

THE GREAT DOXOLOGY

Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will to men. We praise You, we bless You, we worship You, we glorify You, we give thanks to You on account of Your great glory. O Lord, heavenly King, God the Father almighty; O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ; and You, O Holy Spirit. O Lord our God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, You who take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us; You who take away the sin of the world, receive our prayer. You who sit at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For You alone are holy, You alone are the Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen. Every day I will bless You and praise Your name forever and ever.

Deign, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin. Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our Fathers and praised and glorified is Your Name forever. Amen. Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us for we have placed our hope in You. Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your precepts. Blessed are You, O Master, make me understand Your precepts. Blessed are You, O Holy One, enlighten me with Your precepts.

O Lord, You have been our refuge from generation to generation. I said: Lord, have mercy on me and heal my soul, for I have sinned against You. O Lord, in You I take refuge, teach me to fulfill Your will, for You are my God. For in You is the fountain of life and in Your light we shall see light. Extend Your mercy on those who acknowledge You.

(Anonymous, 2nd-3rd c.)



Byzantine Leaflet Series

No. 31

With Ecclesiastical Approbation October 1984

Byzantine Seminary Press
Pittsburgh, PA 15214

MATINS



MORNING SERVICES

ACCORDING TO
THE BYZANTINE RITE

MATINS

MORNING LITURGICAL SERVICES

The Christian Community, from its inception, was encouraged to assemble "in the morning and in the evening, singing psalms and praying in the house of the Lord" (cf. *The Apostolic Constitutions* II, 29). These common morning and evening prayers eventually developed into two distinct liturgical services known as Matins and Vespers. In this leaflet we will limit ourselves to the description of Matins, since Vespers has been described previously (cf. *Byzantine Leaflet Series*, 1983, no. 29).

1.

The English word—*Matins* is derived from the Latin adjective "matutinus," denoting morning prayers (Lat.: *Orationes Matutinae*). In Old Slavonic these services are called *Utrenya*, an abbreviation of the original "Utrennyaya Sluzhba," i.e. Morning Services. In Greek they are called—*Orthros*, indicating the break of day (dawn), the time these services were originally celebrated.

The Byzantine Rite Matins are composed of two parts which initially formed two separate services: 1) *Predawn Services* or *Vigil*—introduced by monks sometime during the fourth century, and 2) *Matins Proper* or the original morning services celebrated at sunrise. These two parts were bound together by the *Kanon*, an integral part of the present Matins.

On Sundays and Feastdays, these morning services were celebrated with great splendor. They included the recitation of additional psalms, the reading of the Holy Gospel and the chanting of inspirational liturgical hymns. By the eleventh century, we already can mark the formation of three distinct types of Byzantine Matins, namely:

1) *Sunday or Resurrectional Matins*—celebrated on Sundays; 2) *Festive Matins*—adapted to the solemn celebration of various feastdays; and 3) *Daily Matins*—much simplified and without the Gospel reading, celebrated on weekdays.

The *Easter Matins of Resurrection* stand by themselves and will be dealt with in a separate leaflet.

2.

The first part of the present Matins developed from the monastic predawn services (vigil, wake) which was introduced by the monks as a response to Christ's admonition, "Stay awake, for you don't know the day or the hour" (Mt. 25:13) when the Son of Man will come. Daybreak with the coming of the rising of the sun, reminded the Christians of the second coming of our Savior, who is referred to in the Bible as "the Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) and the "Rising Sun" (Lk. 1:78). For this reason, St. Basil (d. 379) admonished his monks: "We must rise for prayer before dawn so that we are not caught by the sun, sleeping" (cf. St. Basil, *The Long Rules* 37, 5).

This theme, the "eschatological" expectation of Christ's final coming, is clearly indicated at the beginning of Matins with the words: "The Lord is God, and He has given us light. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 118:26-27). According to *The Apostolic Constitutions*, written about 380 A.D., morning prayers were introduced by the Fathers to give thanks to God for "sending us the light" (VIII, 34). The light of day—that reveals the marvelous works of God for which "everything that breathes should praise the Lord" (Ps. 150:6); the light of faith—that reveals the mysteries of God in the person of Jesus Christ, thus explaining the introduction of the reading of the Gospel at Matins.

The earliest description of this predawn celebration is given to us by the famous Spanish pilgrim, Egeria (about 380 A.D.), who attended morning services in Jerusalem, the actual cradle of the Byzantine Rite. Egeria informs us that on Sundays, in the Church of the Resurrection (Anastasis), the predawn services started "as soon as the first cock crowed" with the recitation of three psalms and a number of prayers. Then the Gospel, describing Christ's glorious resurrection, was read by the presiding bishop. After the Gospel, all the clergy, faithful and the presiding bishop, chanting hymns, proceeded to the adjacent Church of the Holy Cross (Calvary) where another psalm and prayer was recited. Following the kissing of the relics of the Holy Cross, the bishop imparted a blessing and dismissed the faithful who then returned to the Church of the Resurrection for morning services. Egeria concludes her description with the remark: "Each day the priests and the deacons alternated in holding the vigil with the people at the Anastasis" (cf. Egeria, *Diary of a Pilgrim*, 24).

3.

In his *Eighth Baptismal Instruction* delivered in Antioch about 388 A.D., St. John Chrysostom admonished the newly-baptized to show "great zeal in attending morning prayers, daily, in their churches "to thank God for all the gifts" given them and "to beseech Him for His powerful help" (n. 17). From these words we can deduce that the proper morning services which form the concluding part of the present Matins were arranged as follows: a) to sing praises (thanksgiving) to the Lord (Ps. 149:1) and b) to implore God's assistance in the fulfillment of our daily duties. Thus, originally, morning services were composed of the recitation of three *Psalms of Praise* (Pss. 148-150), the chanting of the *Morning Hymn* ("Glory

to God in the highest"), and the recitation of some *Morning Prayers*, usually led by the deacon (the present Ektenias). The presiding bishop or presbyter concluded the service by imparting the final blessing and dismissing the people.

The nucleus of the primitive morning services was the ancient morning hymn, "Glory to God in the highest" (cf. *Apost. Const.* VII, 47), also considered as a *Hymn of Thanksgiving* in the Byzantine Rite. It is chanted in our churches to the present day (cf. Back Cover) and is known to us as—*The Great Doxology* (Gr. doxadzo—to praise).

The writer of this most inspiring hymn is unknown. However, it is known that the hymn was compiled during the second or third century of various passages taken from Holy Scripture and from early liturgical prayers. Its early use at morning services is attested to in the treatise, *On Virginity*, ascribed to St. Athanasius (d. 373). The oldest version of the text can be found in the Alexandrian Code which dates back to the fifth century.

4.

The most characteristic part of Byzantine Matins is the *Kanon*. It links together the two described parts of the present morning services. The *Kanon* is a complex liturgical poem composed according to a specific rule (Gr. *kanon*—rule, standard), hence its name. Generally speaking, it is composed of nine canticles, referred to as *Odes*. These nine odes symbolize the nine Angelic Choirs who unceasingly, day and night, praise Almighty God (cf. Pseudo Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in P. G. 3, 119 ff.).

In her description of the predawn services in Jerusalem, Egeria, also mentioned that the faithful, proceeding from the Church of the Resurrection to that of Calvary, were "chanting hymns."

These hymns, most likely, were the Biblical Canticles praising God for His gracious benefits bestowed on the Chosen People. Since Matins evolved along the lines of what were the morning services of praise (thanksgiving), these Biblical Canticles were eventually adapted by the Christian communities as their liturgical morning hymns.

There were nine such biblical canticles selected by the Christian communities for their morning services:

1. *The Song of Moses*—after the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 15:1-21).
2. *The Song of Warning*—given by Moses to his people before his death (Deut. 32:1-43).
3. *The Song of Hannah*—exulting for bearing a son (I Sam. 2:1-10).
4. *The Song of Habakkuk*—foreseeing the coming of the Messiah (Hab. 3:1-19).
5. *The Song of Isaiah*—rejoicing for the restoration of Israel in Messianic times (Is. 26:9-19).
6. *The Song of Jonah*—after his deliverance from the belly of the whale (Jon. 2:3-10).
7. *The Prayer of Azariah*—in the furnace of fire (Dan. 3:26-45).
8. *The Song of Thanksgiving* of the three young men delivered from the fiery flames in Babylon (Dan. 3:52-90).
9. *The Canticle of the Blessed Virgin*: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk. 1:46-55). This is still used as a morning hymn, introducing the ninth ode of the *Kanon*.

Inspired by these biblical canticles which provided the theme (leading thought) to each of the nine odes, the Byzantine hymnographers composed a great number of the most beautiful liturgical poems, referred to as *the Kanon*. This new

type of Byzantine hymnody was brought to perfection by St. Andrew of Crete (d. 740), who justly is hailed as *The Father of the Kanon* (see *Byzantine Leaflet Series*, 1982, n. 24).

Each ode of the *Kanon* consists of three or more short hymns—stanzas—called *Troparia*. The first of these is referred to as *the Irmos* (Gr. *heirmos*—connecting link, tie), since by its leading thought it connects the entire ode to the respective biblical canticle mentioned above. The *Troparia* that follow the *Irmos* comment on its leading thought and relate it to the celebration of the day. Thus, the *Irmos* by its melody and its leading thought, ties together the many *Troparia* into one liturgical unit, *the Ode*.

It should be remembered that the second ode of the *Kanon*, based on Moses' *Song of Warning* (Deut. 32:1-43), has a purely penitential character and is reserved for the lenten season.

5.

Taking into consideration the composition and the historical evolution of Byzantine Matins, we can say that they developed from the early morning prayers along the lines of *praise, thanksgiving, and supplication*, inspired by the expectation of the second coming of Christ. Thus, in the spirit of our ultimate celebration of the Heavenly Liturgy, we join the Angelic Hosts during Matins in praise, thanksgiving and honor to Almighty God. One in the Blessed Trinity. Justly, then, St. Basil the Great exclaimed:

"What can be more blessed than to imitate on earth the choirs of angels and to begin the day with prayer (Matins), glorifying our Maker with hymns and songs?" (St. Basil, *Epistle* 2, 2).