

## Impressions from Chanting Psalms by Olaf Hall-Holt

The Monastery of Christ in the Desert, like other Benedictine monasteries, follows a clear rhythm of worship and prayer centered around the psalms. In my first extended visit to a living monastery, I greatly appreciated this balanced approach to organizing daily activities.

For each time of prayer, for the Divine Office, we were summoned to the chapel with a bell that rang out into the colorful New Mexico desert. As we entered the chapel, the monks entered from the opposite direction. The singing began when someone at the back, knocked on wood three times. Then the chanting began, and the guests were invited into the chant.

The content of the psalms varied greatly. To have contrasting emotions and supplications chanted in a uniform structure allowed me to think about the psalms from a new perspective, while having many psalms wash over me from day to day. I think the monks chant all 150 psalms every week.

The chosen psalms seemed to fit the various times of day, with joyful psalms near dawn, sometimes more difficult psalms in the morning, and reassuring psalms at the end of the day. We chanted psalms according to the ancient seven-fold rhythm that started at 4am, then repeated at roughly 6am, 9am, 12pm, 3pm, 6pm, and finished at 7:30pm. Sprinkled throughout the psalms were times of spontaneous prayer.

I felt blessed to be a part of this daily rhythm.