

On Sundays, "**Holy is the Lord our God**" is then alternated with a few verses, and another special verse for the feast called the Exapostilarion, or "**Hymn of Lights**," is chanted.

Then the Lauds or "**Praises**" (Psalms 148,149,150) are chanted, along with the verses for the "Praises," in which all of God's creation is summoned to glorify Him: "**Let every breath praise the Lord....**" If it is a major feast special hymns in honor of the occasion are inserted between the final verses.

The Great Doxology follows the chanting of the Lauds. The Royal Gates are opened during the singing of the last hymn of the Lauds (the Sunday Theotokion) and the priest exclaims, "**Glory to Thee Who has shown us the light.**" The doxology begins "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory...**" In early Church practice the singing of this hymn just preceded the first light of dawn.

In the Great Doxology we give thanks to God for the light of day and for the bestowal of spiritual Light - the light of Truth, Christ the Saviour, Who has enlightened mankind with His teachings. The Doxology concludes with the chanting of the Trisagion and the singing of the festal troparion. The deacon then intones the Augmented and Supplicatory litanies.

Matins for an All-night Vigil concludes with the Dismissal. The priest turns to the faithful and says, "**May Christ our true God** (on Sundays, "**Who rose from the dead**") **through the intercessions of His Most-pure Mother, of the holy, glorious, and all-praised Apostles, of the holy and righteous Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna, and of all the saints, have mercy on us and save us, for He is good and the Lover of mankind.**"

The choir responds with a prayer that the Lord preserve the Orthodox episcopate for many years, as well as the ruling hierarch and all Orthodox Christians.

First Hour

The last part of the All-night Vigil, the **First Hour**, follows. The service of the First Hour consists of the reading of three psalms and of various prayers, in which we request that God hear our voices in the morning and that He guide our hands during the course of the day. The First Hour concludes with the victorious hymn in honor of the Theotokos, "**To Thee the Champion Leader...**" The priest reads the Dismissal for the First Hour, and the All-night Vigil comes to an end.

The All-night Vigil

The **All-night Vigil** is the divine service which is served on the evening prior to the days of specially celebrated feasts. It consists of the combination of Vespers, Matins and First Hour, during which both services are conducted with greater solemnity and with more illumination of the church than on other days.

This service is given the name "*All-night*," because in ancient times, it began in the later evening and it continued through the entire night until dawn. Later, in condescension to the weakness of the faithful, this service was begun earlier, and certain contractions were made in the readings and chanting, and therefore it now does not last so long as it did. However, the former term "*All-night*" is preserved.

(from: The Law of God by Fr. Seraphim Slobodskoy)

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For more on Orthodox Christianity see:
<http://ChurchMotherOfGod.org>
<http://www.oca.org> and
http://nynjoca.org/about_orthodoxy.html

Matins

The second half of the All-night Vigil, **Matins**, is meant to remind us of the New Testament period: the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world for our salvation and His glorious Resurrection. [see: the Vespers Brochures for first half]

The beginning of Matins immediately reminds us of the Nativity of Christ. It begins with the doxology or glorification of the angels who appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem: **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill among men.**

This is followed by the reading of the **Six Psalms**, selected from those by the Prophet David (3, 37, 62, 87,102 and 142) in which the sinful condition of mankind is depicted with all its weakness and temptations. The ardent expectation of mankind for their only hope, the mercy of God, is expressed here. Those praying in church should be listening with special attentiveness and reverence to these psalms.

After the Six Psalms the deacon proclaims the Great Litany. The choir follows the Litany with the loud and joyful chant of this hymn with its verses: "**God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.**" It is affirmed that God is Lord and has manifested Himself unto us, and He Who comes in the glory of the Lord is worthy of glorification.

The **troparion** or hymn that particularly honors and describes the feast or saint being celebrated follows, and then two **kathismas** are read, two of the twenty sections into which the Psalter is consecutively divided. The reading of the kathismas, as well as that of the Six Psalms, calls us to ponder our wretched, sinful condition and to place all our hope on the mercy and help of God. At the conclusion of each kathisma the deacon recites the Small Litany.

The **Polyeleos**, a Greek word meaning "**much mercy**," is then celebrated. The Polyeleos is the most

festive and solemn part of Matins and the All-night Vigil, expressing the glorification of the mercy of God, which has been manifested to us by the coming to earth of the Son of God and His accomplishing our salvation from the power of the Devil and death. The Polyeleos begins with the triumphant singing of the verses of praise: **Praise ye the name of the Lord; O ye servants, praise the Lord. Alleluia. Blessed is the Lord out of Sion, Who dwelleth in Jerusalem. Alleluia. O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia. O give thanks unto the God of heaven; for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia.**

With the chanting of these verses all the lamps and candles in the church are lit, the Royal Gates are opened, and the priest, preceded by the deacon holding a lit candle, comes out of the altar and goes around the church censing as a sign of reverence for God and His Saints.

On Sundays, after the chanting of these verses, special **Resurrection troparia**, joyful hymns in honor of the Resurrection of Christ, are sung. They describe how the angels appeared to the Myrrhbearing women when they came to the tomb of Christ and told them of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. On other great feasts instead of these Resurrection troparia, the **Magnification**, a short verse of praise in honor of the saint or feast of that day, is sung before its icon.

After the Resurrection troparia or the Magnification, the deacon repeats the Small Litany, which is followed by the singing of the Hymns of Ascent, alternately by two choirs. There are three antiphons for each of the eight tones (the eighth tone has four); one group being used on each Sunday, depending on the tone of the week. Other feast days the first antiphon of the fourth tone is used. The deacon then says the prokeimenon and the priest reads the Gospel.

At a Sunday service the reading from the Gospel concerns the Resurrection of Christ and the

appearances of Christ to His disciples, while on other feasts the Gospel reading relates to the events being celebrated or to the saint being glorified.

On Sundays, after the Gospel, the solemn hymn in honor of the risen Christ taken from the Paschal Matins service is sung, **"Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus..."**

The Gospel is then carried into the center of the church and the faithful proceed forward to venerate it. On other feasts the faithful venerate the festal icon, and the priest anoints them on the forehead with oil and distributes the bread blessed during the Litia [at Vespers of an All-night Vigil] .

After the hymn, **"Having beheld the Resurrection..."**, the **50th Psalm** is read as well as other hymns asking for the mercy of the Lord, the Theotokos and the Apostles. The deacon then reads the prayer for the intercession of the Saints, **"Save, O God, Thy people..."**, and the priest exclaims, **"Through the mercy and compassion..."** The chanting of the Canon begins.

The **canon** is the name for a series of hymns which are composed according to a definite order. *"Canon"* is a Greek word which means *"rule."* A canon is divided into nine parts or **odes**. The first verse of each ode is called the **irmos**, which means *"connection"* or *"link"* and is chanted. With these irmosi all the rest of the canon is joined into one whole. The rest of the verses for each ode, called **troparia**, are now usually read, although they were originally chanted to the same melody as the irmos. The second ode of the canons is included only during Great Lent due to its penitential character.

The most noted composers of these canons were Sts. John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maiouma and Andrew of Crete, who wrote the penitential Great Canon used during Great Lent. The hymnography of these composers was inspired by the prayers and actions of some of the great Old Testament saints.

Though in common practice they are now chanted only during Great Lent, each ode should be preceded by the Biblical ode upon which each Canon ode is based. The figures commemorated for each Biblical ode, which are found at the end of the Psalter, are the Prophet Moses (first and second odes); the Prophetess Anna, the mother of Samuel (third ode); the Prophet Habbakuk (fourth ode); the Prophet Isaiah (fifth ode); the Prophet Jonah (the sixth ode); the three Hebrew children (seventh and eighth odes); and the Priest Zacharias, the father of St. John the Forerunner (ninth ode).

Prior to the beginning of the ninth ode, the deacon proclaims: **"The Theotokos and Mother of the Light, let us magnify in song,"** and proceeds to cense around the entire church. The choir then begins the Song of the Theotokos, **"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God My Saviour."** Each verse of this hymn alternates with the singing of the refrain, **"More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, Who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, Thee do we magnify."** Following this hymn to the Theotokos, the choir continues with the irmos and troparia of the ninth ode of the canon.

Concerning the general content of the canons, the irmosi remind the faithful of the Old Testament period and events from the history of our salvation and gradually lead our thoughts to the Nativity of Christ. The troparia recount New Testament events and the history of the Church, presenting a series of verses or hymns glorifying the Lord and the Mother of God, and also honoring the event being celebrated, or the saint glorified on this day.

On major feasts each ode is concluded by a **katavasia**, a Greek word meaning *"descent,"* and the deacon proclaims the Small Litany after the third, sixth and ninth odes.