

Chanting with Ison

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Definition

Ison ("ἶσον") of a musical Mode is - by definition - the pitch of its basis (tonic). For instance, the ison of Second Soft Chromatic Mode (Tone 2) is the note DHI (G). To **hold** ("κρατῶ") the ison means to continuously sing the pitch of the basis while the melody of a hymn is being chanted by the psaltis. The person "holding the ison" is called the **isokratis** ("ἰσοκράτης") [plural **isokrates** ("ἰσοκράτες") or **isokratai** ("ἰσοκράται")].

– D. Koubaroulis

Ison in Writing

- First mentioned in writing in the 14th century, but we think it goes way back stemming from Old Testament practice of using bagpipe and other drone instruments
- First notated in music in the 19th century. Not commonly seen in liturgical books until the 20th century.
- Very little written down and published on this topic! Lycourgos Angelopoulos published a three-page article on the topic ("Isokratema Technique in Modern Performance Practice") in November 2000 expressing his opinions.

Ison in Theory

- An opportunity to enhance the melody and form a "Trinity" of Words, Melody, and Ison
- Melody is the "Unified Voice of the Church" with Ison as the "Uncreated Light of God"
- With the essence of Byzantine Chant being mystical prayer, ison is a complimentary, prayerful line
- Ison should never overpower the Melody
- Ison provides a steady foundation for the Melodic line. Most generally the bass note of the tone or the dominant note of the melodic tetrachord

Ison in Practice

- Tremendous variation in style and technique from one choir to another!
- Concept of traditional/usual patterns versus innovations
- Ison is optional. Better to have no ison than "bad" ison

Ison is not Easy!

"To do it properly it requires musicality, knowledge of the music and the text being chanted, psaltic experience, and good aesthetic criterion. It requires vocal and breathing stamina and very good pitch. Untrained psaltai (chanters) can do isokratema as long as there is someone to guide them as to when and where to they should change."

– D. Koubaroulis

Types of Ison:

- Basic ison (=only the basis of the mode)
- Conservative ison (=tetrachords/pentachord and mode changes only)
- Moving ison (=conservative ison + some vertical harmonization similar to Stanitsas's scores)
- Westernized ison (=vertically harmonized ison)

– D. Koubaroulis

Methods of Vocalization:

- Single Vowel Sound [e.g., "a", "o", "ee", "ə" ("schwa") or Hum ("hmm")]
- Only Vowel Sounds of Text (no consonants)
- Complete Text – a choir form requiring practice

Phrasing/Breaths:

- Stop ison with end of phrase. Group breath.
- Carryover ison – how does this work when saying complete text?

Unison notes and Unison phrases

- When melody rejoins the ison note, an opportunity to check pitch
- Unison phrases in composition can enhance text and add variety

Double Ison

- Octaves – Traditional
- Second ison a fourth or fifth above the Bass note introduced by Constantine Psachos, Professor of Byzantine Music in Athens in 1904. Not considered “traditional”
- Only seen in the “Plagal” modes: Tone 5, Tone 6, Tone 8

Methods for indicating ison in Western notation

- Single Note Name above staff when ison changes (parallel with Byzantine notation)
- Ison note physically written into the melodic staff
- Separate staff from melody staff (in treble or bass clef)

Breathing

Directing the Ison

Key Ison notes for each Tone

- **Tone 1:** **D (Pa), G (Dhi), C (Ni)**
Example: Polyeleos, 3 pages from end of Section 2
- **Tone 2 [Soft Chromatic on G (Dhi)]:** **G (Dhi)/G↓(Dhi↓), E (Vou), C (Ni)**
Example: Hierarchical Trisagion 11-A, Section 2, 15 pages in
- **Tone 3:** **F (Ga), D (Pa), C (Ni)**
Example: The Holy Apostle Aquila, Section 4, 1st page
- **Tone 4:** **E (Vou), G (Dhi), D (Pa)**
Example: Psalm 140 – Kazan 45, Section 3, 23 pages in
- **Tone 5 [Based on A (Ke)]:** **A (Ke)/A↓(Ke↓), G (Dhi))/G↓(Dhi↓), D (Pa)**
Example: Resurrectional Apolytikion, Section 4, 2nd page
- **Tone 5 [Based on D (Pa)]:** **D (Pa), G (Dhi), A (Ke)**
Example 1: Psalm 140 – Kazan 58, Section 3, 30 pages in
Example 2: Come Receive Ye Light (below)
- **Tone 6 [Hard Chromatic on D (Pa)]:** **D (Pa), G (Dhi), C (Ni)**
Example: Psalm 140 (below)
- **Tone 7 [Based on F (Ga)]:** **F (Ga), G (Dhi), C (Ni), D (Pa)**
Example: Arise O God (below)
- **Tone 7 [Diatonic on B (Zo)]:** **B (Zo), D (Pa)**
Example: Polyeleos Psalm 135, (below)
- **Tone 7 [Enharmonic on Bb (Zo)]:** **Bb (Zo)/Bb↓(Zo↓)**
Example: Polyeleos, Psalm 134 (below)
- **Tone 8 [on F (Ga)]:** **F (Ga), C (Ni), D (Pa)**
Example: Theotokion 176, Section 3, last page
- **Tone 8 [on C (Ni)]:** **C (Ni), G (Dhi)/ G↓(Dhi↓), F (Ga↓)/F(Ga↓), D (Pa)**
Example1: The Great Doxology, Section 4, 3 pages from the end
Example2: Psalm 140 – Kazan (below)

Special Thanks to the following teachers of Byzantine Chant who were interviewed in the preparation for this class:

- Deacon John El-Massih, Protopsaltis of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America (6/15/17)
- Grammenos Karanos, Professor of Byzantine Chant, Holy Cross School of Theology, Brookline MA (6/20/17)
- Rev. Nicholas Kastanas, Professor of Byzantine Chant, Holy Cross School of Theology, Brookline MA (6/29/17)

POLYELEOS

Psalm 135

adapted by Hieromonk Seraphim (Dedes) and
Hiermonk Ephraim from the Athonite melody as written
by Hieromonk Gregory of Simonos Petras Monastery

First Mode

1

O give thanks_ un - to the Lord,_ for He_ is

good.____ Al - le - lu - i - a. For His

mer - cy en - dur - - - eth for - ev - er. Al - le -

lu - i - a.

2

O give thanks_ un - to__ the God_ of gods.____

Al - le - lu - i - a. For His mer-cy en - dur -

eth for - ev - er. Al - le - lu - i - a.

6



To Him that es - tab - lished the earth up - on the



wa - ters. Al - le - lu - i - a. For His mer-cy en -

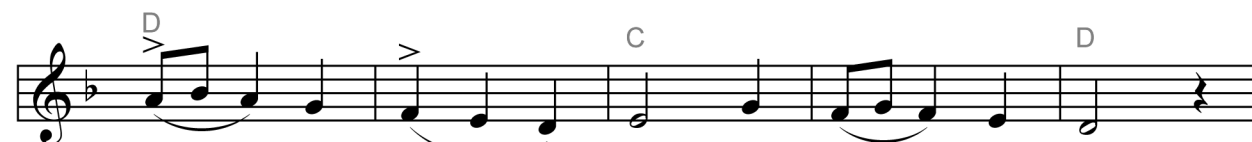


dur - eth for - ev - er. Al - le - lu - i - a.

23



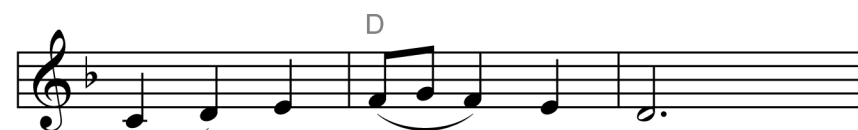
For in our hu - mil - i - a - tion the Lord re -



mem - bered us. Al - le - lu - i - a.



For His mer - cy en - dur - - eth for - ev - er.



Al - le - lu - i - a.

24



And re - deemed us from our en - e - mies.

Trisagion Hymn

Second Section - Long Version

11-A

Unison, ISON = G

mf A - - - - ghi - - - os _____

o _____ The - os. _____

Is pol - la _____ e - ti Dhes - po - ta.

A - - - - - - - ghi - - - -

os _____ Is - - - -

chi - ros. _____

Is - pol - la _____ e - ti Dhes - po - ta.

f A - - - - - ghi... _____ A - ghi - os

The Bishop, standing in the holy doors, facing west, intones: "O Lord, O Lord: Look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vine, and perfect that which thy right hand hath planted."

The Bishop again intones: "O Lord, O Lord: Look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vine, and perfect that which thy right hand hath planted."

God is the Lord

Third Mode

Rassem El Massih

April, 2015

Ison
God__ is the Lord and hath ap - peared un - to us.
Bless - ed is He that com - eth in the Name of the Lord.

(The chanter begins first with "God is the Lord..." and repeats it after each of the verses.)

CHANTER: God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Verse 1: O give thanks unto the Lord, and call upon his holy name.

Verse 2: All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.

Verse 3: This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

THE HOLY APOSTLE AQUILA

July 14

Apolytikion

Third Mode

Intonation: #8

Allegro ♩=150

Ἀπόστολε ἅγιε

O ho - ly A - pos - tle A - quil - a, in - ter -
cede__ with the__ mer - ci - ful God that He grant un -
to our souls for - give - ness of of - fenc - es.

Psalm 140

45

Byzantine Tone 4

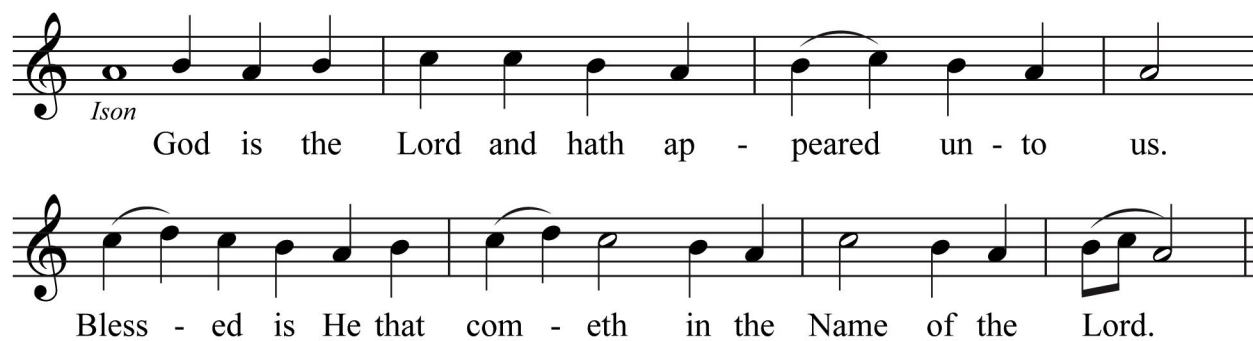
Basil Kazan
(1915 - 2001)

Slow

O Lord, I have cried out unto thee;
hear thou me. Hear thou
me, O Lord, I
have cried out unto thee; hear thou
me. Give ear to the voice of my
supplication, when I cry
out unto thee. Hear thou me, O Lord.
Slow
Let my prayer be set forth before
thee as the incense, and the lifting

God is the Lord: Tone 5

Rassem El Massih



Verses:

O give thanks unto the Lord and call upon His holy name.

All nations compassed me about, but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

Resurrectional Apolytikion: Tone 5

Basil Kazan



Psalm 140

58

Byzantine Tone 5

Basil Kazan
(1915 - 2001)

Slow

O Lord, I have cried out unto thee.

Hear thou me. Hear thou me, O Lord.

O Lord, I have cried out unto thee.

Hear thou me. Give ear to the voice

of my supplication, when I

cry out unto thee. Hear thou me,

O Lord. Let my pray'r

be set forth before thee as the

incense, and the lifting up of

The Hymn of the Unwaning Light

Contemporary
Byzantine Chant
Tone 5

Holy Transfiguration
Monastery

Slowly ♩ = 80

Soprano 1
Tenor 1

Soprano 2
Tenor 2

Alto
Bass

Come, re -- ceive ye light

Come, re -- ceive ye light

from the Un -- wan-ing Light, , and glo-ri --

from the Un -- wan-ing Light, , and glo-ri

fy Christ, Who is a -- ris -- en from the dead.

fy Christ, Who is a -- ris -- en from the dead.

Pentecostarion
The Feast of Pentecost

Sung as the 3rd stichera of the Aposticha, after Psalm 50 (Have mercy), and the Glory at the Praises

Byzantine Chant Tone 6/Plagal Second Mode

Dn. John El Massih

1 **D ***
O heav - en - ly King, the Com - for - ter, the Spir - it of ___ Truth,

2 **D *** **A**
O heav - en - ly ___ King, the Com - for - ter, the Spir - it ___ of ___ Truth,

3 **G** **D**
Who art ___ in ___ all ___ plac - es and fill - est ___

4 **G**
all ___ things; Treas - ur - y of ___ good ___ things,

5 **A**
and Giv - - - er ___ of ___ life; come, ___ and ___

6
dwell in ___ us, and cleanse us ___ from ev - 'ry ___ stain,

7 **D** ******
and save our souls, ___ O ___ Good ___ One.

9 ****** **G**
Final ending
Good ___ One. ___

Arise O God

Contemporary
Byzantine Chant
Tone 7

Father Alexis Kouri

The musical score is written for two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The music is a contemporary Byzantine chant in Tone 7. The lyrics are: 'A rise, O God, and judge the earth for Thou shalt in her- it a- mong all the na- tions.' The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, with some measures containing rests. The time signature changes from common time to 3/4 and then to 4/4.

Arise, O God, and judge the earth; for thou shalt inherit among all the nations.

- 1) God hath stood in the congregation of gods, and being in the midst of them he judgeth gods.
- 2) How long will you judge unjustly; and accept the persons of the wicked?
- 3) Judge the needy and fatherless. Do justice to the humble and the poor.
- 4) Rescue the poor; and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner.
- 5) They have not known or understood; they walk on in darkness. All the foundations of the earth shall be moved.
- 6) I have said: You are gods and all sons of the most High. But you, like men, shall die; and shall fall like one of the princes.

Grave Mode

17

B

To Him that smote____ great____ kings.____ Al - le -

D

lu - i - a. For____ His mer - cy en - dur -

B

eth for - ev - er. Al - le - lu - i - a.

18

B

And slew____ might - y kings.____ Al - le -

D

lu - i - a. For____ His mer - cy en - dur -

B

eth for - ev - er. Al - le - lu - i - a.

19

B

Se - - - on, king of the Am - o - rites.____

Polyeleos
Plagal of First Mode

Mitri el-Murr

Bb

They have a mouth but shall

88 not speak, eyes have they and

92 shall not see:

96 Al - le - lu - i - a.

100 Ears have they and shall not hear, nor

103 is there any breath in their

107 mouth: Al - le -

Byzantine Tone 8

Basil Kazan
(1915 - 2001)

Thou who for our sake wast born of a vir - gin, and didst

suf - fer cru - ci - fix - ion, O good _____ One, and didst de -

- spoil _____ death thru death, and as God didst re - veal res - ur -

- rec - - - tion, de - spise not those _____ whom thou hast cre -

- at - ed with thine own hand. Show forth thy love _____ for man - kind, O _____

mer - ci - ful One. Ac - cept **thē** in - ter - ces - sion of thy

moth - er, the The - o - to - kos, for us and save thy des -

- pair - ing peo - ple, O our Sav - iour. _____

To Dismissal -->

PSALM 140

99

Byzantine Tone 8

Basil Kazan
(1915 - 2001)

Slow

ISON

O _____ Lord, I have cried out

un - to _____ thee. Hear _____ thou _____ me. _____ Hear _____

thou _____ me, _____ O _____ Lord.

O _____ Lord, I have cried _____ out _____ un - to _____ thee.

Hear _____ thou _____ me. Give _____ ear to the

voice _____ of _____ my sup - pli - ca - tion,

when I cry _____ out un - to _____ thee. _____ Hear _____

thou _____ me, _____ O _____ Lord.