

Choir in Context Study Notes and Sample Questions from 2027

QUESTION STYLES

Ministry Section

In the exam, when the 'Choir in Context' section is reached, candidates will be asked first to look through the unfamiliar reading whilst the examiner writes up the sight-reading test comment.

Candidates will have a short time to read through an unfamiliar passage from the Old Testament. They may do so silently or aloud, but will not be marked on their reading if they choose to do so aloud.

Candidates will be asked **three** short questions about the reading.

1. A 'what happened' English comprehension-style question about a particular aspect of the reading.
2. A follow up question asking 'why', eliciting understanding.
3. A question asking how the reading links to wider Christian faith.

Bible Section

Candidates will have prepared **two** Saints. The examiner will choose one of them. The candidates will be asked the question

Briefly explain how St [...] is relevant to Christians today.

Candidates will be expected to give a short response which addresses that question. Note that mere 'factual' recall of the Saint's story is not credited, nor is knowing the date of the Festival or memorisation of the collect. Credit will be given for showing understanding of how that Saint's example and life is relevant to modern Christians. As a guide, candidates should speak for no more than 2 minutes.

Liturgy Section

Candidates choose one Psalm. They will be asked **three** short questions about it.

1. Two questions asking for detail and sophisticated understanding of aspects the Psalm's meaning and how this is established.
2. A questions asking about where/when the Psalm would be used in a Liturgical context.

Ministry Section – Specimen Unfamiliar Reading

A voice of one calling:

"In the wilderness prepare

the way for the Lord;

make straight in the desert

a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up,

every mountain and hill made low;

the rough ground shall become level,

the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,

and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out."

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,

and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall,

because the breath of the Lord blows on them.

Surely the people are grass.

The grass withers and the flowers fall,

but the word of our God endures forever."

Sample questions and *indicative answers* on this reading

1. What does the instruction to "prepare the way for the Lord" tell us about God's relationship with his people?

It shows that God is coming to rescue and restore his people, and that they are called to be ready to receive him.

2. Why does the passage compare people to grass and flowers, while saying that God's word endures for ever?

The comparison reminds us that human life is temporary, but God's promises and purposes are permanent and completely trustworthy.

3. How might Christians today help to "prepare the way of the Lord" in their communities?

Christians can prepare the way by living faithfully, sharing the gospel, serving others with love, and helping people to encounter Christ through their words and actions.

Bible Section – Study Notes –

Candidates should study TWO of the following Saints.

St Thomas, St Luke, St Peter, St Mary Magdelene, St John the Baptist.

Brief introductory study notes on each of these Saints are below.

Thomas the Apostle

- Thomas is often called “Doubting Thomas” because he refused to believe Jesus had risen until he saw and touched Jesus’ wounds himself.
 - **Bible reference:** John 20:24–29
 - This is relevant to Christians today because many believers experience doubt or questions about faith. Thomas shows that honest questioning can lead to stronger belief.
- When Thomas finally saw the risen Christ, he declared, “My Lord and my God!”
 - **Bible reference:** John 20:28
 - Christians see this as one of the clearest declarations of Jesus’ divinity in the New Testament.
- Thomas showed courage and loyalty to Jesus before the crucifixion.
 - **Bible reference:** John 11:16 (“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”)
 - This encourages Christians to remain faithful even when discipleship is difficult.
- Tradition states that Thomas later travelled to India to preach the Gospel.
 - Christians today are inspired by his missionary example and willingness to spread Christianity beyond the Roman world.
- Jesus said to Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”
 - **Bible reference:** John 20:29
 - This verse is especially important for Christians today, who believe in Christ without physically seeing him.

John the Baptist

- John the Baptist prepared people for the coming of Jesus by preaching repentance.
 - **Bible reference:** Matthew 3:1–3
 - Christians today see the importance of repentance, self-examination, and spiritual preparation.
- John baptised Jesus in the River Jordan.
 - **Bible reference:** Matthew 3:13–17
 - This event is central to Christian understanding of baptism and the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God.
- John lived simply in the wilderness, wearing camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey.
 - **Bible reference:** Matthew 3:4
 - He gives an example of humility and devotion to God rather than worldly comfort.
- John recognised that Jesus was greater than himself.
 - **Bible reference:** John 3:30 ("He must increase, but I must decrease.")
 - Christians are encouraged to put God before pride or personal ambition.
- John spoke truth courageously, even criticising King Herod's behaviour.
 - **Bible reference:** Mark 6:17–29
 - His martyrdom inspires Christians to stand up for truth and justice even at personal cost.

Luke the Evangelist

- Luke is traditionally believed to have written the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.
 - **Bible references:** Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–2
 - Christians value Luke because his writings preserve important teachings about Jesus and the early Church.
- Luke's Gospel especially emphasises care for the poor, outsiders, and sinners.
 - **Bible references:** Luke 4:18–19; Luke 19:1–10 (Zacchaeus)
 - Christians today are reminded to show compassion and social justice.
- Luke recorded major parables such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.
 - **Bible references:** Luke 10:25–37; Luke 15:11–32
 - These stories teach Christians about mercy, forgiveness, and loving one's neighbour.
- Luke highlights the importance of prayer throughout Jesus' ministry.
 - **Bible references:** Luke 5:16; Luke 11:1–13
 - Christians are encouraged to develop a strong prayer life.
- Luke accompanied St Paul on missionary journeys.
 - **Bible reference:** 2 Timothy 4:11
 - Christians see Luke as an example of faithful service and support within the Church.
- Tradition says Luke was a physician.
 - **Bible reference:** Colossians 4:14
 - Because of this, he is often regarded as the patron saint of doctors and healers.

Mary Magdalene

- Mary Magdalene was a devoted follower of Jesus after he healed her.
 - **Bible reference:** Luke 8:1–3
 - Christians today may see her life as an example of transformation and discipleship.
- She remained faithful to Jesus at the crucifixion when many disciples fled.
 - **Bible references:** John 19:25; Mark 15:40
 - Christians admire her loyalty and courage during suffering.
- Mary Magdalene witnessed Jesus' burial.
 - **Bible reference:** Mark 15:47
 - Her witness strengthens the reliability of the resurrection accounts in Christian belief.
- She was the first person to see the risen Christ.
 - **Bible references:** John 20:11–18; Mark 16:9
 - Christians regard her as an important witness to the resurrection, the central event of Christianity.
- Jesus instructed her to tell the disciples that he had risen.
 - **Bible reference:** John 20:17–18
 - Because she proclaimed the resurrection, she is sometimes called the "apostle to the apostles."
- Mary Magdalene's story reminds Christians that women played significant roles in the ministry of Jesus and the early Church.

Saint Peter

- Peter was one of Jesus' first disciples and left his work as a fisherman to follow him.
 - **Bible references:** Matthew 4:18–20; Luke 5:1–11
 - Christians today see Peter as an example of responding faithfully to God's call.
- Peter was part of Jesus' inner circle along with James and John.
 - **Bible references:** Mark 5:37; Matthew 17:1–2 (the Transfiguration)
 - This shows his importance among the disciples and his close relationship with Jesus.
- Peter declared that Jesus was "the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
 - **Bible reference:** Matthew 16:13–17
 - Christians see this confession of faith as a model of belief in Jesus' identity.
- Jesus said to Peter, "On this rock I will build my Church."
 - **Bible reference:** Matthew 16:18–19
 - Many Christians, especially within the Catholic Church, regard Peter as the first leader of the Church and the first Pope.
- Peter attempted to walk on water towards Jesus but became afraid and began to sink.
 - **Bible reference:** Matthew 14:28–31
 - Christians today relate to Peter's mixture of faith and doubt and learn the importance of trusting Christ.
- Peter denied knowing Jesus three times during Jesus' trial.
 - **Bible references:** Luke 22:54–62; Matthew 26:69–75
 - His failure reminds Christians that human weakness and sin can be forgiven through repentance.
- After the resurrection, Jesus forgave and restored Peter by asking three times, "Do you love me?"
 - **Bible reference:** John 21:15–19
 - Christians see this as an important example of forgiveness, restoration, and renewed vocation.
- Peter became a bold preacher after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
 - **Bible reference:** Acts 2:1–41
 - His preaching led many people to become Christians and inspires believers to share their faith courageously.
- Peter healed the sick and performed miracles in Jesus' name.
 - **Bible references:** Acts 3:1–10; Acts 5:15–16
 - Christians see this as evidence of the power of faith and the continuing work of God through the Church.
- Peter was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel but remained faithful.
 - **Bible references:** Acts 12:1–11
 - His courage under persecution encourages Christians facing opposition for their beliefs.
- Tradition states that Peter was martyred in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero.
 - Christians remember him as an example of steadfast faith and sacrifice for Christ.

Liturgy section – Study notes

Candidates should study ONE of the following Psalms

22, 51, 80, 114, 130

Brief Study notes on these Psalms are below.

Psalm 22

- A psalm of **lament moving towards trust**, often described as individual complaint.
- Opens with extreme **abandonment language**, suggesting both psychological and spiritual crisis.
- Contains striking imagery of:
 - physical suffering (“poured out like water”)
 - social humiliation (mockery, staring)
 - animal predation (dogs, bulls)
- A clear structural movement:
 - vv.1–21: distress and petition
 - vv.22–31: thanksgiving and proclamation
- The psalm ends with **corporate praise and future hope**, widening from individual to universal worship.
- Strong **Christological interpretation** in Christian tradition (Passion narratives).

Liturgical Use

- Central to **Good Friday liturgy**.
- Often used in Passion readings and Tenebrae services.
- Functions as a bridge between **lament and Paschal hope**.

Sample Questions

1. How does the psalm’s shift in tone affect its theological message about suffering?
2. In what ways does the language of physical distress function as more than literal description?
3. How does its use in Passiontide worship shape Christian interpretation of suffering and redemption?
4. What is the significance of the movement from individual complaint to communal praise?
5. How is the Psalm used within a Liturgical context and why is it suitable for that context.

Psalm 51

Study Notes

- Classical **penitential psalm**, traditionally linked to David after Nathan's rebuke.
- Emphasises **internal moral transformation** over ritual sacrifice.
- Key theological ideas:
 - sin as inherent condition ("in sin did my mother conceive me")
 - divine mercy as the only basis for forgiveness
 - need for inward renewal
- Key imagery:
 - cleansing (washing, hyssop)
 - recreation ("create in me a clean heart")
 - broken spirit as acceptable sacrifice
- Strong emphasis on **restoration to relationship with God**, not just legal pardon.

Liturgical Use

- Central in **penitential seasons**, especially Lent.
- Used in **Confession services**, Ash Wednesday, and Compline traditions.
- Forms the basis of corporate penitential language in many liturgies.

Sample Questions

1. How does the psalm redefine the concept of sacrifice in relation to worship?
2. What is the effect of combining physical cleansing imagery with moral language?
3. How does the psalm balance personal responsibility with dependence on divine grace?
4. Why might this psalm be particularly suited to communal acts of confession?
5. How is the Psalm used within a Liturgical context and why is it suitable for that context.

Psalm 80

Study Notes

- Communal lament focused on national crisis and divine absence.
- Repeated refrain: **“Restore us, O God”** acts as structural and emotional anchor.
- Israel depicted as:
 - a vine planted and nurtured by God
 - now exposed, broken, and ravaged
- Suggests theological tension between:
 - divine election and care
 - perceived divine withdrawal
- The psalm blends **petition, memory of past salvation, and urgent plea.**

Liturgical Use

- Common in **Advent liturgies**, especially early Advent themes of longing.
- Used in contexts of repentance and restoration.
- Emphasises expectation of divine intervention.

Sample Questions

1. How does the extended vine metaphor develop the theme of national identity?
2. What is the effect of repeated direct address to God throughout the psalm?
3. How does the psalm reflect a theology of divine absence and longing?
4. In what ways does it show a meaning of waiting and expectation?
5. How is the Psalm used within a Liturgical context and why is it suitable for that context.

Psalm 114

Study Notes

- Highly poetic retelling of the Exodus event.
- Nature is portrayed as **responsive and reactive** to God's presence.
- Key imagery:
 - sea fleeing
 - Jordan retreating
 - mountains skipping like animals
- Uses **personification and cosmic disruption** to emphasise divine power.
- Theologically, it asserts:
 - God's sovereignty over nature
 - liberation as a cosmic event, not just historical
- Short, concentrated structure enhances impact.

Liturgical Use

- Part of the **Hallel Psalms (113–118)**.
- Associated with **Passover** in Jewish tradition and **Easter themes** in Christianity.
- Used to celebrate **deliverance and divine kingship**.

Sample Questions

1. How does personification of natural elements shape the theological message?
2. What is the effect of presenting liberation as a disruption of creation itself?
3. How does the psalm compress historical narrative into poetic imagery?
4. Why is this psalm particularly suited to festival contexts of deliverance?
5. How is the Psalm used within a Liturgical context and why is it suitable for that context.

Psalm 130

Study Notes

- One of the “Songs of Ascents”.
- Begins with deep **personal and existential despair**.
- Moves towards confidence in:
 - forgiveness
 - steadfast love (hesed)
 - redemption
- Key theological themes:
 - waiting as faithful posture
 - hope rooted in divine character, not circumstance
 - communal redemption (“He will redeem Israel”)
- Structure:
 - cry from depths
 - confession of sin
 - affirmation of forgiveness
 - communal hope

Liturgical Use

- Frequently used in **funeral liturgies** and **Compline/Evensong**.
- Expresses themes of hope beyond death and in times of darkness.
- Also used in penitential contexts and reflective services.

Sample Questions

1. How does the psalm develop a theology of waiting?
2. What is the relationship between individual confession and communal redemption?
3. How does the imagery of “depths” function symbolically rather than literally?
4. Why is this psalm particularly appropriate for times with endings or reflection?
5. How is the Psalm used within a liturgical context and why is it suitable for that context.