

PROKEIMENON

Following the “Gladsome Light” some Psalm verses are sung (depending on the day of the week and particular theme). At this point these verses are called Prokeimenon, which means “to introduce”. On occasion readings from the Old Testament are introduced here. Generally, the Prokeimenon merely serves to draw attention to a theme.

LITANIES

A Litany of Supplication (characterised by the threefold “Lord have mercy”) is chanted. Following the Prayer of Vespers (“Vouchsafe, O Lord...”), another Litany of Vespers is chanted, wherein we specify which mercies we desire (characterised by the refrain: “Grant this, O Lord”).

ADDITIONAL VERSES

More verses, which concentrate on the day’s theme or special commemoration, follow and are joined together with Psalms verses corresponding to the person or even being commemorated. Vespers is the “learning service” of the Church which instructs the faithful as to the meaning of what is being celebrated as well as to the correct interpretation of various Psalms and scriptural verses and their proper context. All of this “learning” will be climaxed in the cycle of worship through participation in the Holy Eucharist at the Divine Liturgy.

PRAYER OF ST SIMEON

At this point of Vespers, having come to an understanding of the lessons the Church has taught us through the service, the dismissal prayer of St Simeon follows (Luke 2:29-32). We have travelled the long road and seen at last the dawn of new life. Only then, echoing this scriptural prayer, has our soul acquired the right to depart - “For my eyes have seen Your salvation.”

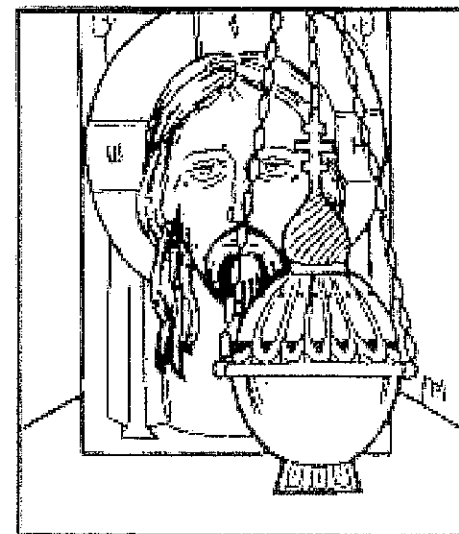
CONCLUSION

The Thrice Holy Prayers (Trisagion), concluding with “Our Father,” are followed by the singing of the Troparion (theme hymn). Often, more than one is sung, based on the commemorations of the day. Finally the “Dialogue of Dismissal” is chanted, permitting us to depart.

Great Vespers is thus filled with memories of the creation, fall, expulsion from Paradise, and anticipation of the coming of the Saviour Who brings light to the world. On Saturday evenings it is our worthy preparation for the Lord’s Day which will follow, enabling us to participate fully in the Mystery of God’s Love through Holy Communion.

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GREAT VESPERS



GREAT VESPERS

The Orthodox Church invites her faithful children to make a journey with her, passing through salvation history in order to re-enter into communion with God's love and by retracing the long way already trodden, to live again the sacred events of our salvation.

In the Orthodox Church, the liturgical day begins in the evening with the setting of the sun. This practice follows the biblical account of creation: *"And there was evening and there was morning, one day"* (Genesis 1:5).

Great Vespers, the first service of worship for "a new day", leads us through the Old Testament to the New.

THE PSALM

After the opening exclamation, portions of Psalm 104 are sung, signifying that at the Creation, the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters (Genesis 1). The opened Holy Doors of the icon screen (*iconostasis*) show that from the creation of the world, man was appointed to dwell in Paradise. This blessed condition, however, was of short duration, and the closing of the doors at the conclusion of the Psalm symbolises the expulsion of man from Paradise.

The Priest (or deacon) then stands before the Holy Doors representing Adam sorrowing before the closed gates of Paradise in penitence and humility.

The Great Litany, sometimes called the Litany of Peace, expresses this condition wherein we are called to pray to Almighty God for everyone and everything.

The Psalms have been called the "Prayer book of the Church." Following the Litany, one of the twenty divisions of the book of Psalms is sung (in part). On Saturday evenings, we sing from the first division: *"Blessed is the man..."*, among which is this verse: *"Arise, O Lord, Save me, O my God."* Since each Sunday is a remembrance of our Lord's Resurrection, this selection already begins to bring it into focus.

"LORD I CALL"

Following a short litany, verses from Psalm 140 (141) are sung according to a specially designated "tone" which changes from week to week. During this time, another censuring is made of the entire church by the celebrant. This expresses Adam's repentance for his sin as well as his request for the Paradise which he had lost.

It is also his exhortation to his posterity that they should utterly obey the will of God. The censuring at this point is an expression of our desire that our prayers, through the mediation of Christ, may ascend to heaven and that the Holy Spirit is always present in the Church and particularly enlightens us at the time of prayer.

"Let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense," sings the Church. To the prophetic verses from Psalm 140 (141) are added special hymns which expand on the particular theme of the day - the Resurrection, feast, or Saint's day.

At their conclusion a hymn called the "Dogmatic" is sung. In addition to its praise of the Virgin Mary (Theotokos), it contains certain dogmatic teachings concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

It is during this hymn that the Holy Doors are opened and an entrance is made by the celebrants. The opened doors now symbolise that with the coming of the Lord, the gates of Paradise have been opened.

"O GLADSOME LIGHT"

This ancient hymn (used by Christians even before the canon of the New Testament) extols Christ as the first ray of the New Testament Light. It reminds us that the light of the sun - the created light - is inadequate when compared to the Divine, Uncreated Light which is Christ.

From this point in the service, Vespers becomes more and more oriented towards the Saviour and salvation. Through Christ, the captivity of the soul has come to an end - the darkness is dispersed by the Light of Christ.