Before we begin, let’s reflect on a question: Why are we doing this? I have a few thoughts for you to consider.

When we sing, or listen, to Messiah, we encounter God through his Word. The text of Messiah is compiled from the [King James Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_James_Bible), and from the version of the [Psalms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalms) included with the [Book of Common Prayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Common_Prayer).

Now, I’m about to go out on a limb. I bet we can agree that the Bible is kind of important – it’s the place where we encounter God through his Word, after all. We know, as it is the teaching of the Church, that Christ is present in his Word. We know, also, that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in our midst.

Regarding the Word, Isaiah says in 55:10-11:

“For just as the rain and snow come down from heaven,

and do not return there without watering the earth,

making it bring forth and sprout,

yielding seed for the sower and bread for eating,

so will my message be *that goes out of my mouth*(reminds me of a song)—

it won’t return to me empty.

Instead, it will accomplish what I desire,

and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

We encounter the person, Jesus Christ, in God’s purpose-filled Word.

Naturally, Messiah isn’t a recitation. St. Pius X teaches that something special happens when Sacred Word is paired with Sacred Music, whose “proper aim” – purpose – “is to add greater efficacy to the text, in order that through it the faithful may be the more easily moved to devotion and better disposed for the reception of the fruits of grace belonging to the celebration of the most holy mysteries.” On the text, Pope Benedict reminds us: “Sacred Music takes as its subject the Word and liturgical texts.” And on the characteristics of Sacred Music, Pius adds: “nobody of any nation may receive an impression other than good on *hearing* it.”

So it’s not just any words and it’s not just any music. Well, we already know a little bit about the Words. If Sacred Music isn’t just any music, what is it? And what is this impression of Good?

St. Pius X teaches that Gregorian Chant is the “supreme model of Sacred Music.” Vatican II affirms Gregorian Chant “is specially suited for the Liturgy.” And more recently, Pope Benedict said: “An authentic updating of sacred music can take place only in the lineage of the great tradition of the past, of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony.”

Lineage. The lineage begins with Gregorian Chant – the origin of the proverbial musical vine. All Sacred Music grows from this musical vine. The first branch is organum. The second branch is polyphony. The third branch is counterpoint, where we find Messiah.

Since we’re dealing with Sacred Word joined to Sacred Music, their *combined* purpose is the same as the Word’s purpose, only with “greater efficacy.” As Pope Benedict says, “music is a higher form of proclamation.” Messiah isn’t a recitation; it’s an opportunity to meet the person Jesus Christ through an elevated proclamation of God’s purpose-filled Word.

Now, how do we know if someone has received an impression of Good?

One way to measure the extent to which the Good (with a capital G) has been *impressed* on a person is by the fruit they yield. For example, we have a basket of fruits known as The Corporal Works of Mercy; namely: To feed the hungry, To give drink to the thirsty, To clothe the naked, To shelter the traveler, To visit/comfort the sick, To ransom the captive, and To [bury](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03071a.htm) the dead. Hmm, remind anyone of the outcome of the premiere of Messiah? In other words, the purpose of God’s Word is fulfilled in acts such as these.

Did Handel attempt to live the purpose of God’s Word? Yes. Has Messiah inspired others to do the same? Yes.

Jesus Christ is present in our midst. What will you do?