

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

**LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO
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All text in this series is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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"The Orthodox Church.....has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from
"Encountering the Mystery."
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Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk

In the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.
Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.
www.thyateira.org.uk

Ecumenical Patriarchate.
Οικουμενικόν Πατριαρχεῖον.
www.ec-patr.org



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

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Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Esperinos (Vespers)



Now we are come to the sun's hour of
rest, the lights of evening round us
shine; we hymn the Father, Son and
Holy Spirit Divine!

Words from the Evening Hymn.

“From the Old Testament to the Primitive Church.

The Old Testament shows that as far back as the Book of Exodus the Jews were required to perform a particular evening service in the tent: “And when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall burn incense before them, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations” (Ex 30:8) Ritual details if this service are found in Leviticus 24:1-4.

The principal element of this service is the rite of lighting the lamp and placing it “outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of the meeting.” The lamp is to burn “from evening to morning before the Lord continually,” and in front of it Aaron and his sons are to offer incense.

Even after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the Jews did not forget this rite of lighting the evening lamp. They were reminded in the Talmud that, while performing this ritual, they were to offer glory and praise to God. For Christians baptism replaced circumcision, and the bloodless sacrifice of the eucharist replaced the bloody sacrificial offerings which took place in the temple. Nothing, however, was introduced to replace the rite of lighting the evening lamp. As a result, Jews who became Christians did not abandon this pious and sacred tradition of their ancestors. Instead, they found a theme in the apostolic preaching which both renewed and heightened the meaning of this tradition. Christ the Saviour called himself the “light of the world” (John 8:12). The gladsome light of the evening lamp brought to remembrance him “that was the true light, which enlightens every man who comes into the world” (John 1:9). Burning during the gathering for prayer, the lamp was a vivid reminder to the assembly of the spiritual presence of Christ, who promised to be in the midst of the two or

three gathered together in his name (Matt 18:20). In this manner the Old Testament ritual was used with a renewed, elevated and purely Christian meaning.”

From chapter 1 of the comprehensive study *Evening Worship in the Orthodox Church*, by Nicholas Uspensky, one time Professor of Liturgy at the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) Theological Academy.

Esperinos (Vespers) or Evening Prayer, as the name indicates, is an act of worship which takes place in the evening of each day. Weekday vespers differ a little from the vespers of Sunday. Whilst the order is fixed and constant there are variables according to the day, season, feast, and any saint(s) being commemorated. The Typikon, published at the beginning of each year, provides the daily content and order of each service for the entire year.

During the Great Fast (Lent) the Divine Liturgy does not take place on weekdays. On weekdays, usually Wednesday and Friday, there will be a service called the Presanctified Liturgy, a combination of Vespers and Liturgy but with no consecration, communion being received from the Holy Gifts sanctified (consecrated) on the previous Sunday. There are a few occasions when a somewhat different Vespers Liturgy is appointed during which the combination of Vespers and Divine Liturgy does include consecration.



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Vespers above the sand covered little Oratory of Saint Piran (c480) at Perranzabuloe, Cornwall. With earlier excavations the Oratory was once again uncovered in 2015. The Oratory is among the earliest extant Christian building remains in Great Britain.

The following outline gives the order for the Vespers of Saturday evening which is the first service of Sunday and known as Great Vespers.

The service is lead by a priest and deacon with a reader and/or singer(s).

- 1 Introduction and invitation to worship.
- 2 Psalm 103 whilst the priest reads the 7 evening prayers quietly at the holy table.
- 3 The Litany of Peace (Great Litany).
[4 Reading from the Psalter].
[5 Little Litany].
- 6 ‘Lord I have cried’ - Psalms 140, 141, 129 and 116 with stanzas appropriate to the day – Stichera). The Great Censing takes place.
- 7 Entrance with censer or Holy Gospel book.
- 8 The Evening Hymn – ‘O Joyful Light.’
- 9 The Evening Prokeimenon.
[10 Three Old Testament readings when appointed].
- 11 Litany of Fervent Intercession.
- 12 Prayer – ‘Vouchsafe O Lord...’
- 13 Litany of Fervent Intercession.
- 14 Prayer at the bowing of heads.
[15 Lity when appointed].
- 16 Aposticha (stanzas – Stichera - inserted between verses from the Psalms) according to the day.
- 17 Song of Simeon (‘Nunc Dimittis’)
- 18 Trisagion prayers concluding with the Lord’s Prayer.
- 19 Apolytikion (dismissal hymn for the day).
- 20 Concluding prayers and Blessing.