

More on My Approach to Pointing Gospels

Not all the phrases in a Gospel are equally important or interesting. For instance, phrases introducing direct quotations (like, “he said to him”) are of little importance, so I monotone them. If, however, it is a solemn introduction like “Very truly, I say to you,” then it *does* call for emphasis and gets a Metrum.

There are usually one or two sentences in a passage that are most important—usually a memorable quote from Jesus, maybe the “punch line” of a parable. I generally try to not monotone those highpoints but to highlight them with a musical figure—like a Metrum, perhaps one broken up by an Apostropha.

The Apostropha is a large, heavy raised comma (apostrophe) I sometimes introduce to “break up” a melodic figure (that is, to insert a pause or a “catch”) while maintaining the overall structure of the figure.

Generally I follow the punctuation of the text. A period usually calls for a Punctum, a comma for a minimum dividing line (the short “tick” through the top line of the staff), and a question mark for an Interrogation. A semicolon sometimes I apply a Punctum to, as it joins two complete sentences, but not always. Sometimes it will get a Metrum.

How I Point Gospels

When I am doing a setting of a Gospel I copy and paste the text with verse numbers into an ever-growing storage file of Gospels in NRSV. Then I copy the text into a blank Worksheet and syllabify it. I lay the syllabified text out under a two-line staff and print.

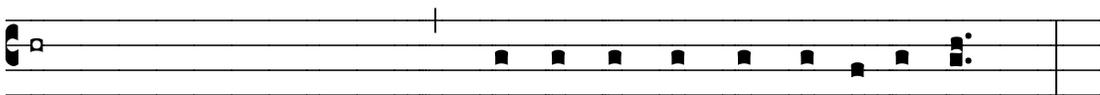
Now a-bout eight days af-ter these say-ings Je-sus took with him Pet-er and John and

James, and went up on the moun-tain to pray. 29 And while he was pray-ing, the ap-

Then with a pencil I begin to work out the chant.

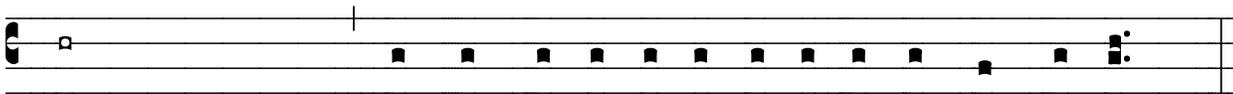
The first time through I mark the ends of sentences with a vertical line that reaches from one staff line to the other. I may also start putting in those things which are most obvious, like short vertical lines through the upper staff line at commas in the text (unless in actual speaking of the text I would not pause at a particular comma).

The first time through I will also put in the Interrogations, working backwards from the last syllable of the sentence, since they are absolutely invariable.



So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you al - so wish to go a - way?”

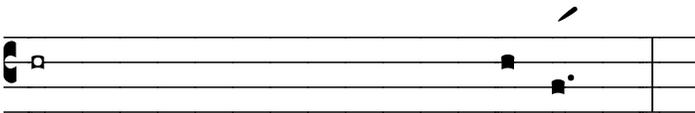
If the question has two parts, I will use the reciting note for the first part.



27 For who is greater, the one who is at the ta-ble or the one who serves?

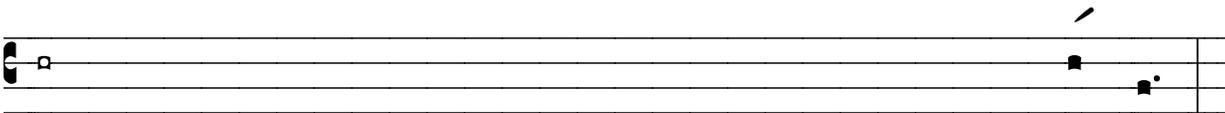
The Punctum

You know that every sentence, if it does not take an Interrogation or is not at the end of the passage and taking a Conclusion, will end with a Punctum (which will drop from the reciting tone two notes). The question to be answered is where is the last stressed syllable of the sentence, the syllable you want to emphasize by having it be the last syllable on the reciting tone. If the last syllable is stressed and the last-but-one is unstressed, you put the Punctum on the last two syllables, with an accent mark above on the last syllable.



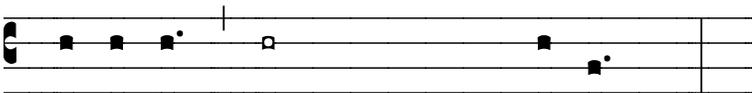
But I am among you as one who serves.

If the next-to-last is stressed and the last is unstressed, you put the Punctum at the same place, only you put the accent mark over the next-to-last syllable.

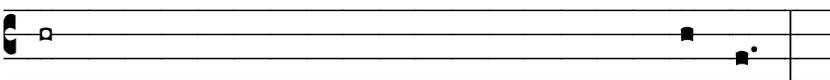


A dispute arose among them as to which one of them was the great - est.

If the last two syllables are stressed equally, I do not put in an accent mark above either syllable.



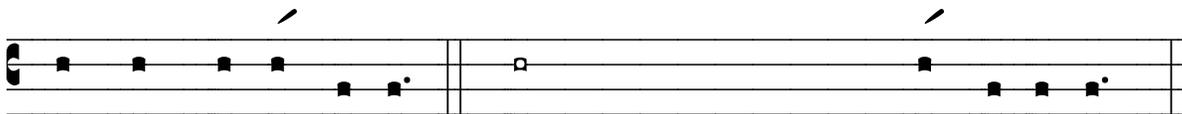
¹⁰ Je-sus said, "Make the people sit down."



he withdrew again to the mountain by him-self.

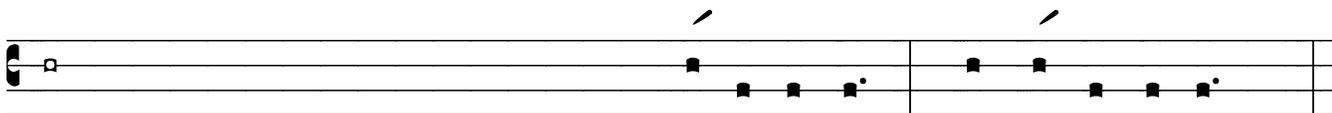
If the syllable I want to stress is farther back in the sentence, say the third, fourth, or fifth syllable from the end, then that syllable becomes the one to be the last syllable on the reciting tone.

Third:



and they were ter-ri-fied. // and the disciples spoke stern-ly to them.

Fourth:



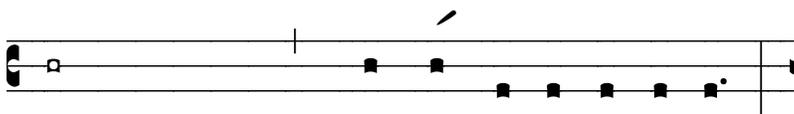
those in authority over them are called ben-e-fac-tors. // do not be a-larmed;

Fifth:



8 You abandon the com-mand-ment of God and hold to hu-man tra-di-tion.”

The drop in the voice can even be six syllables from the end:



Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king.

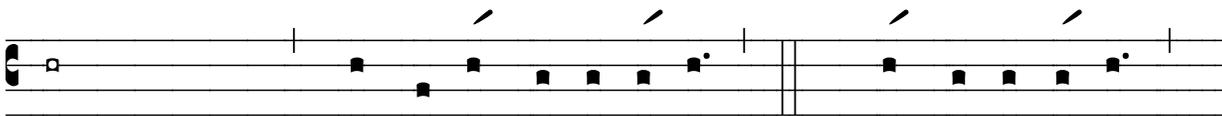
Where there is a semi-colon connecting two complete sentences, you can end each separate sentence with a Punctum, or you can give the first a Metrum and the second a Punctum, or else just a pause before the semi-colon but no dropping of the voice.

The Metrum

I generally do not put a Metrum on an introduction to a direct quotation, because it is less important than the quote itself.

But if the quotation or the first phrase of the quote will not be taking a Metrum, you can put a Metrum on the introduction to a quotation, though I don't generally favor them.

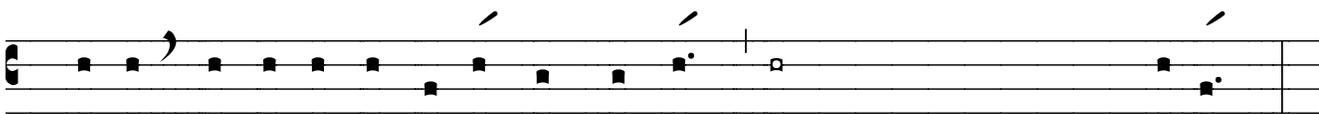
A special case are solemn introductory clauses of Jesus like "Very truly I tell you." These I generally *do* give a Metrum.



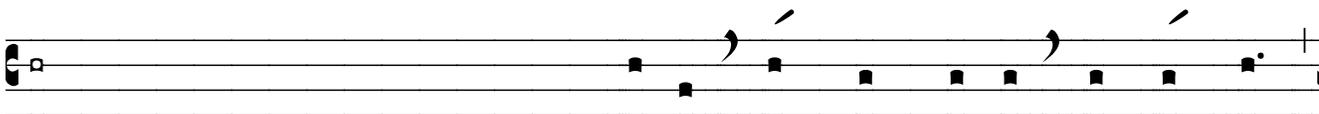
Jesus answered, "Ve - ry tru - ly, I tell you, // "Tru - ly I tell you,

The Apostropha

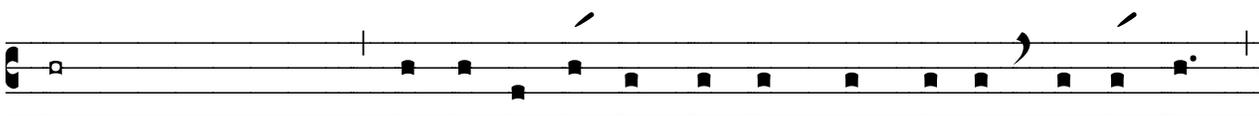
Perhaps the most radical modification of the traditional chant is when I insert a break, a catch of the breath, represented by the Apostropha, into the Metrum.



32 And I, when I am lift-ed up from the earth, will draw all people to my-self."

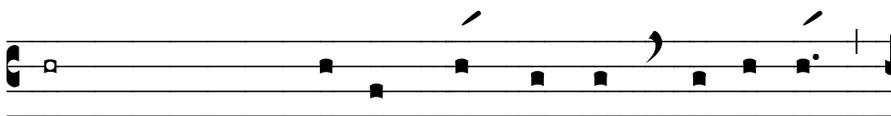


Then Pilate entered the headquarters a-gain, sum-moned Je-sus, and asked him,

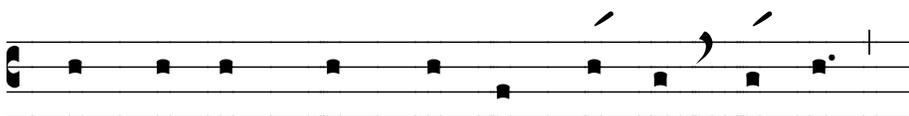


29 and I confer on you, just as my Fa-ther has con-ferred on me, a king-dom,

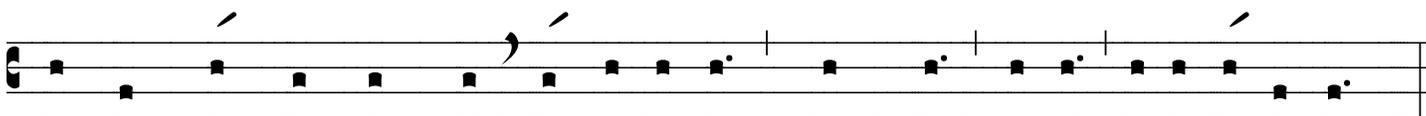
The Apostropha can be used before a direct quote:



6 Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!'

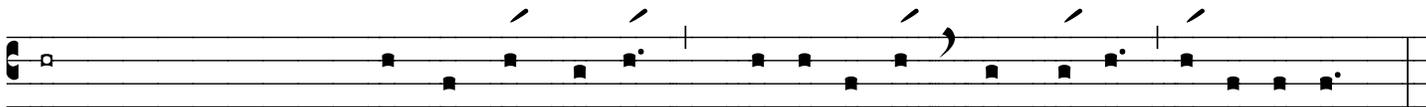


They were as - tounded be-yond mea-sure, say - ing,

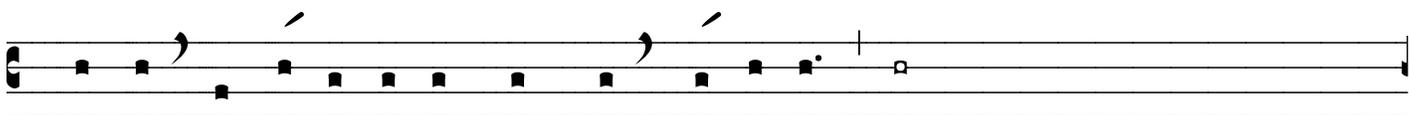


And they called the blind man, say-ing to him, "Take heart; get up, he is cal-ling you."

It can be used in a situation of apposition:

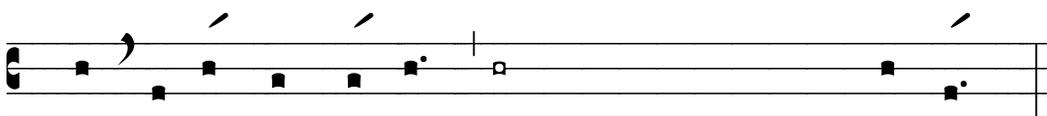


Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chos-en; lis-ten to him!"



Mar-tha, the sis-ter of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench

Or in a situation like the following:



"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

I have also use the Apostropha to break up an Interrogation:

