

# ORTHODOX WORSHIP

## **The Divine Liturgy and The Feast of the Annunciation**

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## Origin of the Liturgy

*The Divine Liturgy*, is the most ancient worship service of the Christian church. The central focus of the service is the *Eucharist* (Thanksgiving), or Holy Communion. Although the basic pattern of the Orthodox liturgy originated from the Hebrew worship of the synagogue that Jesus and His disciples attended daily, the form of the liturgy developed over time. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Paul encouraged the use of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in worship. Early Judeo-Christian prayers are similar to the *tephilla* (intercessory prayers) of the synagogue worship. Prior to Constantine, Vespers and Matins included the chanting of Psalms, eschatological material and hymns. The morning hymns at Matins included Psalms 63, 148, 149 and 159. The evening Psalms at Vespers included Psalms 141, 15, 142, 132, and 130. These Psalms continue to be a part of the daily cycle of worship.

There are four liturgies in use by the Orthodox Church: The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, celebrated on most ordinary Sundays, the Liturgy of St. Basil, celebrated during Great Lent and on other special occasions, the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays during Great Lent, and the Liturgy of St. James, which was the first Divine Liturgy given to us by St. James the Apostle which is celebrated on October 23. The Divine Liturgy most often used is an abbreviation of the Liturgy of St. James, by St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople in the fourth century.

After the fourth century when Christianity was popular and had become the religion of Constantine's Empire, there was a need for reaching the masses in large cathedrals. Chanting the singing of praise to God was one of the important features of cathedral worship. Almost every word pronounced in the service took on a singing quality. There was a rapid growth of hymnody and chanting grew to be a very special and complex layer in the Church's liturgical tradition. The origins of the chant come from Syrians, Ancient Greek and Hebraic traditions. The liturgy and hymnography of the all-night vigils were also influenced by the monastics.

## Characteristics of Hymnography

In the Book of Revelation, the elders sing a new song before the Lamb; and Paul encourages the Christians to "teach and admonish one another . . . by grace singing in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). The church fathers chose eight melodic systems they felt were spiritual in nature. The modes of Byzantine Chant were associated with a particular spiritual quality that the church fathers considered important. Guidelines for all the music of the early church were determined on the basis of wanting the ecclesiastical music to express glory, thanksgiving, repentance, faith and hope. The music was sung simply with a melodic line and a drone note, or *ison*, so as not to provide distraction and unnecessary sound that would hinder understanding of the spiritual text. The hymnographers did not claim to have composed this music but believed it to be the music that is sung by the angels in heaven and is transferred to the hymnographers by the Holy

Spirit. The *Oktoichos* (Byzantine system of eight modes)<sup>1</sup> consists of hymnody: troparia, canons, versicles, etc. that are executed according to tones and is a special element of worship distinct from all others. The chanting acquired its own special material to be sung for festal ceremony in huge church buildings. Hymnographical material was a very important part in the sacred, solemn ceremony.<sup>2</sup>

Hymns are an integral part of the Divine Liturgy service and there are over 8,000 hymns in the Orthodox Church. While the use of melodic lines may differ, the text of the service and the hymns are the same in every Orthodox Church in the world on any given Sunday. The Orthodox do not arbitrarily decide which hymns will be included in a service or which Scripture readings will follow. Also, hymns are associated with the Psalm readings and hymns associated with the Scripture readings. There could be 50 hymns sung on a specific day. The three most important books that tell the chanter what to sing are:

The *Menaion*: It has 12 volumes, one for each month. Daily listings tell which people or events are to be commemorated each day and the special hymns associated with the services that day.

The *Triodian*: This book includes all the hymns sung for Sundays and services of Great Lent that are in addition to the ones listed in the *Menaion*.

The *Pentecostarion*: This includes hymns sung from Easter to Pentecost that are also in addition to the hymns of the *Menaion*.

There are eight resurrection troparia, one for each of the eight Byzantine modes, that are sung each Sunday beginning after Easter with the first mode. When the troparion of the eighth mode is sung, the next Sunday the cycle repeats. Each troparion contains text that celebrates an aspect of the resurrection.

## Symbolism of Ritual

The other important feature of cathedral worship developed after the fourth century was the dramatic nature of its ritual and rich symbolism with entrances, exits and processions with chanting and announcements. For example, the beginning of Matins is announced by the priest, and during the chanting the priest opens one royal door and says, "Look upon me, Lord, and be merciful unto me, showing that the door of heaven has been opened to us by the Incarnation of the Lord who was made man through the heavenly and living door of the Theotokos."<sup>3</sup>

1 "New Byzantium Publications," <<http://www.newbyz.org/>> (accessed February 12, 2013).

2 Alexander Schemann. *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 2003. p. 166

3 *Ibid.*, 171.

## Theology of Time

Alexander Schmemmann refers to the church year as a theology of time of the church as the Sacrament of the Kingdom in time. There was a multiplication of festivals in the fourth century around the cycle of Easter and Pentecost relating to the Hebrew year and the eschatological theology of time relating to the cycle of our Lord's messianic ministry beginning with His baptism (Epiphany) and ending with His messianic entry into Jerusalem. The feasts were celebrations of the victories and results of great Christological controversies. The Lord's baptism celebrated as a Divine Epiphany was the first manifestation of the Trinity in the world. The feasts commemorate events in the life of Christ, Mary, saints, holy events and holy objects. Pascha (Easter), is by far the highest-ranking celebration above all other commemorations. Special services are held each day during Holy Week. The first class feasts are the Feasts of the Lord: Elevation of the Cross, September 14, Nativity of Christ (Christmas), December 25, Theophany (sometimes called Epiphany), January 6, Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Pascha, Ascension, forty days after Pascha, Pentecost, fifty days after Pascha and Transfiguration, August 6. The second class feasts are the Feasts of the Theotokos: Nativity of the Theotokos, September 8, Presentation of the Theotokos, November 21, Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos, August 15, Presentation of Christ, February 2 and Annunciation, March 25.<sup>4</sup>

## Feast of the Annunciation

The Scripture in Luke 1:26-38 provides the background for the Feast of Annunciation, the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation He brings, for on this day the Son of God became the Son of Man. The message, a fulfillment of the promise from Genesis 3:15 and the Virgin's response form the two main components of the Annunciation. There are services conducted in Great Lent for the build up to Easter for special occasions like the Rejoicings (in Greek, *Cheretismi*), Salutations to the Virgin Mary, that is celebrated on the five Fridays before March 25, the Annunciation. Chanted on a Friday night, the services require specific hymns or psalms to be chanted. These hymns are split into four parts and correspond to the themes of the Annunciation, the Nativity, Christ and the Theotokos. On the fifth Friday evening the entire *Akathistos Ymnos* or Unseated Hymn is sung. It is also included in the *Orthros* (Matins) of the fifth Saturday (called the "Saturday of the Akathist") of Great Lent. During the chanting of the hymn, or sometimes the whole service, the congregation is expected to remain standing without sitting down, unless age or physical ailments prevent one from doing so. The Salutations to the Theotokos, (in Greek, *Chairetismoï*) (in Arabic, *Madayeh*) form an alphabetical acrostic—each oikos begins with a Greek letter—and consist of twelve long and twelve short oikoi. The long oikoi include a seven-line stanza followed by six couplets of rhyme, assonance and alliteration, beginning with greetings and ending with the exclamation: 'Alleluia!' which is repeated by

4 Stan Takis, "Worship Services of the Orthodox Church," <<http://www.newbyz.org/orthodoxservices.pdf/>> (accessed February 12, 2013).

the psalters or choir. The ikos ends with the words ‘Rejoice!’<sup>5</sup> Bride without bridegroom! also translated, “Rejoice, thou Bride unwedded!”

On March 24, Small Vespers are sung celebrating the Forefeast of the Annunciation. The words of the troparion and kontakion are as follows:

Troparion - Tone 4

Today is the prelude of joy for the universe!

Let us anticipate the feast and celebrate with exultation:

Gabriel is on his way to announce the glad tidings to the Virgin;

He is ready to cry out in fear and wonder:

Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with You!

Kontakion - Tone 8

You are the beginning of salvation for all of us on earth, Virgin Mother of God.

For the great Archangel Gabriel, God’s minister, was sent from heaven to stand before you to bring you joy:

Therefore, we all cry to you: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride.<sup>6</sup>

‘The Incarnation,’ it has been rightly said, ‘was not only the work of the Father, of His Power and His Spirit: it was also the work of and the faith of the Virgin’<sup>7</sup> The Feast of the Annunciation celebrates God’s initiative in taking on flesh from a Virgin and also Mary’s response. She was willing to accept her role of becoming His Mother. God invites her to participate in His plan of salvation and she says “Yes” “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word (Luke 1:38). The Canon of the Annunciation is written in the form of a dialogue between the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin. “. . . I am a Maid who knows not wedlock, lead me not astray. Thou sayest that I shall conceive Him who remains uncircumscribed.; and how shall my womb contain Him whom the wide spaces of the heavens cannot contain?”<sup>8</sup> It sets forth her questions clearly but also shows that God chose her and she could have refused, but instead she chose to obey.

Mary is referred to as *Theotokos* which means “God-bearer”. Eastern Christianity celebrates the Annunciation as one of the immoveable (always celebrated on March 25) Great Feasts of the year with this traditional Troparion (hymn of the day) ascribed., to St. Athanasius of Alexandria. It celebrates the action initiating the Incarnation of Christ. In Greek, The Annunciation is called *Euangelismos* (Evangelism), which means “spreading the Good News”.

5 “The Cheretisimi, the rejoicings/Salutations to the Virgin Mary,” <[http://www.ayiosnektarios.co.uk/The\\_Virgin\\_Mary/heretismi.htm/](http://www.ayiosnektarios.co.uk/The_Virgin_Mary/heretismi.htm/) (accessed February 12, 2013).

6 “Forefeast of the Annunciation,” <<http://oca.org/FStropars.asp?SID=13&ID=100876/> (accessed February 12, 2013).

7 Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware. *The Festal Menaion*, PA: St. Tikon’s Seminary Press. 1998. p. 60-61

8 Ibid., 437.

Troparion - Tone 4

Today is the beginning of our salvation,  
 The revelation of the eternal mystery!  
 The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin  
 As Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
 Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos:  
 Rejoice, O Full of Grace,  
 The Lord is with You!

Kontakion - Tone 8

O Victorious Leader of Triumphant Hosts!  
 We, your servants, delivered from evil, sing our grateful thanks to you,  
 O Theotokos!  
 As you possess invincible might, set us free from every calamity So that we may  
 sing: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!<sup>9</sup>

At Great Vespers, six stichera are sung. In this stanza references are made to the pre-figurement of the Incarnation of the Son of God, “Revealing to thee the pre-eternal counsel, Gabriel came and stood before thee, O Maid; and greeting thee, he said: ‘Hail, thou earth that has not been sown; hail, thou burning bush that remains unconsumed; hail, thou unsearchable depth; hail, thou bridge that leads to heaven, and ladder raised on high that Jacob saw; hail, thou divine jar of manna; hail, thou deliverance from the curse; hail, thou restoration of Adam; the Lord is with thee’<sup>10</sup> John the Monk proclaims “It is the Word of God who dwells within her. Why then do I stand here, and not say to the Maiden: Hail, thou who art full of grace: the Lord is with thee ...”

Lessons are read from Genesis (28:10-17), the Prophet Ezekiel (43:27-44:4), Proverbs (9:1-11), Exodus (3:1-8), Proverbs (8:22-30) and Great Vespers concludes continuing with the Litany of Entreaty and the Lity. The Vigil Service Great Compline includes several powerfully rich writings based on Scriptures. ‘Thou shalt bring forth a Son, begotten before the ages from the Father, and He shall save His people from their sins.’ (Matthew 1:21). Anatolios writes ‘... Hail, thou vessel containing the Nature that cannot be contained: for thy blessed womb has held Him whom the heavens held not. Hail, O Lady, thou restoration of Adam and deliverance of Eve, thou joy of the world and great rejoicing of our kind.’ John the Monk continues, ‘... O marvel! God is come among men; He who cannot be contained is contained in a womb; the Timeless enters time; ... His conception is without seed, ... so great is this mystery! For God empties Himself, takes flesh and is fashioned as a creature ...’ Cosmas the monk encourages praise to the Lord ‘Lo, our restoration is now made manifest to us: God is ineffably united to man ... for the Virgin receives joy, and the things of the earth have become heaven. The world is loosened from the ancient curse. Let the creation rejoice exceedingly and raise its voice to sing: O Lord, our Maker and Deliverer, glory to Thee. Glory be to the Father ...’ Andrew of Jerusalem continues the theme.

9 Orthodox Church in America, “The Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary,” <<http://oca.org/FSTropars.asp?SID=13&ID=100884> (accessed February 12, 2013).

10 *Ibid.*, 440.

‘Today there come glad tidings of joy: it is the feast of the Virgin. Things below are joined to things above, Adam is renewed, and Eve set free from her ancient sorrow; and the Tabernacle of the human nature which the Lord took upon Himself, making divine the substance He assumed, is consecrated as a Temple of God. O mystery! . . . Today is the crown of our salvation and the manifestation of the mystery that is from all eternity. The Son of God becomes Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel announces the good tidings of grace. Therefore let us also join him and cry aloud to the Theotokos: Hail, thou who art full of grace: the Lord is with thee.’

During Matins, Nine Canticles are chanted or read. Between Canticle Six and Canticle Seven the Kontakion is sung:

To thee, O Theotokos, victorious leader of triumphant hosts, we thy servants, delivered from calamity, offer hymns of thanksgiving. In thine invincible power, keep us free from every peril, that we may cry to thee: Hail, thou Bride unwedded.

Ikos

Hail, thou through whom joy will shine forth:

Hail, thou through whom the curse will cease.

Hail, thou restoration of fallen Adam:

Hail though redemption of the tears of Eve.

Hail, thou Height hard to climb for the thought of man:

Hail, thou Depth hard to perceive even for the eyes of angels.

Hail, thou that art the throne of the King:

Hail, thou who dost hold Him who holdeth all.

Hail, thou Star who dost make the Sun appear:

Hail thou Womb of the divine incarnation.

Hail, thou through whom the creation is made new:

Hail, thou through whom the Creator becomes a newborn child.

Hail, thou Bride unwedded!

The Angel says “Hail, O Lady, hail, O most pure Virgin; hail, thou vessel wherein God is contained, hail, thou candlestick of the Light, the restoration of Adam and the deliverance of Eve, holy Mountain, shining Sanctuary, and Bridal Chamber of immortality.”

The Theotokos responds, ‘The descent of the Holy Spirit has purified my soul and sanctified my body: it has made of me a Temple that contains God, a Tabernacle divinely adorned, a living Sanctuary, and the pure Mother of Life.’

At the conclusion of Matins, the *Exapostilarin*, a troparion often focusing on the theme of Christ as the Light of the world, is sung. ‘Hail, O Theotokos, deliverance from the curse of Adam. Hail, holy Mother of God; hail, living Bush. Hail, Lamp; hail, Throne; hail, Ladder and Gate. Hail, divine Chariot; hail, swift Cloud. Hail, Temple; hail, Vessel of gold. Hail, Mountain;

hail, Tabernacle and Table. Hail, thou release of Eve.<sup>11</sup> Theophanes writes “Today is revealed the mystery that is from all eternity. The Son of God becomes the Son of man, that, sharing in what is worse, He may make me share in what is better. In times of old Adam was once deceived: he sought to become God, but received not his desire. Now God becomes man, that He may make Adam God . . . Let creation rejoice . . .”

## Divisions of the Liturgy

The Liturgy contains three parts. The first part is the Prothesis (or proskomedia), which precedes the beginning of the Liturgy proper, is the service of preparing the holy gifts inside the Holy Doors at the Altar, in which the priest cuts out a square called the *Lamb* from the prosphora (the main loaf of bread) and removes portions and places them on the paten (or diskos) in commemoration of the Theotokos, various saints, the living and the departed faithful. The antidoron, ‘instead of the gift’ what remains of the loaves from which the Eucharistic bread has been cut is blessed (but not consecrated) and given to the congregation at the end of the Holy Liturgy. The priest blesses the wine and water and pours them into the chalice. The Priest kisses the Holy Gospel and lifts it up with both hands then lowers it, making the sign of the cross over the altar.

The second part of the Liturgy sometimes called the Liturgy of the Word, in which the Scriptures are proclaimed and expounded or the Liturgy of the Catechumens, ‘those who are being catechised’, begins when the Priest kisses the Holy Gospel, lifts it up with both hands making the sign of the cross and says aloud: “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.” The Great Ekteneia, (or the great lity, prayer) begins *In peace let us pray to the Lord*. At the opening of the liturgy the deacon calls upon the faithful to pray for the needs of the world: for the President of the United States and all civil authorities, our Armed Forces everywhere, peace and salvation, the Church, her bishops, her faithful, for travelers by sea, by land, and by air, captives and their health and salvation, deliverance from anger and need. To each petition the choir responds *Lord, have mercy (Kyrie, eleison)*, or *Grant this O Lord*. The lity, (or prayer) is concluded by the remembrance of the faithful the witness of the Theotokos and the saints and the phrase *Let us commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ, our God*.

Three antiphons (Psalm verses interspersed with a refrain, or troparion) which vary by day and jurisdiction follow. After the first two antiphons there is a short lity and the Prayer of Justinian, “Only Begotten Son.” The choir sings:

11 Genesis 3:15-17; Exodus 3:2, 25:31; Genesis 28:12, 17; Ezekiel 44:2; Isaiah 19:1; Exodus 16:33; Daniel 2:34-35; Exodus 26:1, 25:23.

O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, save us who sing unto thee: Alleluia  
 O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, save us who sing unto thee: Alleluia  
 Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
 O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, save us who sing unto thee: Alleluia  
 Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.  
 O Only-begotten Son and Word of God, who art immortal, yet didst deign for  
 our salvation to be incarnate of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, and  
 without change wast made man; and wast crucified also, O Christ our God,  
 and by thy death didst Death subdue; who art one of the Holy Trinity, glorified  
 together with the Father and the Holy Spirit; save us.<sup>12</sup>

The main troparion of the day, celebrating the feast of the Annunciation, of the third antiphon, sung after the Small Entrance, is sometimes referred to as the apolytikion, (or the dismissal hymn because it is also sung at Vespers on the previous Saturday evening). The people are

Then the kontakion of the feast is sung:

O Victorious Leader of Triumphant Hosts!  
 We, your servants, delivered from evil, sing our grateful thanks to you,  
 O Theotokos!  
 As you possess invincible might, set us free from every calamity So that we may  
 sing: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!

The Prokimenon

Tell forth from day to day the glad tidings of the salvation of our God (Psalm 95:2).

The Priest bows three times before the Altar, takes up the Holy Gospel, proceeds around the Altar and out of the sanctuary by the north door of the iconostasis (the screen in front of the altar holding the icons), preceded by taperbearers, and stands before the Holy Doors, facing the Altar. Priest kisses the Gospel Book and lifts it up with both hands and says in a loud voice: "Wisdom! Attend!" and the choir sings, "Come, let us bow down and worship Christ! O Son of God, save us who sing to you: Alleluia."

The Priest censes the Altar, icons of Christ, St. John the Baptist, Archangel Michael, Elijah on the south side and the Theotokos with the Child, St. Nicholas, Archangel Gabriel, and St. George on the north side of the iconostasis (the icon screen), and the people and with the "Prayer of the Trisagion" praises the Holy God, "Who out of nothing hast brought all things into being; who hast created man after thine own image and likeness ... who givest to him that asketh wisdom and understanding; who despiseth not the sinner, but hast appointed repentance unto salvation ... Forgive us every transgression both voluntary and involuntary ... grant us to serve thee in holiness all the days of our life: through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and of all the Saints who from the beginning of the world have been well-pleasing unto thee" and The

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Rev Father Gregory Ofiesh. *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom of the Holy Orthodox Church*, CA: St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. 1966. p. 5.

Trisagion Hymn that proclaims “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us.” The Priest says: “Let us attend!”, “Wisdom!” and “Let us attend!” as the reader interjects the theme of the Epistle and announces the title and after he reads from the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:11-18) the priest says “Peace be to thee that readest.” The people stand and the choir sings: “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia”. The Priest with the Gospel Book before him says: “Wisdom! Attend! Let us hear the Holy Gospel. Peace to all.” The choir responds, “And to thy spirit.” Then follows the reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (1:24-38). After the Gospel is read the choir resounds with: “Glory to thee, O Lord, glory to thee.”

After the Gospel, or sometimes after Communion or dismissal, the priest gives a homily, (a short sermon on Scripture, the season, the festival or commemoration). The next part of this Liturgy is the Ektenia of Fervent Supplication in which prayers are marked by the triple repetition of “Lord, have mercy.” The Liturgy of the Catechumens closes with prayers for all our brethren in Christ, mercy, life, peace, health, salvation for the servants of God, for pardon and remission of sins, the founders of the temple, all our fathers, the Orthodox departed this life before us, and for pardon of their sins, and for all the people who are there present, for the continued growth of the catechumens in faith, leading up to the day of their baptism. “... for Thou art a merciful God and lovest mankind, and to thee we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, unto ages of ages ... that guarded always by thy might we may ascribe glory unto thee ...” The Prayer of the Cherubimic Hymn and Psalm 50 (51) are prayed silently by the people and the Priest. He says “...Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by thy grace ... That the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless, let us ask of the Lord ... An angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies ...that we may complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance ... A Christian ending to our life, painless, blameless, peaceful; and a good defence before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ, let us ask of the Lord ... Calling to remembrance ... Mary with all the Saints ... through the compassions of thine Only-Begotten Son ... and life-giving Spirit.” The Priest says: “Let us love one another, that with one accord we may confess: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the Trinity, one in Essence and undivided.

The third part of the Divine Liturgy, the Liturgy of the Faithful, sometimes called the Liturgy of the Eucharist, is the service in which the gifts of bread and wine are offered and consecrated. The Great Entrance is the procession of the clergy, preceded by the Acolytes carrying the icon commemorating the special day, the feast, event or saint, around the inside of the room to the icon screen where the holy gifts are carried in through the holy doors and placed on the Altar.

## **Importance of Iconography**

The most prominent of all icons in the church is the one which fills the dome depicting Jesus Christ as *Pantocrator*, or the Master of all that is seen and unseen, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The gold background represents eternal life and holiness, the

closed Book of Life Christ holds in His left hand represents the finality of the Last Judgment. His right hand is raised in a blessing; His fourth and fifth fingers representing His divine and human natures, and His other two fingers placed with His thumb, represent the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Trinity Icon (The Hospitality of Abraham) is the icon above the Holy Doors of the iconostasis at St. Nicholas Church. Three angels are depicted as united and unique. The lines of their gaze focused on the one sitting to his right form a triangle suggesting unity in one existence. Their placement above the Holy Doors, through which Holy Communion is brought out during the Divine Liturgy, furthers their connection to God's becoming incarnate for our salvation and being present in the Eucharist. The angels, unified around the feast, are partaking of Holy Communion themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The Holy Doors at the center of the iconostasis separate the sanctuary from the rest of the church are adorned with an icon of the Annunciation. The placement of this icon on the Holy Doors symbolizes the door of salvation opened to us through the Theotokos' willingness to bear the Son of God. The Holy Doors themselves "announce" the presence of Christ among us during the Divine Liturgy as the word of God and the Body and Blood of Christ are brought to us through them. "The icon of the Annunciation on the Holy Doors proclaims the Incarnation through reminding us that the Theotokos opens the gate for the coming of Grace, just as the holy Doors open for the coming of the very Body and Blood of Christ Himself."<sup>14</sup>

The Icon of the Annunciation carried in procession on the Feast of the Annunciation is one of the most ancient known iconographies of festivals. The earliest known icon of the Annunciation attributed to the second century exists in the Roman catacomb of Priscilla. The Icon of the Annunciation, like the Gospel story in Luke 1:26-38 and liturgy of the feast is permeated with the deep inner joy of the Old Testament promise being fulfilled through the Incarnation of the Redeemer of the world. The joy is shown in the colors, elaborate detail rendering and in the posture of the Archangel. Gabriel's legs are far apart, and looks to be running. His right hand reaches toward the Virgin as he communicates to Her the good news from His Master, the Mystery of the Divine Providence.<sup>15</sup> In many icons of the Annunciation the angel is depicted as if his flight was still not quite completed; although he stands on the ground, one wing is raised, which too is a symbol of his being a messenger. This symbol is also transmitted in the service, when the deacon who, according to the interpretation of St. John Chrysostom, represents an angel, symbolically repeats this gesture by lifting up his stole with his right hand every time he calls the faithful to prayer. But while at the Annunciation the flight of the angel is from heaven down to earth, in the Divine service the deacon invites the faithful to lift themselves up with him in prayer.<sup>16</sup>

13 Katherine Khorey. *Beyond the Image: The History of the Church Through Iconography*, Grand Rapids, MI: Saint Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church. 2011. p.26-27.

14 *Ibid.*, 71.

15 V. Lossky and L. Ouspensky. *The Meaning of Icons*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1982. p. 172.

16 *Ibid.*, 173.

The Mother of God, either sitting or sometimes standing, as a rule holds yarn in Her hands. The icon usually emphasises one of the three moments of the experience: Her fear of seeing Gabriel and in Her surprise drops the ball of yarn, Her questioning by the gesture of Her hand which She holds with palm facing outwards, Her submission and willing acceptance shown with bowing Her head and pressing Her right palm to Her breast—the gesture which has decided the fate of the world: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto Me according to Thy word.”

The eyes of the Mother of God and Gabriel are turned upward toward the symbol of the high heavens (the portion of a sphere) with rays issuing from it—the action of the Holy Spirit. The meaning being transmitted in the icon, the unity of action and will of God and Mary is that of which the festival speaks: “The Angel serves the miracle, the virgin womb receives the Son, the Holy Spirit is sent down (the rays), the Father sends His favour from on high (the sphere), and the transformation is made by mutual consent . . .” Mary’s gesture is directed upwards emphasizing the Mother of God’s active surrender of Herself to God’s will in the work of Salvation.

### **Profession of the Common Faith**

The exclamation “The Doors! The Doors! In Wisdom let us attend.” once marked the point in the service at which time the doors to the temple were locked leaving only the faithful Christians in attendance. Now the visitors are allowed to stay in the service but this phrase proclaims a distinction between what the members and observers can participate in. The recitation of the Symbol of Faith, the Nicene Creed, is a profession of the common faith and was important for determining the Orthodoxy of persons claiming to be of the Church. When the Creed is finished the Priest says: “Let us stand aright; let us stand with fear, let us attend, that we may offer the Holy Oblation in peace.” The choir in response sings, “A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.” The Priest says: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” and he turns towards the people and blesses them.

The Eucharistic Prayer over the gifts begins with these words: “Let us lift up our hearts ... Let us give thanks unto the Lord.” The choir in response sings, “It is meet and right to worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the Trinity, one in Essence, and undivided.” Prayers remembering the fall and redemption and the institution of the Eucharistic meal are sung. “Singing the Triumphal Hymn, shouting, proclaiming, and saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Hosanna in the highest: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest.

## Invocation of the Eucharistic Prayer

The epiclesis ‘invocation’ is the culminating moment in the Eucharistic prayer during the Orthodox Liturgy in which the priest asks God to send down His Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine, and to make them the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>17</sup> The Priest says: “Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee, in behalf of all, and for all.” “Again we offer unto thee this reasonable and unbloody service, and beseech thee and pray thee and supplicate thee: send down thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here spread forth: And make this bread the precious Body of thy Christ; And that which is in this cup, the precious Blood of thy Christ; Changing them by thy Holy Spirit, Amen.” The Priest continues in prayer ...”we offer unto thee this reasonable service for all those who in faith have gone before us to their rest: Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics, and every righteous spirit made perfect in faith: Especially our all-holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary” then commemorates the Theotokos and the people chant the ancient hymn in honor of the Virgin, the megalynarion (a short verse). The text of this hymn changes according to the festal celebration, for the Annunciation, this one is sung:

‘O earth, announce good tidings of great joy: ye heavens, praise the glory of God.’  
 “... And grant us with one mouth and one heart to glorify and praise thine all-honorable and majestic name: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.”

After the Priest prays for the bishop in whose name he is celebrating the Liturgy, the *Lord’s Prayer* is recited by the entire congregation.

The Communion verse:

‘The Lord hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for His habitation’ (Psalm 131:13).

After the consecration of the gifts and commemoration of the saints and praying for the bishop, the Priest holds up the gifts, exclaiming, “Holy things are for the holy!” and the faithful respond, “One is holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.” The Communion Hymn is sung, which may change according to the feast of the day. The Priest breaks the holy Bread into four parts saying, “Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided, yet not disunited; who is ever eaten, yet never consumed, but sanctifies those who partake thereof.” These pieces are arranged in the form of a cross on the rim of the Diskarion, signifying in Greek JESUS CHRIST CONQUERS. He takes the IC portion, makes the sign of the cross over the Chalice, and drops it in saying “The fullness of the Cup, of the Faith, of the Holy Spirit. He blesses the warm water saying, “Blessed is the fervor of thy Saints, always: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. He pours warm water into the Chalice crosswise saying, “The fervor of faith, full of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The prayer of preparation for the Holy Communion is:

*I believe, O Lord, and I confess that thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who didst come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. And I believe that*

*this is truly thine own immaculate Body, and that this is truly thine own precious Blood. Wherefore I pray thee, have mercy upon me and forgive my transgressions both voluntary and involuntary, of word and of deed, of knowledge and of ignorance; and make me worthy to partake without condemnation of thine immaculate Mysteries, unto remission of my sins and unto life everlasting. Amen.*

*Of the Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of thy Mystery to thine enemies, neither will I give thee a kiss as did Judas; but like the thief will I confess thee: Remember me, O Lord, in thy Kingdom.*

*Not unto judgment not unto condemnation be my partaking of thy Holy Mysteries, O Lord, but unto the healing of soul and body.<sup>18</sup>*

## **Communion of the Church**

The Priest then makes a low bow before the Altar and says, “Lo, I draw near unto Christ, our immortal King and our God.” and then partakes of the holy Bread XC saying, “The precious and all-holy Body of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ is imparted unto me, the unworthy Priest, unto remission of my sins and unto life everlasting. Then he takes the Chalice and drinks from it once, saying, “The precious and all-holy Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ is imparted unto me, the unworthy Priest, unto remission of my sins and unto life everlasting.” He wipes his mouth and the Chalice with the veil and says, “Lo, this hath touched my lips, and shall take away mine iniquities, and purge away my sins.” Then the Priest divides the portions NI and KA of the holy Bread and places them in the Chalice for the Communion of the congregation, and covers it with the veil. The people stand after he turns, elevates the Chalice and people are invited to come and receive the sacrament when he says, “With fear of God, and faith and love, draw near.” The communicants cross their hands over their hearts, right hand over left hand, cross themselves with the Sign of the Cross and stand before the Priest or deacon to be served the bread intincted in the wine from a spoon, a tradition which dates to the fourth century. The Priest says to each person, “The servant of God partakes of the precious and all-holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the remission of sins and unto life everlasting.” After receiving the Body and Blood of the Savior, they take a small piece of bread, antidoron, although it is not consecrated to be the Eucharist, it is part of the same loaf from which the Lamb was taken. After all is served, the priest says, “O God, save thy people and bless thine inheritance.” and the choir sings: “We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit: we have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity: for He hath saved us.” The Priest raises the Chalice and the Diskarion turns towards the people, saying aloud: “Always: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. “ the choir sings: “Amen. Let our mouths be filled with thy praise, O Lord, that we may sing of thy glory: for thou hast permitted us to partake of

<sup>18</sup> Rev Father Gregory Ofiesh. *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom of the Holy Orthodox Church*, CA: St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. 1966, p. 25.

thy holy, divine, immortal and life-giving Mysteries. Establish us in thy Sanctification, that all the day long we may meditate upon thy righteousness. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.”

## Prayer of Dismissal

The Priest returns the Chalice and Diskarion to the Prothesis Table and returns to the Altar. He makes the sign of the cross with the Gospel Book saying: “Attend! Having partaken of the divine, holy, immaculate, immortal, heavenly, life-giving and terrible Mysteries of Christ, let us worthily give thanks unto the Lord ... Help us ... Asking that the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless, let us commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God ... For thou art our sanctification, and unto thee we ascribe glory: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever unto ages of ages. Amen... Let us go forth in peace ... In the name of the Lord ... Lord have mercy.” the Priest stands before the Icon of Christ and prays aloud the following prayer of thanksgiving:

*O Lord, who blessest those who bless thee, and sanctifiest those who put their trust in thee: save thy people and bless thine inheritance; preserve the fullness of thy Church: sanctify those who love the beauty of thy House: glorify them in recompense by thy divine power, and forsake us not who hope on thee. Give peace to the world, to thy Churches, to the priests, to all civil authorities, to our Armed Forces, and to all thy people: for very good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from thee, the Father of Lights, and unto thee we ascribe glory, thanksgiving, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.<sup>19</sup>*

The Priest returns to the Altar, the people stand and he prays the prayer of dismissal:

*He who rose again from the dead, Christ our true God,— through the intercessions of the all-immaculate and all-blameless holy Mother, (by the might of the precious and life-giving Cross; by the protection of the honorable Bodiless Poers of heaven; at the supplication of the honorable, glorious Prophet, Fore-runner and Baptist John; of the holy, glorious, and all-laudable Apostles; of the holy, glorious and right-victorious Martyrs; of our venerable and God-bearing Fathers; of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; of Saints (s) N., whose memory we celebrate, and of all the Saints, have mercy upon us and save us, forasmuch as he is good and loveth mankind. Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen.<sup>20</sup>*

After the dismissal, being renewed by the eucharistic meal, the faithful come forward, venerate the cross, and are sent forth to be witnesses to Christ in the world.

## Unity of the Body

‘Nobody is Christian by himself, but only as a member of the body’, wrote Father Georges Florovsky. ‘Even in solitude, “in the chamber”, a Christian prays as a member of the redeemed community, of the Church.’<sup>21</sup> Personal prayer is a continuation of divine worship. Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev in his book entitled *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church*, ‘Our entire life as Christians is the Liturgy which we celebrate in our heart and address to God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’<sup>22</sup>

19 Ibid., 29.

20 Ibid., 30.

21 Cited in Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, *The Orthodox Church*, p.310.

22 Bisop Hilarion Alfeyev. *The Mystery of Faith*, Great Britain: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 2002. p.179.

A Monk of the Eastern Church wrote, “We say ‘Jesus’, and we rest in a plentitude and totality that can no longer be taken from us. The name of Jesus then becomes a bearer of the whole Christ. It brings us into His total presence. In this total presence are found all the realities towards which the name has served as a means of approach: salvation and pardon, the Incarnation and the Transfiguration, the Church and the Eucharist, the Father and the Spirit. All things then appear to us gathered together in Christ (Eph. 1:10) ... If we cling to the name of Jesus, we shall receive the special blessing that the Scripture promises, Have mercy on me as is Thy custom toward them that love Thy name (Ps 119:132). And may the Lord be pleased to say of us what He said of Saul: He is a chosen vessel of Mine, to bear My name (Acts 9:15).<sup>23</sup>

‘the bread of life’ (John 6:35), ‘the daily bread’ (Matt 6:11) which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world (John 10:10) is only possible in Christ. Outside him, life is incomplete, imperfect; a fading and dying rather than living.” thus St. Paul says: ‘For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain’ (Phil 1:21) The aim of the Christian religion is fullness of communion with God, being united with him. “In the Eucharist we unite ourselves to God both spiritually and bodily; in prayer we ascend to God with our intellect and heart; in the experience of the vision of God we see Him with our ‘inner eyes’. God reveals himself to us in an unspeakable and beautiful light.

## Purification of the Divine Fire

But he is also a ‘fire’, the Bible says in Deut 4:24 and Heb 12:29, a fire which consumes and destroys every evil, illumines everything that is good. A personal encounter with God is participation in the divine light. Divine fire purifies, it destroys sin and evil and liberates the individual from them.

The Orthodox prayers before and after Communion express this experience of fire: ‘Behold I draw near to divine Communion. O Creator, let me not be destroyed thereby; for thou art fire to consume the unworthy. Rather do thou cleanse me from all that defiles.’<sup>24</sup> the fire of the Body and Blood of Christ penetrates the entire person — body, soul and spirit: ‘O Thou who didst gladly give me thy flesh for nourishment, who are fire to consume the unworthy: burn me not, O my Creator, but search out my members. Quicken my veins and my heart ... Purify my soul. Sanctify my thought. Knit firm my bones. Enlighten my senses ...’ this purification by the fire of the Divinity is no less than participation in the divine light, for transfiguration and deification: “The blood that makes divine, O man, let it be your fear, let it be your dread. Fire is to consume the unworthy. The divine body makes me a partaker of the divine nature,<sup>25</sup> and likewise feeds me; makes the spirit divine and wondrously nourishes the mind.’ The Body and Blood of Christ, according to prayers ascribid., to St. Symeon the New Theologian, make those who truly repent ‘partake of the light’ and ‘share in Christ’s divinity’. This concept of deification is central to the eastern Orthodox theological tradition and based on Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

## Deification Because of the Incarnation

Three important characteristics of the approach taken by the Eastern Fathers is that deification is based in a christological perspective (what Christ did) an eschatological perspective (what will be in the Kingdom of Heaven) and the human perspective (active participation in it) referring to 1 Corinthians 6:19 (‘your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit’). Irenaeus of Lyon in his writing *Against the Heresies*, said the word ‘became what we are in order to make us what he is.’ Because of the Incarnation of the Word, we become by adoption what the Son

23 Ibid., 181.

24 Ibid., 190. The prayers are quoted from *The Orthodox Liturgy* (texts translated by the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Tolleshunt Knights, Essex), (Oxford, 1982), pp. 1-16; 211-15.

25 Compare 2 Peter 1:4

26 Compare these verses John 10:34; Psalm 81/82:6, I John 1:12; 3:2, Romans 8:29; I Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; Gal. 3:26; 4:5, 1 Cor. 3:16, Rom 8:18-23; Eph 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:28; 1 John 3:2.

of God is by nature. St. Athanasius said in 54 of his writing *On the Incarnation*, ‘God became man in order that we may become gods.’

At the end of Great Vespers for the Vigil of the feast on the Feast of the Annunciation, *aposticha* (six stichera, three being of the feast accompanied by verses taken from the Psalms) are sung:

“In the sixth month the Archangel was sent to the pure Virgin and with his greeting ‘Hail’ he brought good tidings, that the Deliverer would come forth from her. And so, accepting his salutation with faith, she conceived Thee, the pre-eternal God, who wast pleased to become man ineffably, for the salvation of our souls.

Tell forth from day to day the glad tidings of the salvation of our God (Psalm 95:2).

The Theotokos heard a voice she knew not, when the Archangel brought her the glad tidings of the Annunciation; and accepting the salutation with faith, she conceived Thee the pre-eternal God. Therefore in great rejoicing we also cry unto Thee: O God, who without change hast been made flesh from her, grant peace unto the world and to our souls great mercy.

Sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth (ibid., 1).

Lo, our restoration is now made manifest to us: God is ineffably united to men ...”

Then three stichera of the Archangel:

Gabriel, the greatest and most godlike of the spiritual powers, shining with heavenly brightness, who with the hosts on high gazes upon the light of the Threefold Sun, came to the Virgin and announced to her the glad tidings of the divine mystery full of awe; and he intercedes for our souls.

To thee alone, O Gabriel, was entrusted the great mystery, till then unknown to the angels and hid from all eternity: coming to Nazareth, thou hast not dared to impart it to any save the pure Virgin alone. Pray with her that our souls may be granted peace and great mercy.

Thou who art ever filled with light, who doest the will and fulfillest the decrees of the Almighty, O Leader of the angels, Gabriel the all-perfect, preserve those who honour thee with love, and ask at all times that our souls may be granted peace and great mercy.

Glory be to the Father . . .

The troparion of the day is sung before the entrance with the Gospel, ‘O joyful Light’ is sung, and the prokimenon of the day. Readings follow from Exodus (3:1-8) and from Proverbs (8:22-30) reminding the worshippers of Moses’ burning bush experience and the pre-eternal Lord:

‘The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was . . . when He appointed the foundations of the earth: then was I by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.’

Apolytikion (troparion of the Archangel:

‘O chief commander of the heavenly hosts, in our unworthiness unceasingly we pray to thee: surround us with the rampart of thine intercessions. Shelter us beneath the protection of thy wings of spiritual glory, for we fall down before thee, crying earnestly: deliver us from peril, O leader of the powers on high.’<sup>27</sup>

Since the Feast of the Annunciation falls within Lent this year, fish, wine and oil are allowed, but meat and animal products may not be eaten. This day is one of the only two times during Lent that fish is allowed. The Feast of the Annunciation closes at Vespers on March 25. March 26 is observed as the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel, a commemoration honoring the Archangel Gabriel who is connected with the theme of the feast.

## **Summary of Orthodox Worship**

Orthodox Worship has many distinctives that make it stand apart from worship experiences in the Protestant church. The liturgy, hymnography, iconography, the ritual processions with dramatic entrances and exits, the rich liturgical and scriptural texts as guided by the liturgical calendar, the profession of the shared faith by the recitation of the Nicene Creed, structured prayers, the feasts, the fasts, the special services celebrated in honor of the saints, martyrs, events, and special days throughout the year are instrumental in preparing the worshippers to encounter the Triune God. The Eucharistic Supper of the Lamb is the central focus of the entire Divine Liturgy worship service. Purification from sin and participation in the divine light has been made possible to the believer through the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this paper has been to describe the elements of Orthodox worship as experienced in the Divine Liturgy and annual celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation.

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