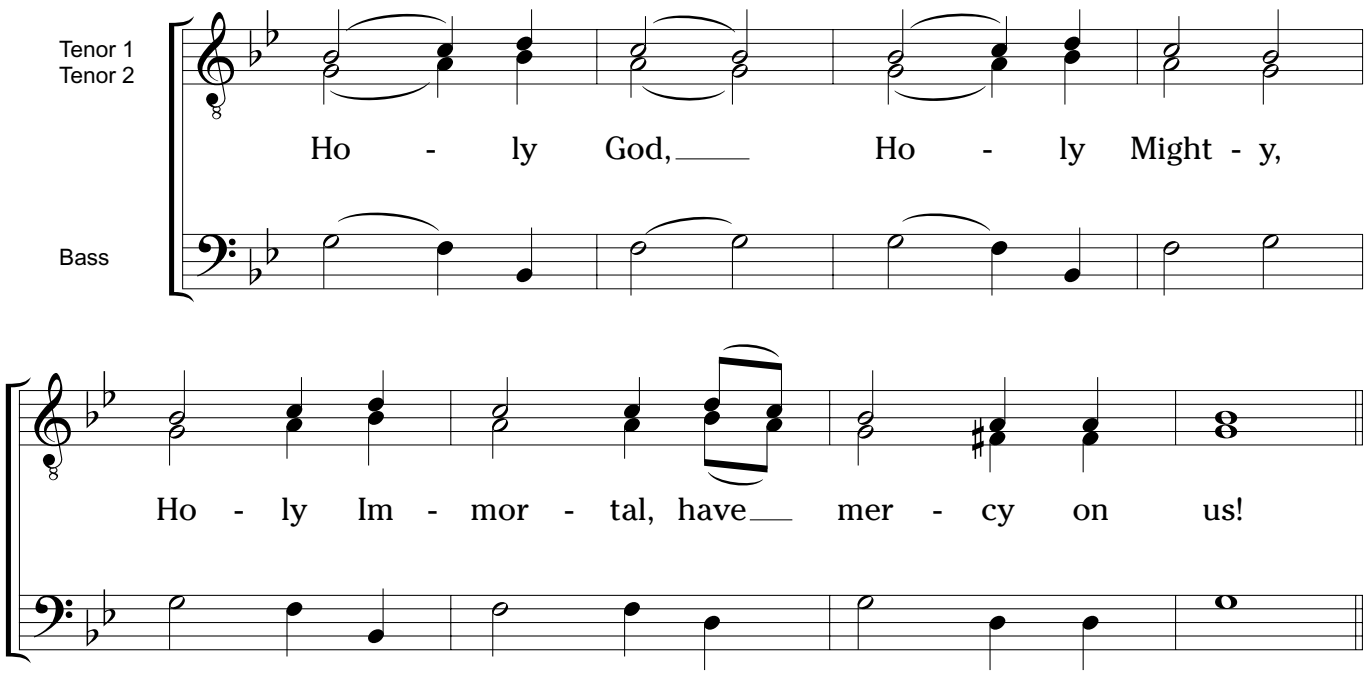
7. *Choir:*



8. *Choir: Repeat No. 1*

Holy God

(HIERARCHAL: Clergy)



Ex. 6

Holy God

Funereal

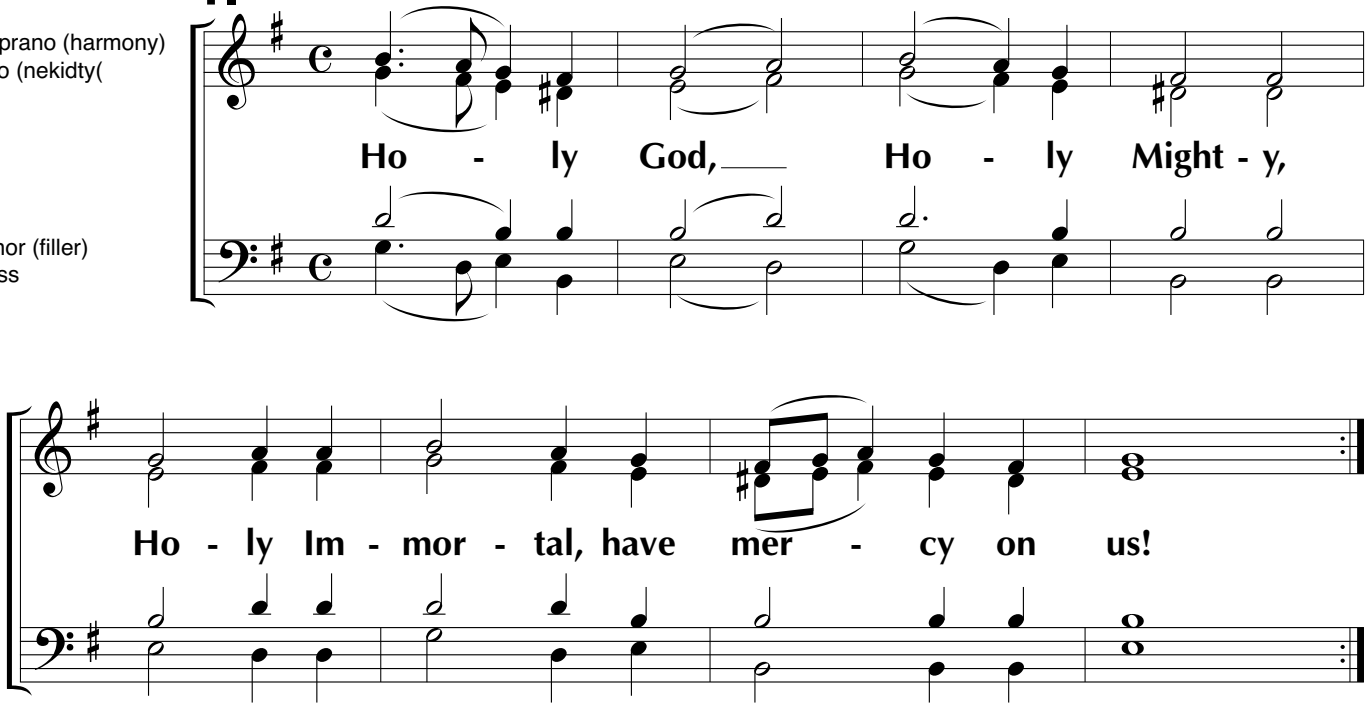
(for processions)

A traditional melody
(rearranged to fit the English language by VM)

1. **Very slowly.**

Soprano (harmony)
Alto (nekidty(

Tenor (filler)
Bass

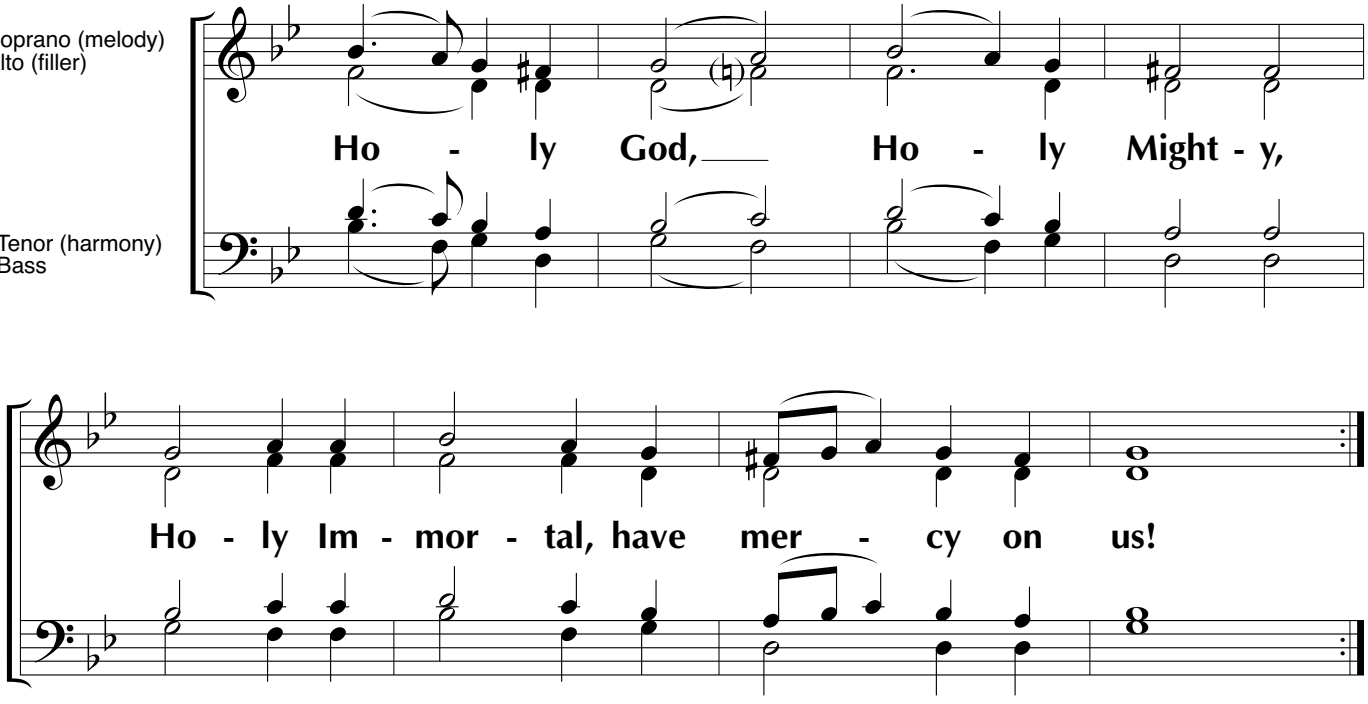


(Alternative voicing)

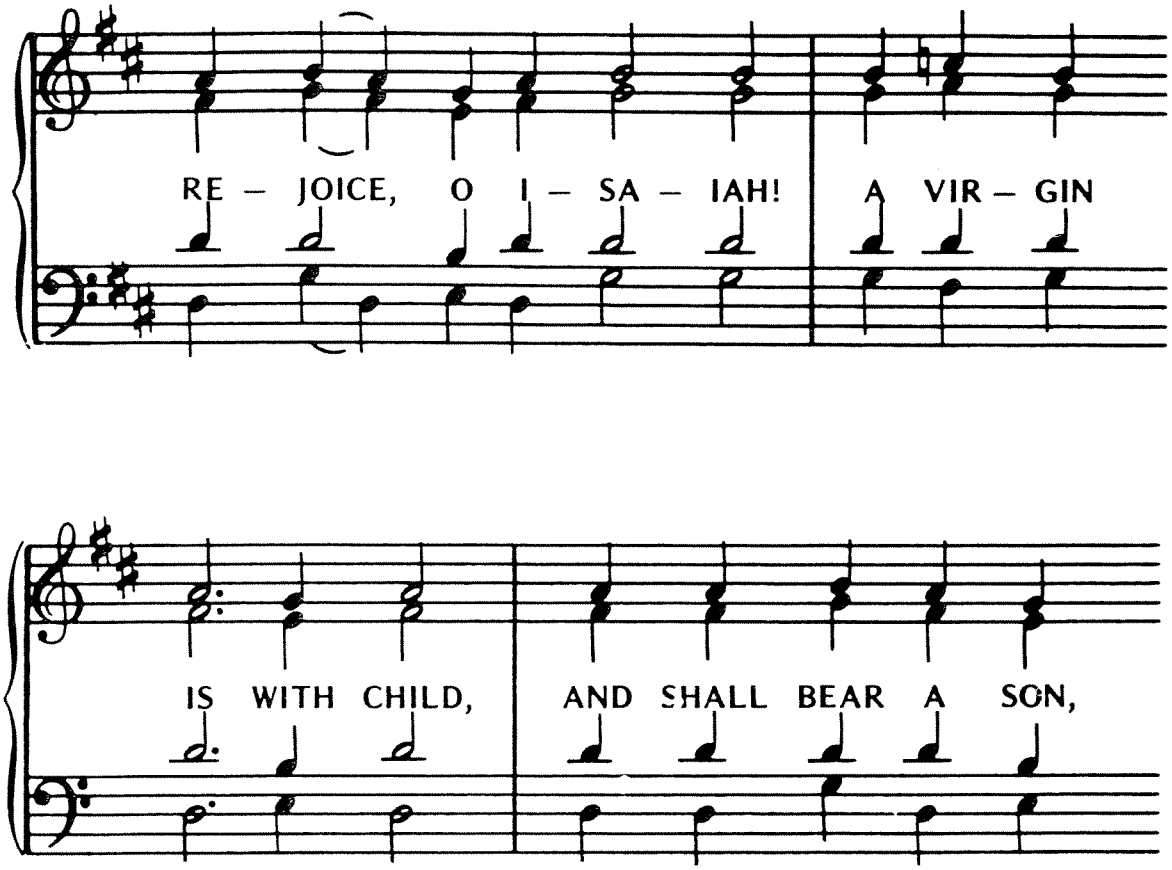
2.

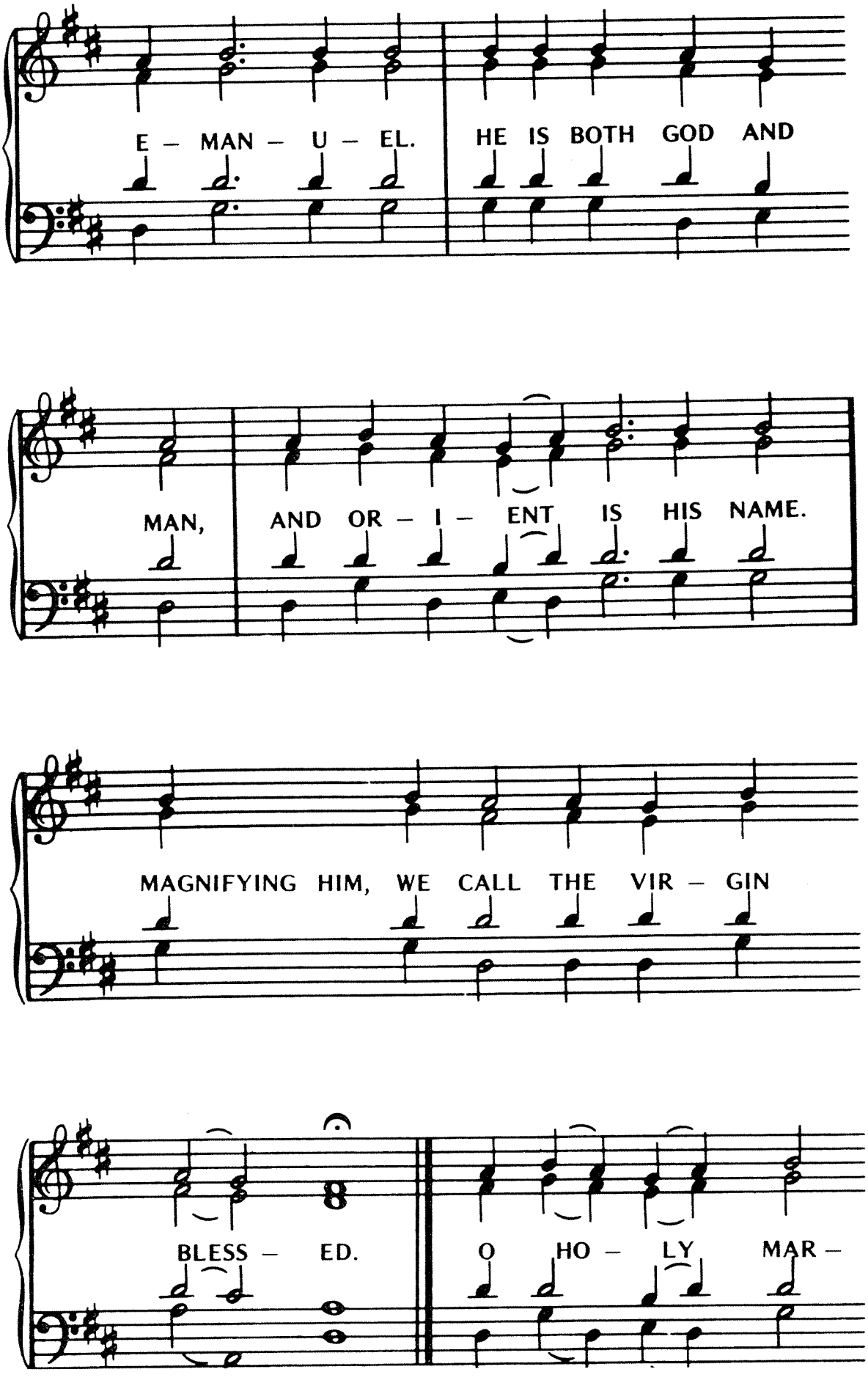
Soprano (melody)
Alto (filler)

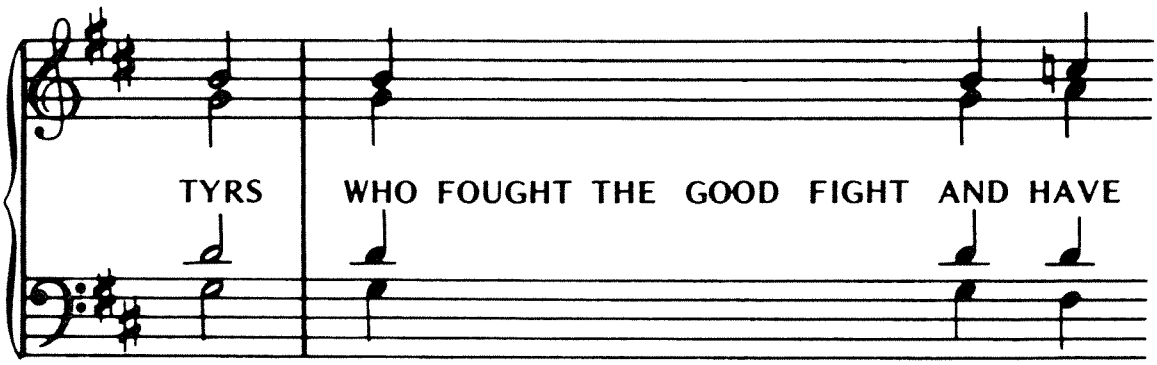
Tenor (harmony)
Bass

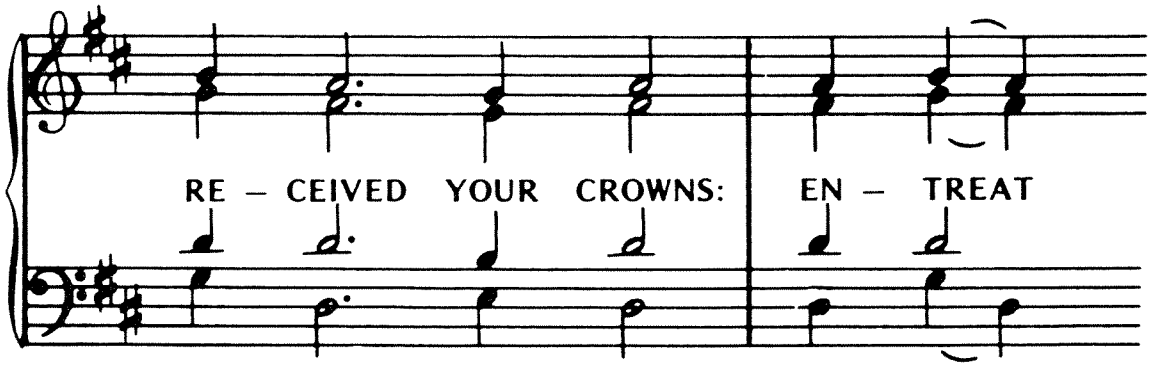


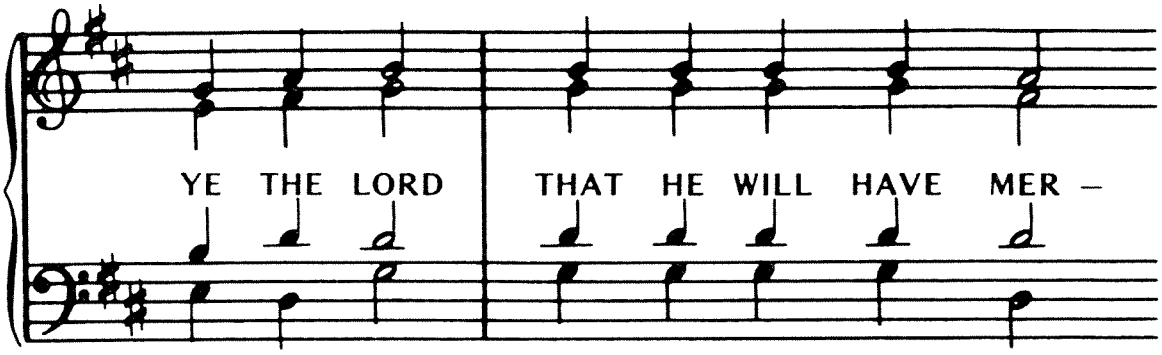
Ex. 7a

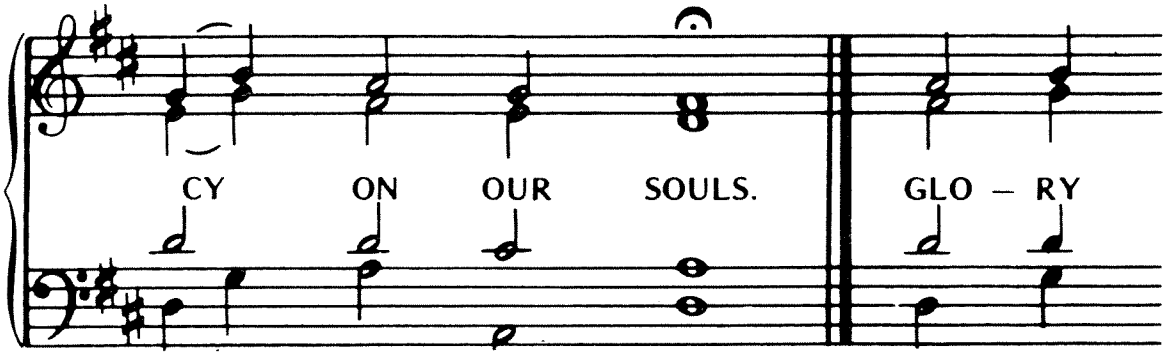


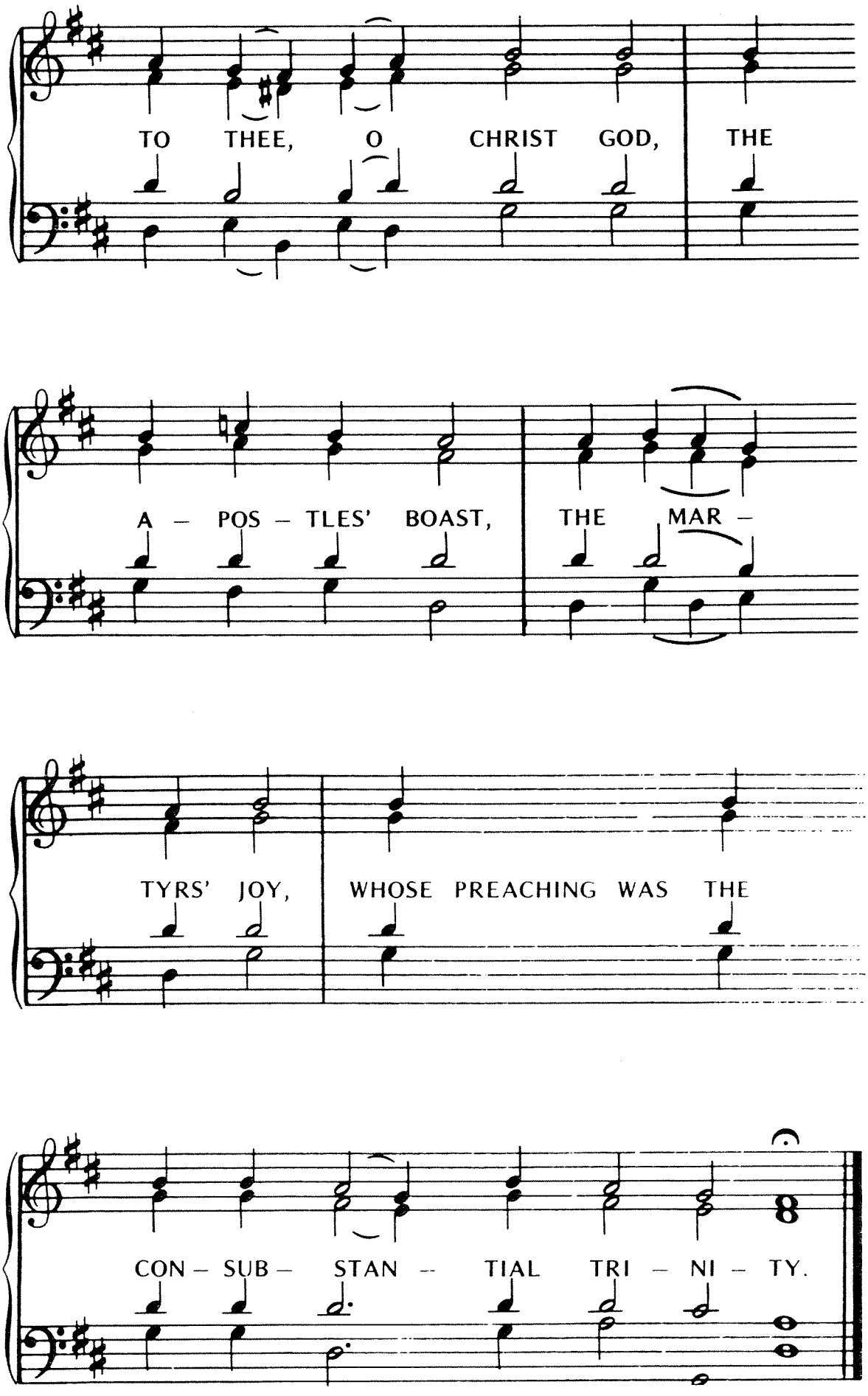

E – MAN – U – EL. HE IS BOTH GOD AND
MAN, AND OR – I – ENT IS HIS NAME.
MAGNIFYING HIM, WE CALL THE VIR – GIN
BLESS – ED. O HO – LY MAR –


TYRS WHO FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT AND HAVE


RE – CEIVED YOUR CROWNS: EN – TREAT


YE THE LORD THAT HE WILL HAVE MER –


CY ON OUR SOULS. GLO – RY

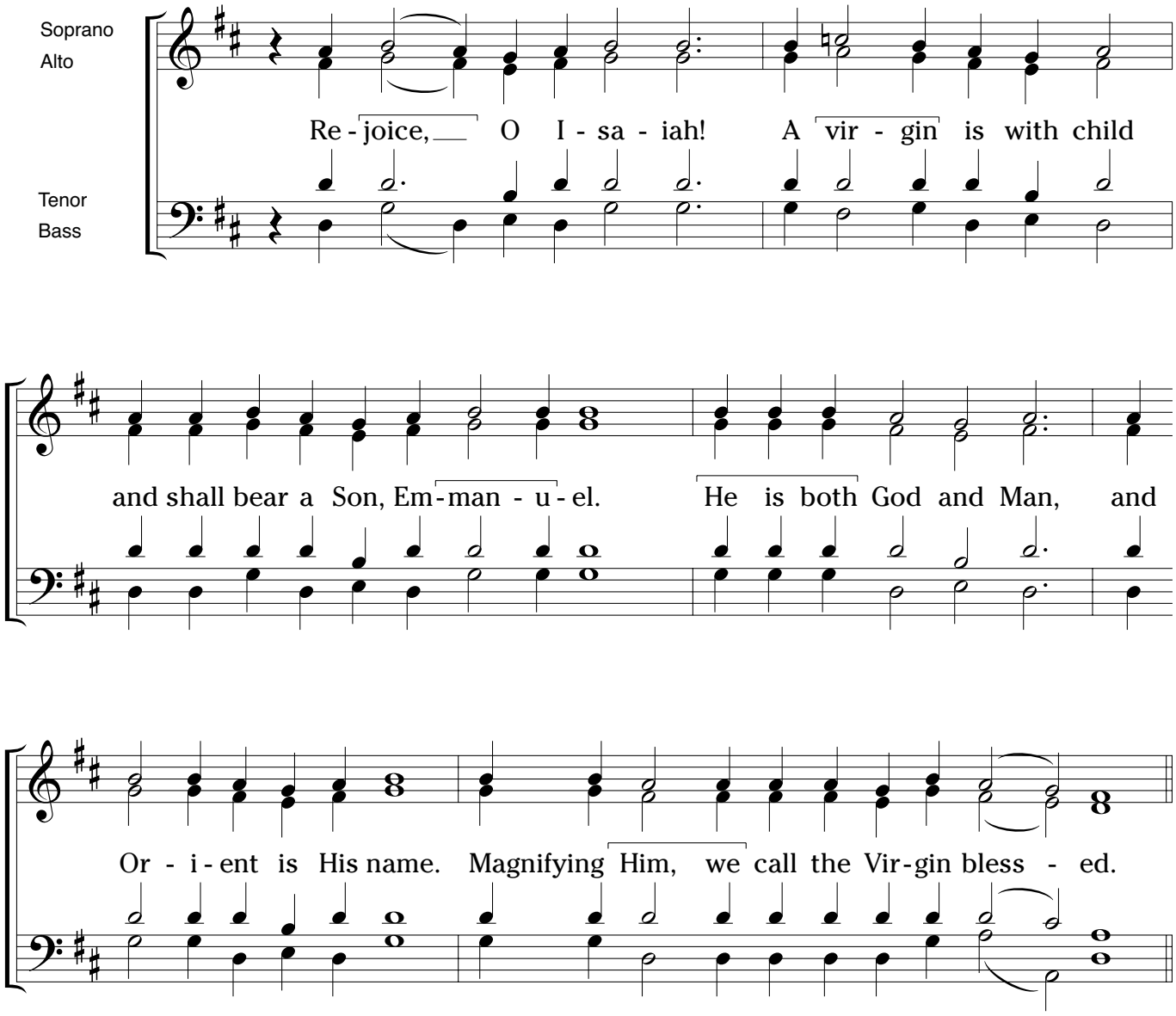

TO THEE, O CHRIST GOD, THE
A – POS – TLES' BOAST, THE MAR –
TYRS' JOY, WHOSE PREACHING WAS THE
CON – SUB – STAN – TIAL TRI – NI – TY.

Ex. 7b

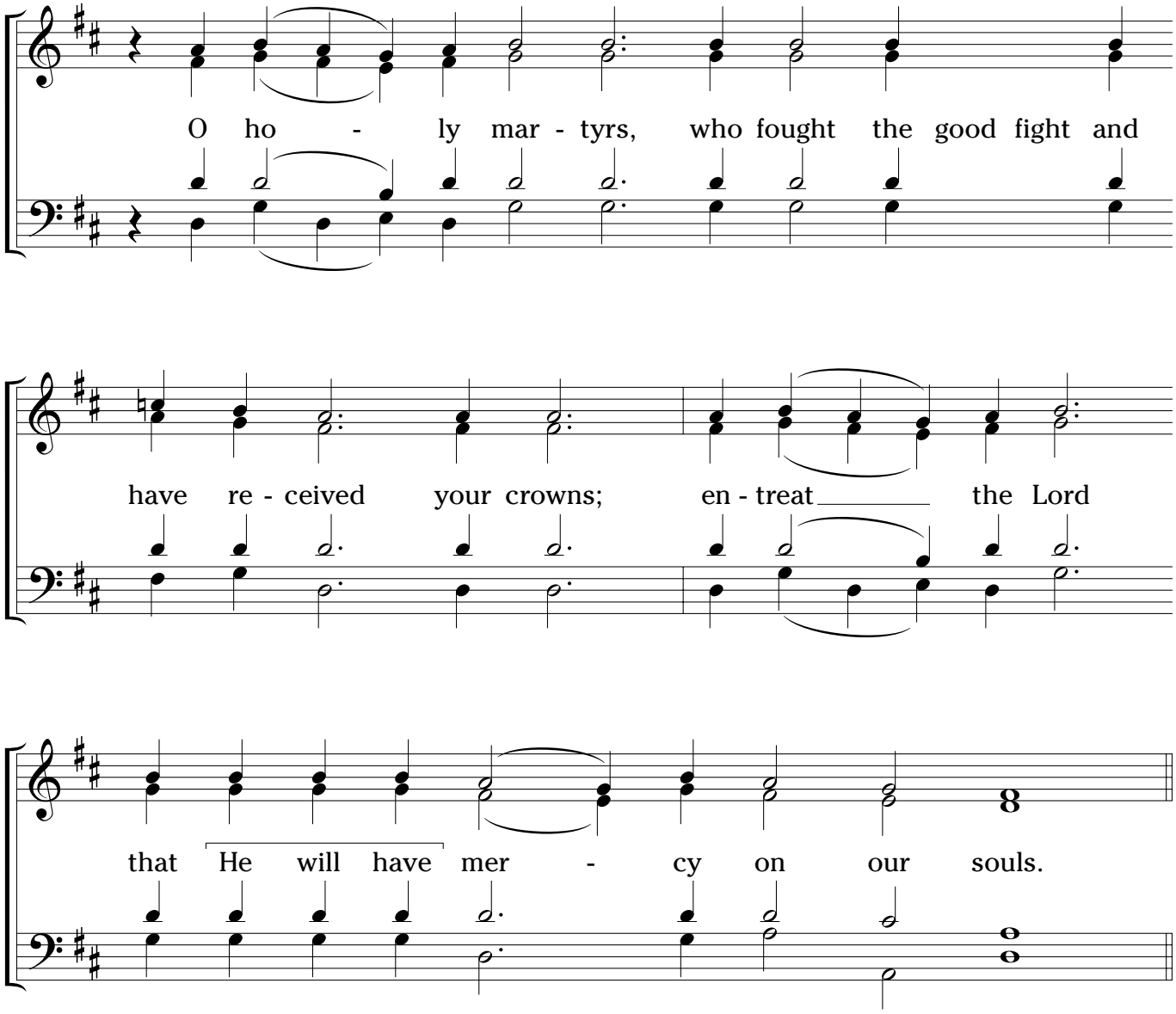
THE OFFICE OF CROWNING

Rejoice, O Isaiah

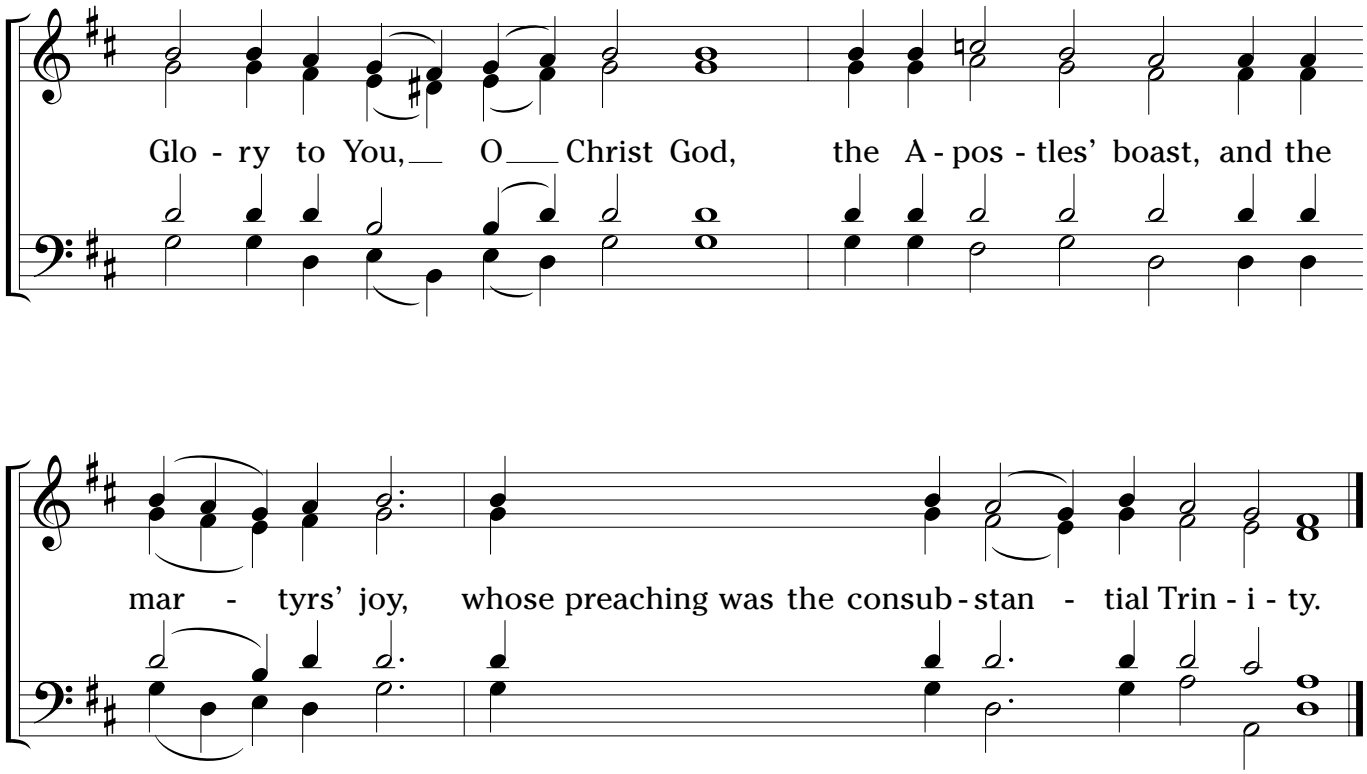
Common Chant
Tone 5, arr. VM



2.


O ho - ly mar - tyrs, who fought the good fight and
have re - ceived your crowns; en - treat the Lord
that He will have mer - cy on our souls.

3.


Glo - ry to You, O Christ God, the A - pos - tles' boast, and the
mar - tyrs' joy, whose preaching was the consub - stan - tial Trin - i - ty.

Ex. 8

The Third Antiphon

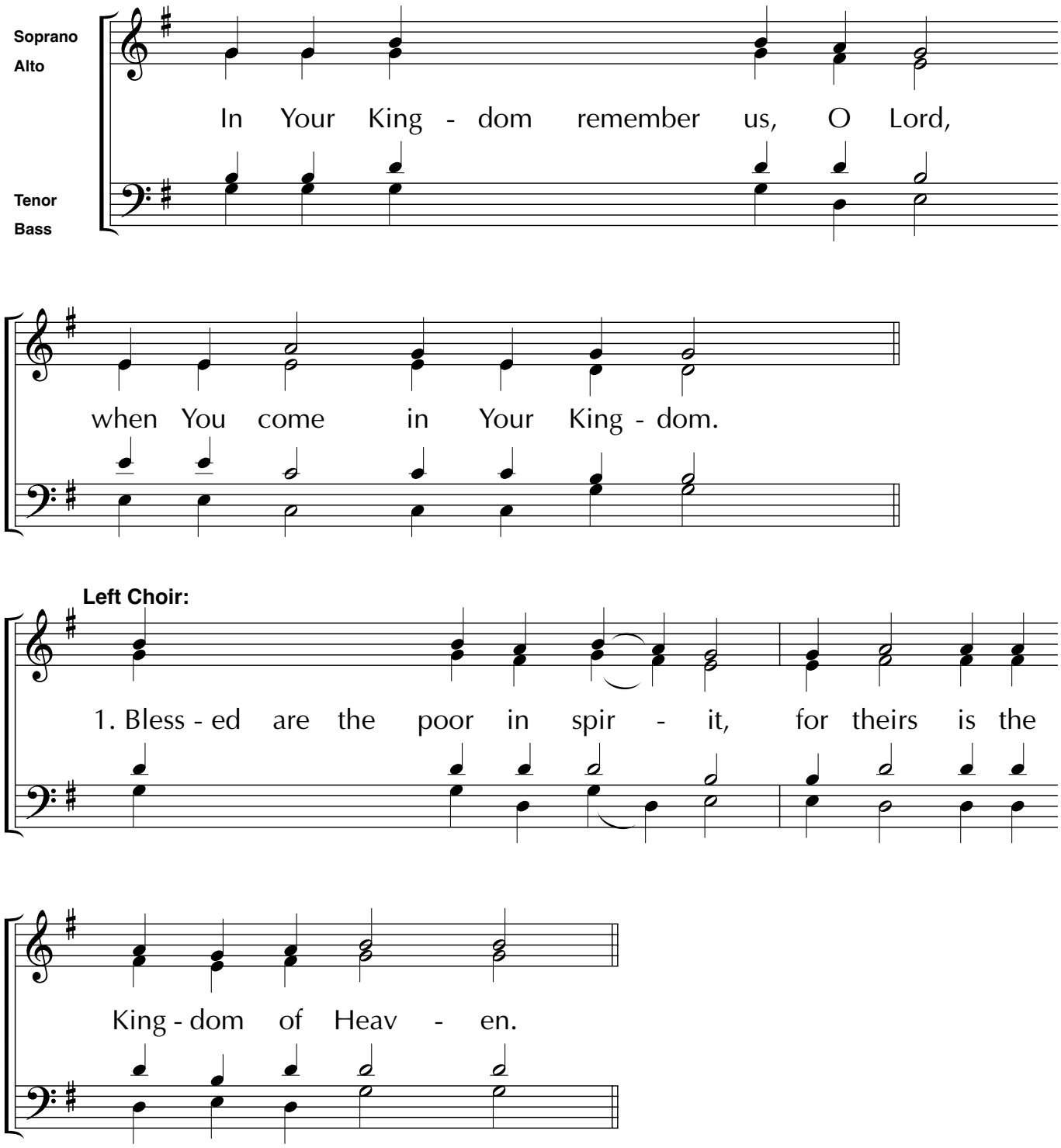
Matthew 5:3-12

(with Refrains)

A New Chant

V. Morosan (1993)

INTRODUCTION: (Right Choir)



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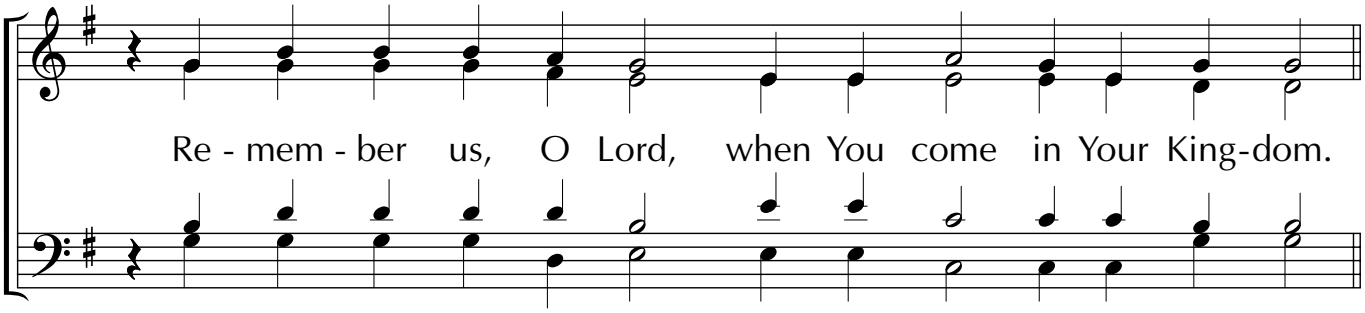
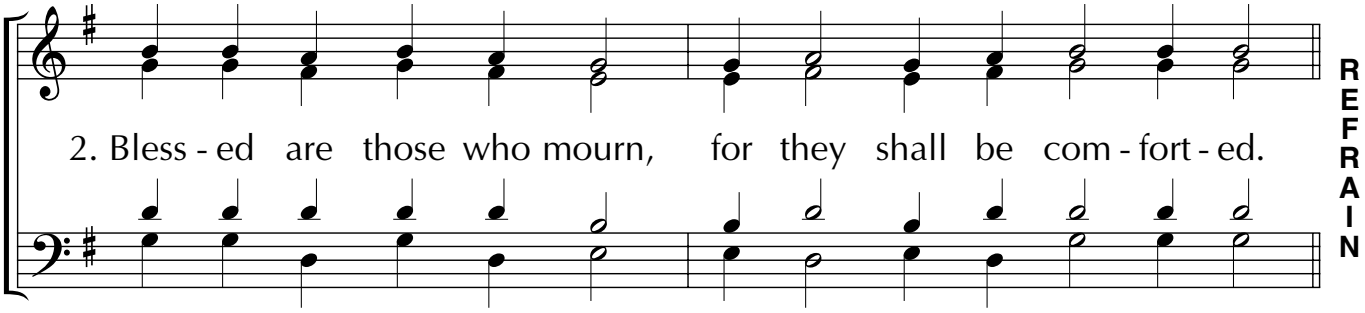
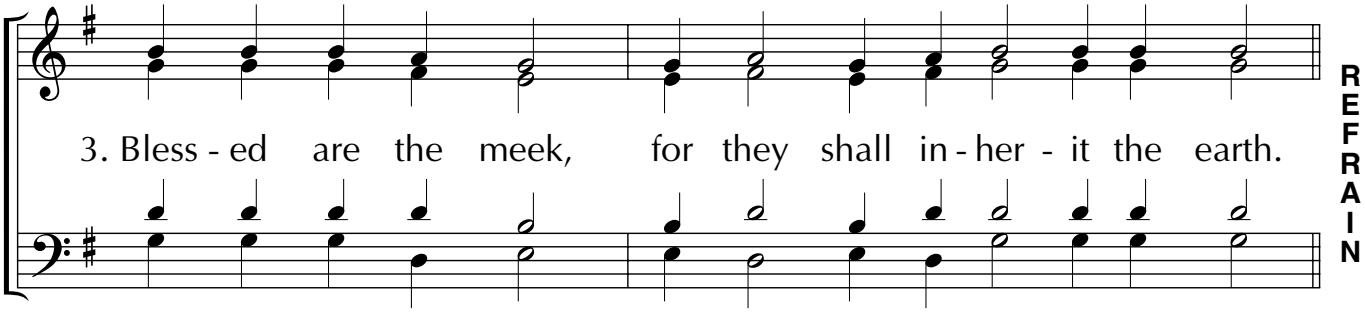
REFRAIN (After each verse): ALL



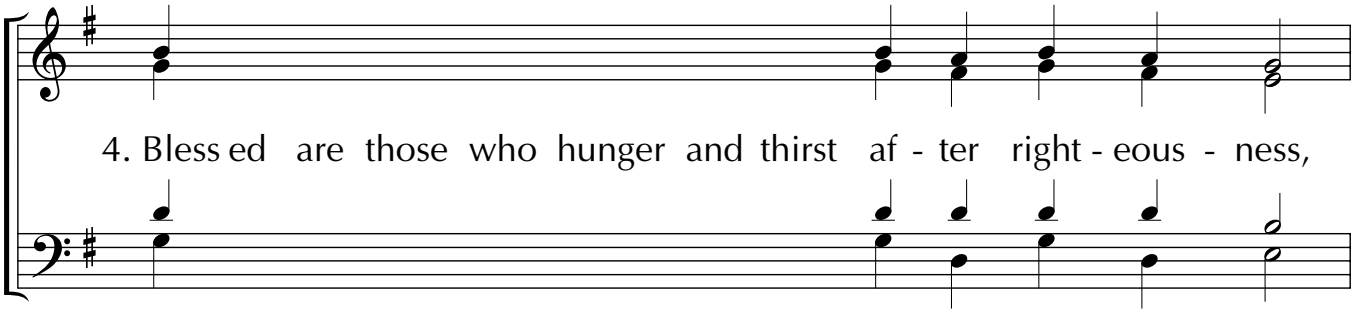
Right Choir:

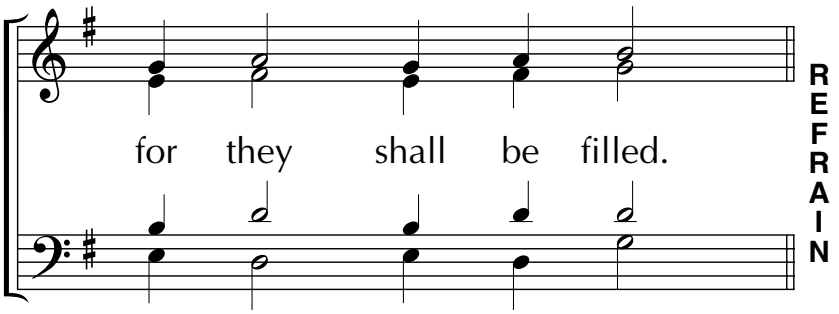


Left Choir:

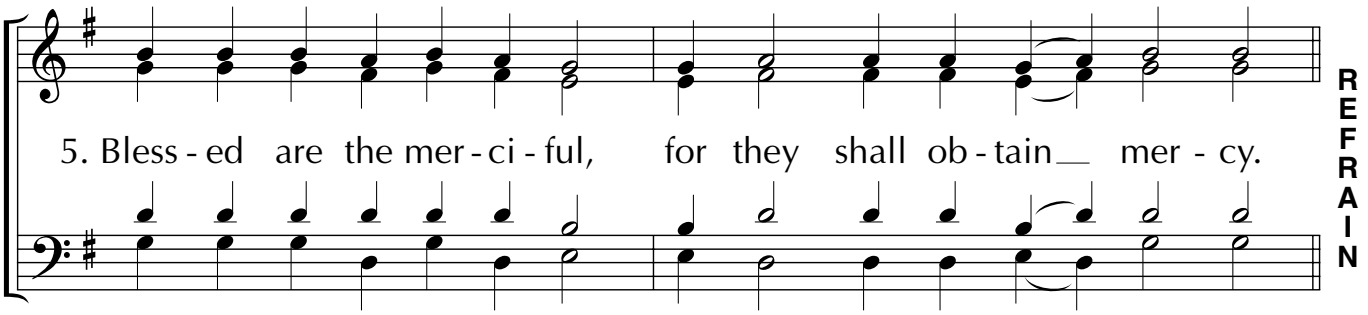


Right Choir:

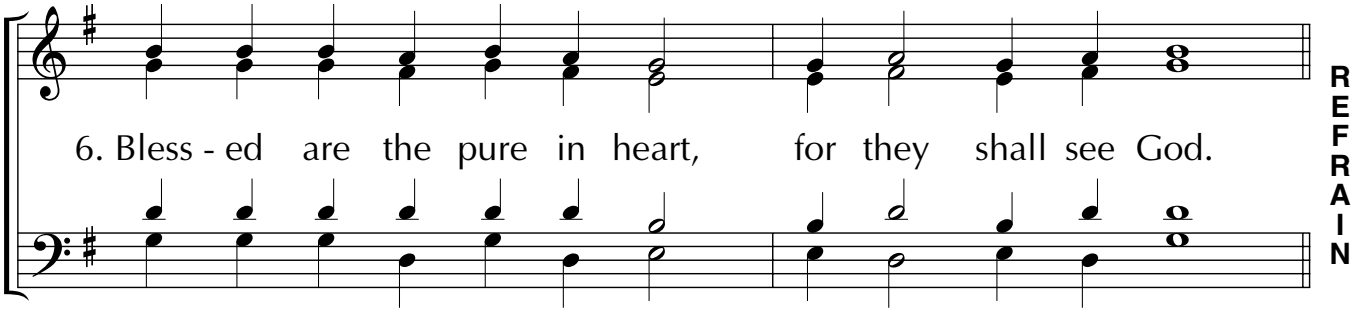




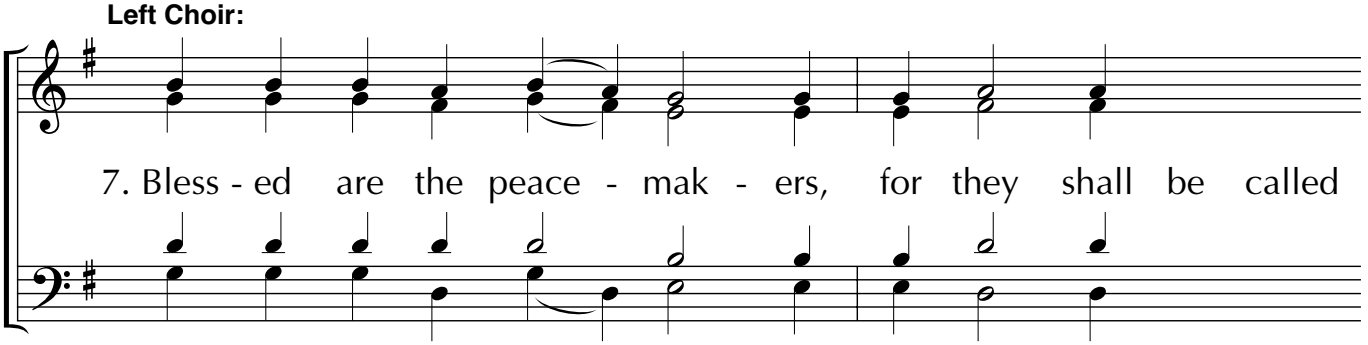
Left Choir:

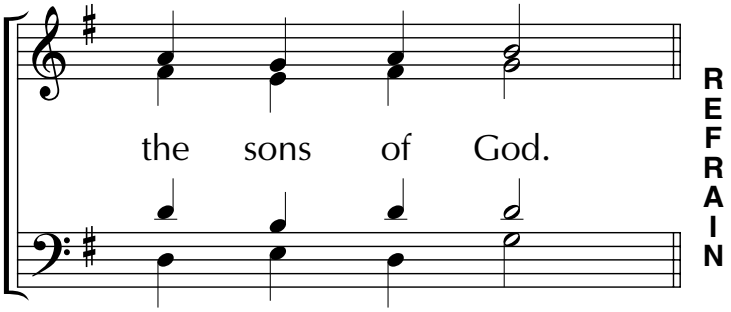


Right Choir:

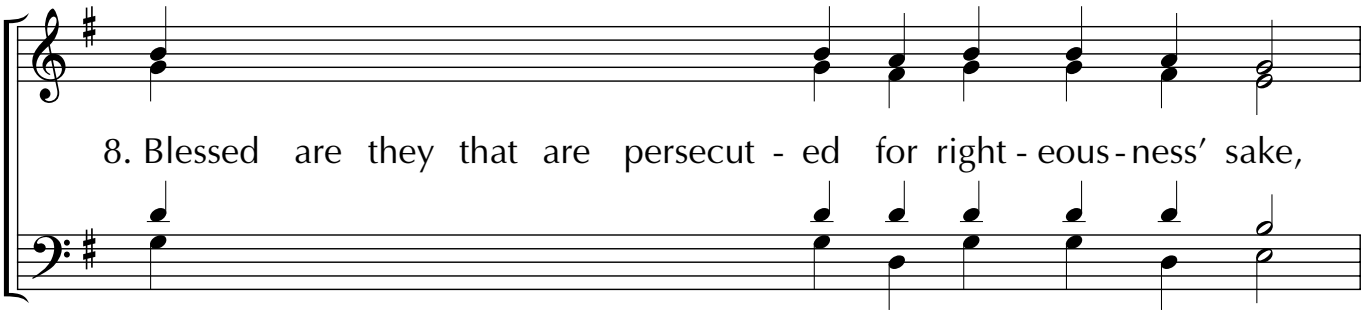


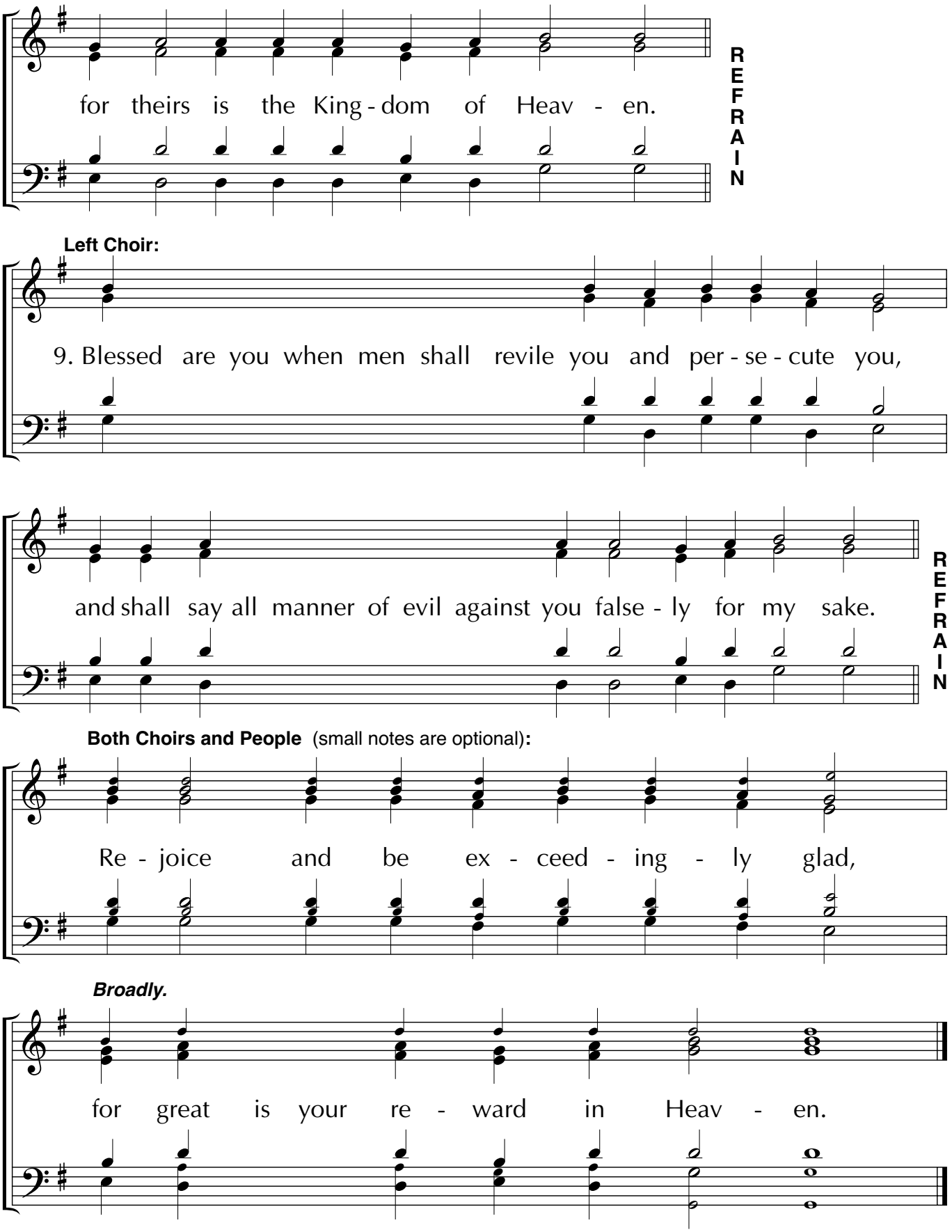
Left Choir:





Right Choir:




for theirs is the King - dom of Heav - en.
REFRAIN
Left Choir:
9. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and per - se - cute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you false - ly for my sake.
REFRAIN
Both Choirs and People (small notes are optional):
Re - joice and be ex - ceed - ing - ly glad,
Broadly.
for great is your re - ward in Heav - en.