The first text is a very early example of Middle English. This is the introduction from the British Library website (http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/timeline/index.html), where you can view the original manuscript. The spelling and punctuation of this passage has not been normalised.

*Most sermons (or homilies) in this collection are copies of earlier ones in Old English. But this one is different. It is an English translation of a Latin sermon in which we can see many of the changes that signal the end of Old English. The rhythm and pattern of the sentences are beginning to sound distinctly modern. That is why linguists have called it the first text in Middle English. The sermon was given by Ralph d’Escures, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the 12th century.*

Translate the following passage to modern English. You will need to look up the words you don’t know. For this, I suggest you use the online [Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/) which includes non-normalised spellings.

Se godspellere Lucas sæigð on þyssen godspelle. þæt se hælend com in to sumen cæstele. and sum wif hine underfeng in to hire huse. þære wæs to name Martha. Seo hæfde ane suster. þe wæs genæmd Maria. Seo wæs sittende æt ures drihtenes foten. and hlyste his worden.

The second text is taken from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. It is the taken from the Prioress’s Portrait in the General Prologue.


First try and understand as much as you can with the help of the glossary at the bottom of the webpage: [http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/priorport.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/priorport.htm)

It is also possible to look up individual words online in this Middle English Dictionary: [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/structure.html](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/structure.html)

Then you can look at this interlinear translation to help you with the words that you have difficulties with: [http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/gp-par.htm](http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/gp-par.htm)

Finally, work in pairs and answer the study questions below. There is a brief but useful guide to Chaucer’s pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary available from here: [http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/pronunciation](http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/pronunciation)
Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,
That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;

Hire gretteste ooth was but by seïnt Loy;
And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.
Ful weel she soonge the service dyvyne,
Entuned in hir nose ful semely,
And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly

After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
At mete wel y-taught was she with-alle,
She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe.

Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe,
Thât no drope ne fille upon hire breste;
In curteisie was set ful muchel hir leste.
Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene,
That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene

Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
Ful semely after hir mete she raughte,
And sikerly she was of greet desport,
And ful plesáunt, and amyable of port,
And peyned hire to countrefete cheere

Of Court, and been estatlich of manere,
And to ben holden digné of reverence.
But for to spoken of hire conscïence,
She was so charitable and so pitous
She wolde wepe if that she saugh a mous

Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
Of smal houndes hadde she that she fedde
With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel breed;
But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte,

And al was conscience and tendre herte.
Ful semly hir wympul pynched was;
Hire nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,
Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to softe and reed,
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;

It was almoost a spanne brood I trowe,
For, hardly, she was nat undergrowe.
Ful fetys was hir croke as I was war;
Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,

And ther-on heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after Amor vincit omnia.
**Study Questions**

1. (a) Comment on the relationship between pronunciation and spelling of the vowels in these words:

   *smylyng* (119), *ooth* (120), *mous* (144) and *smal* (153, 158).

   (b) Comment on the relationship between pronunciation and spelling of the underlined consonants in these words:

   *unknowe* (126), *draughte* (135).

2. Comment on the morphology of these verbs (i.e. as regards tense (*tempus*), mood (indicative/subjunctive), person, strong/weak verb, etc.):


3. What is the function of *y-* in *y-taught* (127)?

4. Compare *smal/smale* in lines 146, 153 and 158. Can you account for the –e in line 146?

5. Identify all the plural nouns and compare their morphology with both their Modern English and Old English counterparts (using the Old English Translator to help you: [http://www.oldenglishtranslator.co.uk/](http://www.oldenglishtranslator.co.uk/)).

6. Comment on the word order of these passages (especially the order of the subject, object and verb in comparison with modern English):

   (a) *She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle* (128)

   (b) *Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene* (133)

   (c) *That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene* (134)

   (d) *whan she dronken hadde hir draughte* (135)

   (e) And sikerly she was of greet desport (137)

   (Disregard the influence of the metre.)
7. Comment on the change in meaning that these words have undergone since Chaucer’s day (using the Oxford English Dictionary: [http://www.oed.com.lt.itag.bibl.liu.se](http://www.oed.com.lt.itag.bibl.liu.se)):

     mete (127, 136), countrefete (139), pitous (143), houndes (146), flessh (147).

8. Compare the two passages of Middle English as regards:

   (a) spelling
   (b) grammar (morphology and syntax)
   (c) lexis