



# The Royal Hours of The Nativity In The Flesh of Our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ

## The Royal Hours of the Nativity

**HISTORY** - The Royal Hours, also called the Great Hours, are a solemn liturgical service of the Byzantine Churches. From at least the fourth century, Great and Holy Friday was commemorated in the cathedral of Jerusalem with a lengthy service of hymns, psalms, and scriptural readings, lasting from noon until three in the afternoon. Over the centuries, this service was combined with the “little hours” (the first, third, sixth, and ninth hours) and eventually came to be known as the Great or Royal Hours. As the Good Friday liturgy of Jerusalem spread throughout the Byzantine world, a similar selection of psalms, hymns, and readings were also developed for the feasts of Christmas and Theophany. Today, the Royal Hours are celebrated each year on these three days: the Eve of the Nativity, the Eve of Theophany, and Great and Holy Friday.

**THEOLOGY** - The Royal Hours are a valuable part of the Byzantine liturgical tradition, presenting an admirable balance of hymns, psalms, and readings from the Old Testament, Epistles, and Gospels. Moving back and forth between the prophecies of the old covenant, the fulfillment of these prophecies in the new covenant, and the Church’s unwrapping of this mystery in the hymns, we are enter into the mystery of Christ’s fulfillment of the Law. As one well-known carol puts it, “the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

**THE PRESENT TEXT** - The present text is an abbreviated version of the Royal Hours. Most of what is omitted is from the ‘ordinary’ of the hours (i.e. those psalms and prayers that are recited every day of the year), thus allowing for the psalms, hymns, and readings selected for the Nativity to be retained. This version of the Royal Hours is based on a text from Holy Spirit Seminary, which itself drew on earlier translations, including those of Bishop Kallistos Ware and Mother Mary, and the *Anthology* edited by Rev. Peter Galadza. May God bless and reward all those who have labored to make this service available in the English language!

Finally, the Royal Hours are normally celebrated on the morning of December 24. However, so that this service may not be forgotten, it is not inappropriate to celebrate it on the evening of December 23.

## THE ROYAL HOURS OF THE NATIVITY IN THE FLESH OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

*An ornamented lectern is set in the center of the nave facing the Holy Doors; the priest is vested in epitrachelion and phelonion. The priest (and deacon) open the Holy Doors and come forth with the Gospel Book and the censer (the deacon carrying a candle to be placed behind the lectern – otherwise, the candle may be placed at the lectern before the service begins). The Holy Doors remain open throughout the service. The Priest sets the Gospel Book on the lectern and stands before it, and begins the First Hour.*

### FIRST HOUR

*Priest:* Blessed be our God, always, now and for ever and ever.

*People:* **Amen.**

✙ Glory be to You, our God, glory be to You.

Heavenly King, Advocate, Spirit of Truth, Who are everywhere present and fill all things, Treasury of Blessings, Bestower of Life, come and dwell within us; cleanse us of all that defiles us, and, O Good One, save our souls.

✙ Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us. *Three times.*

✙ Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, \* now and for ever and ever. Amen.

Trinity most holy, have mercy on us. Cleanse us of our sins, O Lord; pardon our transgressions, O Master; look upon our weaknesses and heal them, O Holy One; for the sake of Your name.

Lord, have mercy. *Three times.*

✙ Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, \* now and for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

*Priest:* For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours, + Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever and ever.

*People:* Amen.

Lord, have mercy. *Twelve times.*

+ Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, \* now and for ever and ever. Amen.

+ Come, let us bow in worship before the King, our God.

+ Come, let us bow in worship before Christ, the King, our God.

+ Come, let us bow in worship and fall down before the very Lord Jesus Christ, \* our King and God.

*Then the reader(s) begins the psalms.*

*During the psalms the Priest (and Deacon) perform a great incensation: the Gospel Book on four sides, the Holy Table, Sanctuary, Icon Screen, the people, and around the perimeter of the whole temple.*

## Psalm 44

My heart overflows with noble words. To the king I must speak the song I have made, my tongue as nimble as the pen of a scribe. You are the fairest of the children of men and graciousness is poured upon your lips: because God has blessed you for evermore. O mighty one, gird your sword upon your thigh; in splendour and state, ride on in triumph for the cause of truth and goodness and right. Take aim with your bow in your dread right hand. Your arrows are sharp, peoples fall beneath

you. The foes of the king fall down and lose heart. Your throne, O God, shall endure for ever. A sceptre of justice is the sceptre of your kingdom. Your love is for justice; your hatred for evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above other kings: your robes are fragrant with aloes and myrrh. From the ivory palace you are greeted with music. The daughters of kings are among your loved ones. On your right stands the queen in gold of Ophir. Listen, O daughter, give ear to my words: forget your own people and your father's house. So will the king desire your beauty: He is your lord, pay homage to him. And the people of Tyre shall come with gifts, the richest of the people shall seek your favour. The daughter of the king is clothed with splendour, her robes embroidered with pearls set in gold. She is led to the king with her maiden companions. They are escorted amid gladness and joy; they pass within the palace of the king. Sons shall be yours in place of your fathers: you will make them princes over all the earth. May this song make your name for ever remembered. May the peoples praise you from age to age.

### **Psalm 45**

God is for us a refuge and strength, a helper close at hand, in time of distress, so we shall not fear though the earth should rock, though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea; even though its waters rage and foam, even though the mountains be shaken by its waves. The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our stronghold. The waters of a river give joy to God's city, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within, it cannot be shaken; God will help it at the dawning of the day. Nations are in tumult, kingdoms are shaken: he lifts his voice, the earth shrinks away. The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Come, consider the works of the Lord, the redoubtable deeds he has done on the earth. He puts an end to wars over all the earth; the bow he breaks, the spear he snaps. (He burns the

shields with fire.) “Be still and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme on the earth!” The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

*Reader:* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

*All:* Now and forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Glory be to You, O God! (3)

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

### **Troparion of the Pre-feast**

*(Tone 4)* Mary once, with aged Joseph, went to be taxed in Bethlehem,\* for they were of the lineage of David;\* and she bore in her womb the fruit that had not been sown.\* The time of the birth was at hand and there was no room at the inn;\* but the cave proved a fair palace for the Queen.\* Christ is born, that He may raise up again the image that before was fallen.

*Reader:* Now and forever and ever. Amen. What shall we call you, O Full of grace? Heaven? For you made the Sun of righteousness to dawn. Paradise? For you made the flower of incorruption blossom. Virgin? For you remained incorrupt. Pure Mother? For you held in your holy embrace a Son who is the God of all. Implore Him that our souls may be saved.

### **Stichera**

*(Tone 8)* Make ready, O Bethlehem:\* let the manger be prepared, let the cave show its welcome!\* The truth has come, the shadow has passed away.\* Born of a Virgin, God has appeared to men,\* formed as we are and making Godlike the garment of our nature\* which He has put on.\* Therefore Adam is renewed with Eve, and they call out:\* “Your good pleasure has appeared on earth to save our race!”\*

*Verse (Tone 3):* God comes from Teman,\* the Holy One from the mountain overshadowed by the forest.

Now the prophecy is about to be fulfilled.\* It mystically said, “And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, who are preparing in a cave:\* you are by no means the least among the princes of Judah,\* since from you shall come for me in the flesh a Ruler,\* Christ our God, born of a Virgin;\* and He is to shepherd His people, the new Israel!”\* Let us all give Him glory!

*Glory...now...(Tone 8):* Joseph spoke to the Virgin in this way:\* “What is this that I see happening in you, O Mary?\* I fail to understand and I am amazed! My mind is struck with dismay!\* Leave my sight therefore, with all speed!\* What is this which I see you in, O Mary?\* Instead of honour, you have brought me shame!\* Instead of gladness, sorrow! Instead of praise, rebuke!\* No longer can I bear the reproach of men!\* I was married to you by the priests in the Temple as one blameless before the Lord:\* and what is this that I now see?”

### **Prokeimenon**

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Let us be attentive!

*(Tone 4):* The Lord said to me: You are My Son.\* It is I who have begotten You this day.

*Verse:* Ask and I shall bequeath you the nations, put the ends of the earth in your possession.

### **Old Testament Reading**

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the prophecy of Micah.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* Thus says the Lord: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labour has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth. (5:2-4)

### **Epistle**

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the epistle of the holy apostle Paul to the Hebrews.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* Brethren: God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You”? And again: “I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son”? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” And of the angels He says: “Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.” But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the



scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” And: “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.” (1:1-12)

### **Gospel**

*During the reading of the Gospel, the faithful gather around the lectern holding candles.*

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Stand aright! Let us listen to the holy Gospel.

*Priest:* Peace be with all.

*All:* And with your spirit.

*Priest:* A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*(The Gospel is from Matthew 1:18-25)*

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*Immediately after the gospel, the reader chants the following verses:*

Direct my steps according to Your word, and let no iniquity control me. Deliver me from people’s slander, and I shall keep Your commandments. Let Your face shine on Your servant, and teach me Your statutes. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise, O Lord, that I may hymn Your glory, and sing Your splendor all the day!

**Kontakion of the Pre-feast, Tone 3:** Today the Virgin comes to the cave\* to give birth ineffably to the pre-eternal Word.\* Hearing this, be of good cheer, O inhabited earth,\* and with the angels and the

shepherds glorify Him whose will it was\* to be made manifest a young Child - the pre-eternal God!

*All:* Lord, have mercy. (40)

### **Prayer of the First Hour**

*Priest:* O Christ, the true Light, You enlighten and sanctify everyone who comes into the world; let the light of Your countenance be signed upon us, that in it we may see Your unapproachable light. Direct our steps that we might fulfill Your commandments; through the prayers of Your immaculate Mother and of all Your saints.

*People:* Amen.

### **THIRD HOUR**

✚ Come, let us bow in worship before the King, our God.

✚ Come, let us bow in worship before Christ, the King, our God.

✚ Come, let us bow in worship and fall down before the very Lord Jesus Christ, \* our King and God.

*The reader(s) chant the following psalms. The deacon (or priest) performs a small incensation: the Gospel Book on four sides, Icon Screen, the priest, and the people.*

### **Psalm 66**

O God, be gracious and bless us and let your face shed its light upon us. So will your ways be known upon earth and all nations learn your saving help. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and exult for you rule the world with justice. With fairness you rule the peoples, you guide the nations on earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its fruit for God, our God, has blessed us. May God still give us his blessing till the ends of the earth revere him.

## Psalm 86

On the holy mountain is his city cherished by the Lord. The Lord prefers the gates of Sion to all Jacob's dwellings. Of you are told glorious things, O city of God! "Babylon and Egypt I will count among those who know me; Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia, these will be her children and Sion shall be called 'Mother' for all shall be her children." It is he, the Lord Most High, who gives each his place. In his register of peoples he writes: "These are her children," and while they dance they will sing: "In you all find their home."

*Reader:* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

*All:* Now and forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Glory be to You, O God! (3)

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

## Troparion of the Pre-feast

*(Tone 4)* Mary once, with aged Joseph, went to be taxed in Bethlehem,\* for they were of the lineage of David;\* and she bore in her womb the fruit that had not been sown.\* The time of the birth was at hand and there was no room at the inn;\* but the cave proved a fair palace for the Queen.\* Christ is born, that He may raise up again the image that before was fallen.

*Reader:* Now and forever and ever. Amen. O Mother of God, you are the true vine, from whom blossomed the fruit of life; we implore you, O Lady, intercede together with the holy apostles that He may have mercy on our souls.

## Stichera

*(Tone 6)* This is our God: no other is to be compared to Him.\* Born of a Virgin, He is coming to dwell among men.\* Laid in a poor manger,

the Only-Begotten Son appears as a mortal man\* and the Lord of Glory is wrapped in swaddling clothes.\* A star guides the Magi to come and worship Him;\* and we sing: “O Holy Trinity, save our souls!”\* This is our God: no other is to be compared to Him.\* Born of a Virgin, He is coming to dwell among men.\* Laid in a poor manger, the Only-Begotten Son appears as a mortal man\* and the Lord of Glory is wrapped in swaddling clothes.\* A star guides the Magi to come and worship Him;\* and we sing: “O Holy Trinity, save our souls!”

*Verse (Tone 8):* O Lord,\* I have heard the report of You and was afraid.

Before Your birth, O Lord, the angelic hosts\* looked with awe on this mystery and were filled with wonder:\* for You Who adorned the vault of heaven with stars\* have decided to be born as a Child.\* You Who hold the whole earth in the palm of Your hand,\* will be laid in the manger of dumb beasts.\* By this plan of salvation, Your compassion has been made known, O Christ,\* and Your great mercy: Glory to You!

*Glory...now...(Tone 3):* Joseph, how can you bring to Bethlehem, pregnant with child,\* the Maiden whom you married in the sanctuary?\* “I have searched the prophets and have been warned by an angel.\* I am convinced that Mary will give birth to God in a way surpassing all understanding.\* Magi shall come forth from the East to worship Him with precious gifts!”\* O Lord, Who are taking flesh for our sake, glory to You!

### **Prokeimenon**

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Let us be attentive!

*(Tone 4)* For a Child is born to us; \* a Son is given us.

*Verse:* All authority will be upon his shoulders.

### **Old Testament Reading**

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the prophecy of Baruch.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* This is our God; no other can be compared to him! He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved. Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men. She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures for ever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light. Do not give your glory to another, or your advantages to an alien people. Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God. (3:35-4:4)

### **Epistle**

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the epistle of the holy apostle Paul to the Galatians.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* Brothers and Sisters: before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (3:23-29)

### **Gospel**

*During the reading of the Gospel, the faithful gather around the lectern holding candles.*

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Stand aright! Let us listen to the holy Gospel.

*Priest:* Peace be with all.

*All:* And with your spirit.

*Priest:* A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*(The Gospel is from Luke 2:1-20)*

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*Immediately after the Gospel, the reader chants the following verses:*

Blessed is the Lord God, blessed is the Lord day by day; may the God of our salvation give us prosperity. Our God is the God who saves.

*Kontakion of the Pre-feast, Tone 3:* Today the Virgin comes to the cave\* to give birth ineffably to the pre-eternal Word.\* Hearing this, be of good cheer, O inhabited earth,\* and with the angels and the shepherds glorify Him whose will it was\* to be made manifest a young Child - the pre-eternal God!

*All:* Lord, have mercy. (40)

### **Prayer of the Third Hour**

*Priest:* O God and Master, Father almighty, Lord, only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit, one Godhead, and one power, have mercy on me a sinner; and by the judgements which You know, save me Your unworthy servant; for You are blessed for ever and ever.

*All:* Amen.

### **SIXTH HOUR**

- + Come, let us bow in worship before the King, our God.
- + Come, let us bow in worship before Christ, the King, our God.
- + Come, let us bow in worship and fall down before the very Lord Jesus Christ, \* our King and God.

*The reader(s) chant the following psalms. The deacon (or priest) performs a small incensation, as at the Third Hour: the Gospel Book on four sides, Icon Screen, the priest, and the people.*

### **Psalm 71**

O God, give your judgment to the king, to a king's son your justice, that he may judge your people in justice and your poor in right judgment. May the mountains bring forth peace for the people and the hills, justice. May he defend the poor of the people and save the children of the needy (and crush the oppressor). He shall endure like the sun and the moon from age to age. He shall descend like rain on the meadow, like raindrops on the earth. In his days justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails. He shall rule from sea to sea, from the Great River to earth's bounds. Before him his enemies shall fall, his foes lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts shall pay him tribute. The kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring him gifts. Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him. For he shall save the poor when they cry and the needy who are helpless. He will have pity on the weak and save the lives of the poor. From oppression he will rescue their lives, to him their blood is dear. (Long may he live, may the gold of Sheba be given him.) They shall pray for him without ceasing and bless him all the day. May corn be abundant in the land to the peaks of the mountains. May its fruit rustle like Lebanon; may men flourish in the cities like grass on the earth. May his name be blessed for ever and endure like the sun. Every tribe shall be blessed in him, all nations bless his name. Blessed be the Lord,



God of Israel, who alone works wonders, ever blessed his glorious name. Let his glory fill the earth. Amen! Amen!

### **Psalm 131**

O Lord, remember David and all the many hardships he endured, the oath he swore to the Lord, his vow to the Strong One of Jacob. “I will not enter the house where I live nor go to the bed where I rest. I will give no sleep to my eyes, to my eyelids I will give no slumber till I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the Strong One of Jacob.” At Ephrata we heard of the ark; we found it in the plains of Yearim. “Let us go to the place of his dwelling; let us go to kneel at his footstool.” Go up, Lord, to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your strength. Your priests shall be clothed with holiness; your faithful shall ring out their joy. For the sake of David your servant do not reject your anointed. The Lord swore an oath to David; he will not go back on his word: “A son, the fruit of your body, will I set upon your throne. If they keep my covenant in truth and my laws that I have taught them, their sons also shall rule on your throne from age to age.” For the Lord has chosen Sion; he has desired it for his dwelling: “This is my resting-place for ever; here have I chosen to live. I will greatly bless her produce, I will fill her poor with bread. I will clothe her priests with salvation and her faithful shall ring out their joy. There David’s stock will flower; I will prepare a lamp for my anointed. I will cover his enemies with shame but on him my crown shall shine.”

*Reader:* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

*All:* Now and forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Glory be to You, O God! (3)

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

### **Troparion of the Pre-feast**



*(Tone 4)* Mary once, with aged Joseph, went to be taxed in Bethlehem,\* for they were of the lineage of David;\* and she bore in her womb the fruit that had not been sown.\* The time of the birth was at hand and there was no room at the inn;\* but the cave proved a fair palace for the Queen.\* Christ is born, that He may raise up again the image that before was fallen.

*Reader:* Now and forever and ever. Amen. As we have no boldness because of our many sins, entreat the One born of you, Virgin Mother of God; for a Mother's plea has great power to obtain the Master's kindness. Do not despise the supplications of sinners, O all-pure one, for He is merciful, and able to save, He who even accepted to suffer for us.

### **Stichera**

*(Tone 1):* Come, O Faithful!\* Inspired by God, let us go to see the divine mercy that is revealed in Bethlehem.\* Let us cleanse our minds and offer virtues in our lives instead of myrrh.\* Let us prepare with faith to enter the Feast of the Nativity,\* storing up treasure in our souls as we cry aloud:\* “Glory in the highest to God in Trinity,\* Whose good will is now being revealed to men;\* in His love for mankind,\* He will set Adam free from the ancient curse!”

*Verse (Tone 4):* God comes from Teman\* the Holy One from the mountain overshadowed by the forest.

Hear, O Heavens! Give ear, O Earth!\* Let the foundations be shaken,\* and let trembling lay hold on the whole world!\* For our God and Creator is clothing Himself in flesh.\* The One Who fashioned the whole creation with His strong arm\* will be seen in the womb of a woman whom He has formed.\* How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!\* How inscrutable His judgements, how unsearchable His ways!

*Glory...now...(Tone 5):* Come, O People who belong to Christ!\* Let us behold the wonders that strike and hold fast every mind with awe!\* Let us sing praises with faith in reverent worship.\* Today a Maiden, pregnant with Child,\* comes to Bethlehem to give birth to the Lord.\* The choirs of angels go before her.\* Seeing these things, Joseph, her betrothed, cried out,\* “What is this strange mystery in you, O Virgin?\* How shall you bring forth a Child,\* a Calf upon Whom a yoke has never been laid?”

### **Prokeimenon**

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Let us be attentive!

*(Tone 4):* Before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten You!\* The Lord has sworn and He will not repent!

*Verse:* The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand!”

### **Old Testament Reading**

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the prophecy of Isaiah.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* The Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, “Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!” Then he said, “Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. Moreover the Lord said to me, “Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man’s pen

concerning Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. And I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.” Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, “Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; for before the child shall have knowledge to cry ‘My father’ and ‘My mother,’ the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.” Then the Lord said, “Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces! Give ear, all you from far countries. Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak the word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.” (7:10-16; 8:1-4, 9-10)

## Epistle

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the epistle of the holy apostle Paul to the Hebrews.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* Brothers and Sisters: Scripture says, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.” But to which of the angels has He ever said: “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?” Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which

at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. (1:10-2:3)

## Gospel

*During the reading of the Gospel, the faithful gather around the lectern holding candles.*

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Stand aright! Let us listen to the holy Gospel.

*Priest:* Peace be with all.

*All:* And with your spirit.

*Priest:* A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*(The Gospel is from Matthew 2:1-12)*

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*Immediately after the gospel, the reader chants the following verses:*

Let your mercies, O Lord, come quickly to our aid, for we are utterly poor; help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of Your name. O Lord, deliver us, and have mercy on our sins, for Your name's sake.

*Kontakion of the Pre-feast, Tone 3:* Today the Virgin comes to the cave\* to give birth ineffably to the pre-eternal Word.\* Hearing this, be of good cheer, O inhabited earth,\* and with the angels and the shepherds glorify Him whose will it was\* to be made manifest a young Child - the pre-eternal God!

*All:* Lord, have mercy. (40)

## Prayer of the Sixth Hour

*Priest:* O God and Lord of powers, Maker of all creation, in the compassion of Your incomprehensible mercy You sent Your only-begotten Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ for the salvation of our race.

Through His precious Cross He tore up the record of our sins, and triumphed over the principalities and powers of darkness. O loving Master, accept our supplications of thanksgiving and entreaty; and deliver us from destructive and dark transgression, and from all our foes, visible and invisible, who seek to harm us. Nail down our flesh through fear of You, and prevent our hearts from inclining towards words or thoughts of evil, but rather wound our souls with longing for You; that always gazing upon You and guided by the light that comes from You, seeing You the unapproachable and everlasting Light, we may unceasingly confess and thank You, the Father without beginning, with Your only-begotten Son and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever and ever.

*All:* Amen.

## NINTH HOUR

- + Come, let us bow in worship before the King, our God.
- + Come, let us bow in worship before Christ, the King, our God.
- + Come, let us bow in worship and fall down before the very Lord Jesus Christ, \* our King and God.

*The reader(s) chant the following psalms. Meanwhile, the priest (and deacon) perform a great incensation, as at the First Hour: the Gospel Book on four sides, the Holy Table, Sanctuary, Icon Screen, the people, and around the perimeter of the whole temple.*

## Psalm 109

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet.” The Lord shall send forth the rod of your power from Zion, and rule in the midst of your enemies. With you is the beginning in the day of your power, in the brightness of your

saints; “I have begotten you from the womb before the morning star.” The Lord swore and will not repent, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The Lord at your right hand crushed kings in the day of his wrath; He shall judge among the nations; he shall fill them with dead bodies; he shall crush the heads of many on earth. He shall drink from the brook on the way; therefore, he shall raise his head high.

### **Psalm 110**

I will thank the Lord with all my heart in the meeting of the just and their assembly. Great are the works of the Lord, to be pondered by all who love them. Majestic and glorious his work, his justice stands firm for ever. He makes us remember his wonders. The Lord is compassion and love. He gives food to those who fear him; keeps his covenant ever in mind. He has shown his might to his people by giving them the lands of the nations. His works are justice and truth, his precepts are all of them sure, standing firm for ever and ever; they are made in uprightness and truth. He has sent deliverance to his people and established his covenant for ever. Holy his name, to be feared. To fear the Lord is the first stage of wisdom; all who do so prove themselves wise. His praise shall last for ever!

*Reader:* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

*All:* Now and forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Glory be to You, O God! (3)

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

### **Troparion of the Pre-feast**

*(Tone 4)* Mary once, with aged Joseph, went to be taxed in Bethlehem,\* for they were of the lineage of David;\* and she bore in her womb the fruit that had not been sown.\* The time of the birth was

at hand and there was no room at the inn;\* but the cave proved a fair palace for the Queen.\* Christ is born, that He may raise up again the image that before was fallen.

*Reader:* Now and forever and ever. Amen. O Good One, You were born of a Virgin for our sake and endured crucifixion; You despoiled death by death and as God revealed resurrection. Do not despise those whom You fashioned with Your own hand; show Your love for mankind, O Merciful One; accept the Mother of God who bore You as she intercedes for us, and save, O Savior, a people in despair!

### **Stichera**

*(Tone 7):* Herod was struck with amazement\* when he saw the piety of the Magi.\* Then, overcome with wrath, he asked them when the Child was to be born.\* Mothers lost their infants\* and their babies were harvested by an untimely death;\* breasts grew dry and sources of milk were stopped;\* great was this calamity!\* Therefore, O Faithful, let us come together in holiness to worship the Nativity!

*Verse (Tone 2):* O Lord, I have heard the report of You\* and was afraid.

O Virgin, when Joseph went up to Bethlehem distressed by sorrow,\* you said to him, “Why are you downcast and troubled at seeing me pregnant?\* Why do you not know the mystery which has come to pass in me?\* Cast every fear aside and understand this strange marvel:\* in my womb, God is coming down to earth for the sake of mercy\* and He has taken flesh in me!\* You shall see Him when he is born!\* Filled with joy, you shall worship Him as your Creator!\* The angels ceaselessly praise Him in song\* and they glorify Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit!”

*The following sticheron is sung solemnly with three prostrations at its conclusion.*



*(Tone 6)* Glory... Now... He who holds the whole creation in the hollow of His hand is born today of the Virgin.\* He Whose Essence none can approach is wrapped in swaddling clothes as a mortal.\* God, Who established the heavens at the beginning of time, lies in a manger.\* He Who rained down manna on His people in the desert\* is nourished on milk from His Mother's breast.\* The Bridegroom of the Church, Who called the Magi,\* accepts their gifts as the Son of the Virgin.\* We bow down and worship Your Nativity, O Christ!  
*(prostration)*\* We bow down and worship Your Nativity, O Christ!  
*(prostration)*\* We bow down and worship Your Nativity, O Christ!  
*(prostration)*\* Show us also Your divine Epiphany!

### **Prokeimenon**

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Let us be attentive!

*(Tone 4):* This man was born there. \* And of Sion they shall say, One and all were born in her!

*Verse:* His foundations are upon the holy mountains.

### **Old Testament Reading**

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the prophecy of Isaiah.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* Thus says the Lord: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.  
 (9:6-7)



## Epistle

*Deacon:* Wisdom!

*Reader:* A reading from the epistle of the holy apostle Paul to the Hebrews.

*Deacon:* Let us be attentive!

*Reader:* Brothers and Sisters: both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.” And again, “I will put My trust in Him.” And again: “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.” Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (2:12-18)

## Gospel

*During the reading of the Gospel, the faithful gather around the lectern holding candles.*

*Deacon:* Wisdom! Stand aright! Let us listen to the holy Gospel.

*Priest:* Peace be with all.

*All:* And with your spirit.

*Priest:* A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*(The Gospel is from Matthew 2:13-23)*

*All:* Glory be to You, O Lord, glory be to You.

*Immediately after the gospel, the priest (preceded by the deacon, carrying the candle) carries the Gospel Book through the Holy Doors and places it on the Holy Table. Then the doors and the veil are shut. The priest removes the phelonion, exits the altar, and goes and stands before the Holy Doors. Meanwhile, the reader chants these verses:*

For Your holy name's sake do not utterly reject us, do not annul Your covenant, do not take Your mercy from us for the sake of Abraham, Your beloved, and for the sake of Isaac, Your servant, and Israel, Your holy one.

**+** Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.  
*Three times.*

**+** Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, \* now and for ever and ever. Amen.

Trinity most holy, have mercy on us. Cleanse us of our sins, O Lord; pardon our transgressions, O Master; look upon our weaknesses and heal them, O Holy One; for the sake of Your name.

Lord, have mercy. *Three times.*

**+** Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, \* now and for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

*Priest:* For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours, **+** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever and ever.

*People:* **Amen.**

*Kontakion of the Pre-feast, Tone 3:* Today the Virgin comes to the cave\* to give birth ineffably to the pre-eternal Word.\* Hearing this, be of good cheer, O inhabited earth,\* and with the angels and the shepherds glorify Him whose will it was\* to be made manifest a young Child - the pre-eternal God!

*All:* Lord, have mercy. (40)

### **Prayer of the Hours**

*Priest:* In every season and at every hour, in heaven and on earth You are worshipped and glorified, O good God, longsuffering, rich in mercy, loving the just and compassionate to sinners, calling all to salvation by the promise of the blessings to come; now at this very hour, Lord, accept our prayers, and direct our lives in the ways of Your commandments. Sanctify our souls, purify our bodies, correct our thoughts, and make our knowledge whole and sober. Deliver us from every distress, evil, and pain. Surround us with Your holy angels as with a rampart so that protected and guided by their host we may reach the unity of the faith and the knowledge of Your unapproachable glory; for You are blessed for ever and ever.

*All:* Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever. Amen.

More honourable than the cherubim and by far more glorious than the seraphim; ever a virgin, you gave birth to God the Word; O true Mother of God, we magnify you!

In the name of the Lord, Father, give the blessing.

*Priest:* O God be gracious to us and bless us; make Your face to shine upon us and have mercy on us.

*All:* Amen.

### **Prayer of the Ninth Hour**

*Priest:* Master, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, You have patiently endured our transgressions, and brought us to this hour in which hanging on the life-giving tree You showed the good Thief the way into Paradise and destroyed death by death. Have mercy also on us sinners, Your unworthy servants, for we have sinned and transgressed Your law and are not worthy to raise our eyes and look to the height of heaven; because we have abandoned the way of Your justice and walked in the willfulness of our hearts. But we implore Your unbounded goodness: spare us, O Lord, according to the multitude of Your mercy, and save us for Your holy name's sake, for our days have been wasted in vanity. Rescue us from the hand of our opponent, forgive us our sins, slay our carnal will, that having put off the old man, we may put on the new, and live for You, our Master and benefactor; and that thus following Your precepts we may reach eternal rest, where all who rejoice have their dwelling. For You indeed are the true joy and gladness of those who love You, Christ our God, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who has no beginning, and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and always and for ever and ever.

*All:* Amen.

### **Dismissal**

*Priest:* Glory be to You, Christ God, our hope, glory be to You!

*All:* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever. Amen. Lord, have mercy. (3) Give the blessing.

*Priest:* May Christ, our true God, have mercy on us and save us, through the prayers of His most pure Mother, of the holy, glorious, and all-praiseworthy Apostles, and of all the Saints, for He is good and the Lover of Mankind.

*All:* Amen.

*A lit candle is placed in the centre of the temple. All gather before it for the singing of the Troparion, Tone 4:*

Bethlehem, make ready, for Eden has been opened for all. \* Ephrathah, be a

lert, for the Tree of Life has blossomed forth from the Virgin in the cave. \* Her womb has become a spiritual paradise \* wherein fruit was planted, \* and if we eat of it we shall live and not die like Adam. \* Christ is coming forth to bring back to life \*\* the likeness that had been lost in the beginning.