

St. Christopher

Hellenic Orthodox Church

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Friday Services During Great Lent

Quick Overview from Fr. George

Weekly Salutations to the Theotokos (1st 4 weeks) & The Akathist Hymn (5th Week), 6:00 - 7:15 p.m.

The **Service of the Salutations** is known as one of the hymnological masterpieces of the Church. Its hymns expound the belief in the Incarnation of the Lord and the salvation of believers in Him. The hymns are not only offered to the Virgin Mary, but also to St. John the Baptist, Gabriel the Archangel, and the Shepherds and the Magi worshipping Christ.

During the first four Fridays of Great Lent, Salutation Services are chanted in four weekly parts. Then, on the fifth Friday of Great Lent, they are combined into the **Akathist Hymn**. It is a profound, devotional poem which sings the praises of the Holy Mother and Ever-Virgin Mary.

It was composed and sung, according to tradition, as a thanksgiving to the Theotokos, for the protection of Constantinople from a siege by the Arabs in 626 A.D. The Akathist Hymn is perhaps the greatest hymn ever written for the Mother of God. It has a number of characteristics... it is a historical, theological narrative, showing glory to the Theotokos. The twenty-four verses, each beginning with a letter of the Greek alphabet, form a beautiful religious poem regarding the coming of Christ for the salvation of the world. It is believed to have been written by St. Romanos the Melodist, one of the greatest Greek-speaking poets of all time.

The Akathist Hymn is one of the most well-loved services of devotion in the Orthodox Church. The word "*akathistos*" literally means "not sitting" (*i.e., standing; normally all participants stand while it is being prayed.*) The hymn's 24 verses alternate long and short. Each short verse (kontakion) ends with the singing of "*Alleluia.*" Each longer stanza (ikos) ends with the refrain: "*Rejoice, O Bride Unwedded.*"

The majority of the Akathist Hymn is made up of praises directed to the Mother of God, always beginning with the salutation of the Archangel Gabriel: "*Rejoice.*" In each of them, one after the other, all the events related to our Lord's incarnation pass before us for our contemplation. The Archangel Gabriel (in Ikos 1) marvels at the Divine self-emptying and the renewal of creation which will occur when Christ comes to dwell in the Virgin's womb. The unborn John the Baptist (Ikos 3) prophetically rejoices. The Shepherds (Ikos 4) recognize Christ as a blameless Lamb, and rejoice that in the Virgin "the things of earth join chorus with the heavens." The pagan Magi, (Kontakion 5) following the light of the star, praise Her for revealing the light of the world.

As the hymn progresses, various individuals and groups encounter Christ and His Mother. Each has his own need; each his own desire or expectation, and each finds his or her own particular spiritual need satisfied and fulfilled in Our Lord and in the Mother of God. So too, each generation of Orthodox, and each particular person who has prayed the Akathist, has found in this hymn an inspired means of expressing gratitude and praise to the Mother of God for what she has accomplished for their salvation.

In the same way, may we the faithful find the Mother of God to be a help and consolation for our souls. We offer glory to God that He has given us the most Holy Theotokos to intercede for us and help us in our present condition. Let us take advantage of the five Friday evenings of Great Lent as a gift in our lenten journey; may we be present physically and spiritually. ***Please join us!***