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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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Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

# Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: The Orthros order



**"O God and Master, holy and unfathomable, at your word the light radiated from darkness. After relaxing us in the sleep of night, you have raised us to glorify and implore your goodness. We beg your compassion to receive us also who worship you at this time and give thanks to you according to our ability."**

The opening words of the fourth of twelve prayers said quietly by the priest whilst the singer(s) read the six psalms following the beginning of the Orthros.

Orthros is the Greek word for "dawn". Mattins is a familiarly used word for the service and both indicate a morning act of worship. In the Greek tradition Orthros normally precedes the Divine Liturgy.

The Sunday Orthros consists of **fixed** and **variable** parts. The fixed are read and/or sung each Sunday. The variable parts depend upon **the eight tones** (modes) used in weekly rotation, and the church calendar. For the variable parts it is important to consult and follow the Taxis (order) contained in the Typikon issued annually by the Patriarchate at the beginning of each year. Orthros on weekdays differs a little from that on Sundays.

Orthros (Mattins or Morning Prayer), is the longest of the daily services of Orthodoxy and is rich in its biblical and theological expression from those who have over many years composed its verses and hymnody which comprise both variable and fixed parts within its structure. There is special importance and spiritual value in listening to the psalms and all other parts intoned or read by those who have a particular role within the service. Except when we are called to "*Bow our heads to the Lord,*" our whole being is raised in attentiveness, common prayer and worship.

The repetitive nature of Orthodox worship means it is possible to become familiar without the need of special concentration and texts to read. As each person takes their allotted part we are freed to enter fully and on each occasion into the essentials of our prayer and praise.

The following outline gives the common order for the Orthros on Sunday morning according to the tone. The priest (and deacon) will have said their prayers of preparation and vesting and begun the Proskomeidi – preparing the bread and wine (with water) to become in the Divine Liturgy the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

1 The priest says the opening blessing.

- 2 The Trisagion Prayers concluding with the Lord's Prayer.  
[Psalms 19 and 20]
- 3 Troparia - three set hymns always used.
- 4 A brief Litany.
- 5 Blessing by the priest followed by the Six Orthros Psalms: 3, 37, 62, 87, 102, 142. During these psalms the priest says quietly the twelve morning prayers, six at the Holy Table and six before the icon of the Saviour on the Iconostasis.
- 6 The Great Litany – Litany of Peace.
- 7 "*God is the Lord*" - with verses.
- 8 Apolytikia – the hymns of the day according to the appointed tone.
- 9 Small Litany.
- 10 Kathismata – hymns of the day according to the appointed tone.
- 11 Evlogetaria – "*Blessed are you, Lord, teach me your statutes.*"
- 12 Small Litany.
- 13 Ypakoi (not intoned). Anavathmoi and the Prokeimenon - each again according to the appointed tone.
- 14 Kontakion and Ikos usually not intoned.
- 15 Synaxarion and Ypomnima– a brief reading on the saint(s) or other commemoration(s) of the day.
- 16 Katavasia
- 17 The Gospel Dialogue followed by the reading of the Gospel for the day – one of the eleven Resurrection Gospels.
- 18 "*Now that we have seen the Resurrection of Christ.....*"

- 19 Psalm 50 during which the Book of Gospels is brought to the Royal Doors for veneration by the people.



- 20 The Prayer "*O God, save your people.....*"
- 21 Song of the Theotokos – Magnificat – the Great Censing takes place.
- 22 Small Litany.
- 23 "*Holy is the Lord our God.*"
- 24 Resurrection Exaposteilaria and Theotokia – hymns according to the tone.
- 25 The Praises – Psalms 148-150 – with verses.
- 26 Great Doxology. During this canticle the priest and deacon say the concluding prayers of Orthros at the Holy Table.
- 27 The Resurrection Troparion.
- 28 If the Divine Liturgy is to follow it begins immediately.

There are parts known as the Canon – not often used but when they are will follow 20 above. For those unfamiliar with the names of Orthros parts – from Greek – they mostly mean hymns and verses in the Orthodox manner of singing. There are occasions, i.e, the Sunday of Palms or when another of the Great Feasts falls on a Sunday, the order will be a little different – the Gospel for example will be read earlier in the service, from the Royal Doors and not held for veneration. In some traditions the morning service takes place in the evening, following Vespers, and is called the All-night Vigil.