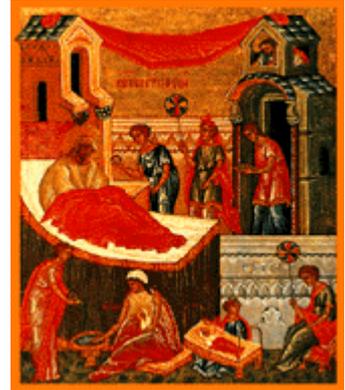


The Akathist Hymn

Introduction

The Akathist Hymn is a profound, devotional poem or chant, which sings the praises of the Holy Mother and Ever-Virgin Mary (Theotokos). It is chanted in all Orthodox Churches throughout the world during the five Fridays in the Great Lent, and constitutes a very concrete spiritual preparation for the Holy Week and Easter Services.



Devotional Hymns to the Theotokos are as ancient as the first Christian Church. The Byzantine Empire from its very inception at Constantinople during the fourth century, closely allied itself to the Virgin Mary and always sought Her protection or intercessions. This we see from the Prayer Services to the Theotokos between the fifth and eighth centuries, and the reference to Constantinople as the 'Queen City'.

The Akathist Hymn, which in its present form was added to by many Ecclesiastical Hymnographers, existed for most part even before it was formally accepted by the Church in 626 AD. The Kontakion "To the Invincible Champion... we ascribe the victory" was added then, and came to be recognized as the Akathist Hymn, because of the following described miracle attributed to the intercession of the Theotokos.

While the Emperor of Byzantium Heracleios was on an expedition to fight the aggression of the Persians on their own grounds, there appeared outside the walls of Constantinople barbaric hordes, mostly Avars. The siege lasted a few months, and it was apparent that the outnumbered troops of the Queen City were reaching desperation. However as history records, the faith of the people worked the impossible. The Venerable Patriarch Sergius with the Clergy and the Official of Byzantium Vonos, endlessly marched along the great walls of Constantinople with an Icon of the Theotokos in hand, and bolstered the faith of the defenders of freedom. The miracle came soon after. Unexpectedly, as the chronicler narrates, a great storm with huge tidal waves destroyed most of the fleet of the enemy, and full retreat ensued.

The faithful of Constantinople spontaneously filled the Church of the Theotokos at Vlachernae on the Golden Horn, and with the Patriarch Sergius officiating, they prayed all night singing praises to the Virgin Mary without sitting. Hence the title of the Hymn "**Akathistos**", in Greek meaning '**not seated**'.

The Akathist Hymn is a very important and indeed an integral part of our religious and ecclesiastical life. When we are present during the first Friday Service, we firmly realize that we commence to ascend the spiritual steps of the lengthy Lenten period, to finally reach the peak with our Lord's Glorious Resurrection.

The Akathist Hymn was not strange to the Latin West even though apart from the Eastern Church. Pope Benedict XIV granted on May 4, 1746 an indulgence of 50 days to the Latin and Eastern Rite Roman Catholics, for each recitation of the Hymn.

Fr. Vincent McNabb, a Roman Catholic Priest in London, translated the Hymn into English in 1934. In his forward remarks he stated "No apology is needed for introducing the Akathistos to the Christian West. Indeed the West might well be apologetic about its neglect, or ignorance of such a liturgical and literary masterpiece".

In any of our Service Books we can readily see that our glorious and Ever-Virgin Theotokos is the center of many of our Orthodox Services in which prayers abound for Her interceding to Her Son, and our God, for our Salvation. The Virgin Mary is the most exalted and most honoured person by God. She is the most revered and most loved by humans. She is a binding force for all Christians. She is the Unique Personality of the world, because of the unique fact of the Lord's Incarnation. She is the daughter of Grace and the Crystal Vessel of the Grace of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:26-56).

Faith in the Almighty God is primary and all important to the Holy Orthodox Church. Our dependence on God is always beyond question, and from this faith we should strive not to stray. Therefore, Services, like the Akathist Hymn, should be a must and attended by all. Moreover, this particular Service links us so beautifully with a great and glorious period of our Christian history; it is also a very live tradition, which has never ceased in the Orthodox Church since its official acceptance in 626 AD.

Living in these trying times, when we are besieged by many forces of evil, it is hoped that the Akathist Hymn as well as our other Services may become the bulwark to withstand, and indeed to overcome these forces.

Paraphrased from Fr. George Papadeas'
THE AKATHIST HYMN preceded by THE BRIEF COMPLINE
published by Patmos Press, DAYTONIA BEACH, FLORIDA, 1980

Brief outline

The Akathist Hymn is divided into 4 main parts, and briefly the content is as follows:

- 1 Stanzas 1 - 6
recount:
 - a. The Annunciation to the Virgin Mary.
 - b. The Virgin Mary's purity.
 - c. The Virgin Mary's visit to Elizabeth.
 - d. The doubts of Joseph the protector, and his joy upon learning of the supernatural Conception.
- 2 Stanzas 7 - 12
tell us of:
 - a. The shepherds hearing the Angels praising the birth of the Lord and their visit to the manger.
 - b. The adoration of the Magi.
 - c. The flight of the Holy Family to Egypt and the falling of the idols.
- 3 Stanzas 13 - 18
relate:
 - a. The new Creation which was wrought by the Incarnate Lord through the Theotokos.
 - b. The call for the uplifting of our minds to Heaven from where God descended.
 - c. The Lord's Omnipresence, that while He came to earth, He was no less in Heaven.
 - d. The confounding of the philosophers and orators, who were at a loss to explain God's condescension.
- 4 Stanzas 19 - 24
speak of:
 - a. The Theotokos as a protector of all the devout, and those who choose to flee unto Her.
 - b. God coming as one of us, amongst us, to draw us near to Him.
 - c. Our inability to adequately sing the praises of God, whose mercies are countless.
 - d. The Lord cancelling all the ancient spiritual debts, and the granting of His Grace to all. Our prayers and petitions to the Holy Mother to protect us from misfortunes and save us from the future condemnation.

The Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos

Having secretly received the command, the Archangel hastened into Joseph's abode and spoke to the Holy Virgin. He Who bowed the Heavens with His descending, is wholly contained, yet unchanged in You. And seeing Him taking the likeness of a servant in your womb, I stand in amazement and cry unto you:

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin [3 times].

Kontakion

Unto you, O Theotokos, invincible Champion, your City, in thanksgiving ascribes the victory for the deliverance from sufferings. And having your might unassailable, free us from all dangers, so that we may cry unto you:

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

1

The Archangel was sent from Heaven to cry 'Rejoice!' to the Theotokos. And beholding You, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice he cried aloud to her such things as these:

Rejoice, you through whom joy shall shine forth. Rejoice, you whom the curse will vanish.

Rejoice, the Restoration of fallen Adam. Rejoice, the Redemption of the tears of Eve.

Rejoice, O Height beyond human logic. Rejoice, O depth invisible even to the eyes of Angels.

Rejoice, for you are the King's throne. Rejoice, you bear Him, Who bears the universe.

Rejoice, O Star revealing the Sun. Rejoice, O Womb of divine Incarnation.

Rejoice, you through whom creation is renewed. Rejoice, you through whom the Creator is born a Babe.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

2

Beholding herself in purity, the holy one courageously said to Gabriel: Your strange voice seems almost unbelievable to my soul; for how do you speak of birth-giving without seed? crying aloud:

Alleluia.

3

Seeking to know the incomprehensible knowledge, the Virgin cried to him who ministered to her: How many a Son be born from a virginal womb? Tell me! To her he answered in fear, yet crying thus:

Rejoice, O seer of the ineffable Will. Rejoice, O surety of those praying in silence.

Rejoice, you the Preface of Christ's miracles. Rejoice, you the Pinnacle of His commandments.
Rejoice, O heavenly Ladder, by which God descended. Rejoice, O Bridge leading those from earth to Heaven.
Rejoice, O Miracle, much marveled of Angels. Rejoice, O trauma, much dirged of demons.
Rejoice, you who ineffably gave birth to the Light. Rejoice, you who revealed the mystery to none.
Rejoice, O knowledge superceding the wise. Rejoice, You who enlightens the minds of the faithful.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin

4

The power of the Most High then overshadowed the Virgin, that she might conceive; and her fruitful womb He made a fertile meadow for all those desiring to reap salvation, as they chant:

Alleluia.

5

Carrying God in her womb, the Virgin hastened to Elizabeth, whose unborn babe forthwith recognizing Mary's salutation rejoiced, and with leaps as it were with songs, he cried out to the Theotokos:

Rejoice, O branch of the unwithering Vine. Rejoice, O Land yielding the untainted Fruit.
Rejoice, O Husbandry of the merciful Husbandman. Rejoice, O birthgiver to the Planter of our life.
Rejoice, O Field bearing abundant compassion. Rejoice, O Table laden with an abundance of mercies.
Rejoice, for you make the meadow produce contentment. Rejoice, for you prepare a haven for souls.
Rejoice, acceptable Incense of intercession. Rejoice, Oblation for all the world.
Rejoice, Favour of God to mortals. Rejoice, Access of mortals to God.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

6

Having doubtful thoughts, the righteous Joseph was troubled; for he suspected a secret union as he beheld you unwed, O blameless one; but when he learned of your conception through the Holy Spirit, he cried:

Alleluia.

7

On hearing the Angels praising the incarnate presence of Christ, the shepherds hastened as to a Shepherd, and beholding Him as a spotless Lamb, pastured in Mary's womb, her they hymned, and said:

Rejoice, Mother of the Lamb and Shepherd. Rejoice, Fold of the rational sheep.

Rejoice, O Defense against invisible foes. Rejoice, Opener of the gates of Paradise.

Rejoice, for the things of Heaven rejoice with the earth. Rejoice, the things of earth join chorus with the Heavens.

Rejoice, never-silent Voice of the Apostles. Rejoice, never-conquered Courage of the Martyrs.

Rejoice, firm Support of the Faith. Rejoice, shining Token of grace.

Rejoice, you through whom Hades was laid bare. Rejoice, you through whom we are clothed with glory.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

8

Beholding the Godward-pointing Star, the Magi followed its radiance; and holding it as a lantern, they sought through it the mighty King. And having approached the Unreachable, they rejoiced and cried to Him:

Alleluia.

9

The sons of the Chaldees saw in the hands of the Virgin Him Who by His hand fashioned man; and sensing Him as Lord, even though He had taken the form of a servant, they hastened with gifts to do homage, and they cried out to her who is blessed:

Rejoice, Mother of the never-setting Star. Rejoice, Dawn of the mystic Day.

Rejoice, you who has quenched the fiery furnace of error. Rejoice, you who enlightens the initiates of the Trinity.

Rejoice, you who has removed the inhuman tyrant from power.

Rejoice, you who has shown Christ, the man-befriending Lord.

Rejoice, you who has redeemed us from the pagan religion.

Rejoice, you who has rescued us from the works of mire.

Rejoice, you who ceased the worship of fire. Rejoice, you who saves us from the flames of passions.

Rejoice, Guide of the faithful to chastity. Rejoice, O Delight of all generations.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

10

Having become God-bearing heralds, the Magi returned to Babylon. Fulfilling Your prophecy, and having preached You as the Christ to all, they left Herod as a trifler, who knew not how to chant:

Alleluia.

11

Having shed the light of truth in Egypt, You expelled the darkness of falsehood; and unable to bear Your strength, O Saviour, her idols fell; and they that were set free from them cried to the Theotokos:

Rejoice, Uplifting of men. Rejoice, Downfall of demons.

Rejoice, you who trampled upon the delusion of error. Rejoice, you who censured the deceit of the idols.

Rejoice, Sea which drowned the symbolic Pharaoh. Rejoice, Rock which refreshed those thirsting for life.

Rejoice, Pillar of fire, guiding those in darkness. Rejoice, Protection of the world, more spacious than a cloud.

Rejoice, Nourishment, successor to manna. Rejoice, Minister of holy joy.

Rejoice, Land of promise. Rejoice, you from whom flows milk and honey.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

12

When Symeon was prepared to leave from this age of deception, You were presented to him as a newborn Babe, but he recognized You as perfect God. Wherefore, he marvelled at Your ineffable wisdom, chanting:

Alleluia.

13

New was the Creation which the Creator showed to us His creatures, when He sprang forth from the seedless womb; and He preserved it incorrupt, even as it was, that we, seeing this Miracle, may praise her

saying:

Rejoice, Flower of incorruption. Rejoice, Crown of self-restraint.
Rejoice, O shining Token of Resurrection. Rejoice, you whom
reflects the life of the Angels.

Rejoice, Tree of delectable Fruit that nourishes the faithful.

Rejoice, well-shaded Tree under which many find shelter.

Rejoice you who bears the Guide of those astray. Rejoice, you who
gives birth to the Redeemer of captives.

Rejoice, Intercession before the righteous Judge. Rejoice,
Forgiveness for many transgressors.

Rejoice, Robe of confidence for those bare of courage. Rejoice,
Tenderness conquering all desire.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

14

Seeing a strange childbirth, let us estrange ourselves from the world by
transporting our minds to Heaven; to this end the Most High God
appeared on earth a lowly man, that He might draw to the heights those
who cry out to Him:

Alleluia.

15

The Infinite Word was wholly present with those on earth, yet never
absent from those in Heaven; for this was a divine condescension and
not a mere change of place; and His birth was from a Virgin chosen of
God, who heard such words as these:

Rejoice, Land of the Uncontained God. Rejoice, Gate of the sacred
mystery.

Rejoice, doubtful Rumour of the faithless. Rejoice, undoubtful Pride
of the faithful.

Rejoice, all-holy Chariot of Him Who is above the Cherubim.

Rejoice, most excellent Dwelling-place of Him Who is above the
Seraphim.

Rejoice, you who conducts the opposites of unity. Rejoice, you who
has woven maidenhood into motherhood.

Rejoice, you through whom transgression is annulled. Rejoice, you
through whom Paradise is open.

Rejoice, Key of the Kingdom of Christ. Rejoice, Hope of eternal
blessings.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin

16

All angel-kind was amazed by the great deed of Your Incarnation; for they saw the inaccessible God as Man accessible to all, dwelling among us and hearing from all:

Alleluia.

17

Orators most eloquent do we behold mute as fish before you, O Theotokos; for they are at loss to explain how you could remain a virgin and yet give birth. But as for us, marvelling at this mystery, we cry with faith:

Rejoice, Vessel of the Wisdom of God. Rejoice, Treasury of His providence.

Rejoice, you who proves the philosophers fools. Rejoice, you who proves the logicians illogical.

Rejoice, for the subtle debaters are confounded. Rejoice, for the inventors of myths are faded away.

Rejoice, you who breaks the webs of the Athenians. Rejoice, you who fills the nets of the Fishermen.

Rejoice, who draws us from the depths of ignorance. Rejoice, you who enlightens many with knowledge.

Rejoice, Raft for those who desire to be saved. Rejoice, Haven for those who fare on the sea of life.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

18

Wishing to save the world, to this end did the Ruler of all come of His own will; and, though as God He is the Shepherd, for us He appeared as a Man like us; for by this likeness He called those of like kind, yet as God He hears:

Alleluia

19

You are a fortress protecting all virgins, O Theotokos and Virgin; for the Master of heaven and earth prepared you, O Immaculate One, and dwelt in your womb, and taught all to cry out to you:

Rejoice, Pillar of virginity. Rejoice, Gate of salvation.

Rejoice, Leader of spiritual restoration. Rejoice, Bestower of divine

goodness.

Rejoice, for you regenerated those conceived in shame. Rejoice, for you gave guidance to the thoughtless.

Rejoice, you who abolished the corrupter of hearts. Rejoice, you who gave birth to the Sower of chastity.

Rejoice, bridal Chamber of a seedless marriage. Rejoice, you who joined the faithful to the Lord.

Rejoice, fair Nursing-mother of virgins. Rejoice, bridal Escort of holy souls.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

20

Defeated is every hymn that strives to pay homage to the multitude of Your many compassions; for even should we offer You, O holy King, odes of praise numberless as the sands, we should still have done nothing worthy of what You have given to us who cry to You:

Alleluia.

21

As a brilliant beacon-light shining to those in darkness do we behold the holy Virgin; for she kindles the celestial Light and leads all to divine knowledge; she illuminates our minds with radiance and is honoured by these our cries:

Rejoice, Ray of the spiritual Sun. Rejoice, Beam of the innermost Splendour.

Rejoice, Lightning, enlightening our souls. Rejoice, Thunder, striking down the enemy.

Rejoice, for you caused the many-starred Light to dawn. Rejoice, for you caused the ever-flowing River to gush forth.

Rejoice, you who depicts the image of the Font of Siloam. Rejoice, you who washes away the stain of sin.

Rejoice, Laver purifying conscience. Rejoice, Wine-bowl over-filled with joy.

Rejoice, sweet-scented Fragrance of Christ. Rejoice, Life of mystic festival.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin

22

Wishing to bestow His grace, He that forgives the ancient debts of all mankind came of His own will to dwell among those who departed from

His favour; and tearing up writ of indebtedness, He hears from all:

Alleluia.

23

Whilst praising your Offspring, we all praise you, O Theotokos, as a living temple; for the Lord, Who holds all things in His hand, dwelt in your womb, and He sanctified and glorified you, and taught all to cry to you:

Rejoice, Tabernacle of God the Word. Rejoice, Holy one, holier than the Hollies.

Rejoice, Ark made golden by the Spirit. Rejoice, inexhaustible Treasury of Life.

Rejoice, precious Diadem of godly kings. Rejoice, venerable Boast of faithful priests.

Rejoice, unshakeable Tower of the Church. Rejoice, impregnable fortress of the Kingdom.

Rejoice, you through whom trophies are raised up. Rejoice, you whom enemies are cast down.

Rejoice, Healing of my flesh. Rejoice, Salvation of my soul.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

24

O all-hymned Mother, worthy of all praise, who brought forth the Word, the Holiest of all Saints [3 times], as you receive this our offering, rescue us all from every calamity, and deliver from future torment those who cry with one voice: Who is more

Alleluia.

1st Stanza

The Archangel was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! to the Theotokos. And beholding You, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice he cried aloud to her such things as:

Rejoice, you through whom joy shall shine. Rejoice, you the Redemption of the tears of Eve.

Rejoice, Height hard to climb for human thought. Rejoice, Depth hard to explore even for the eyes of Angels.

Rejoice, for you are the Throne of the King. Rejoice, for you sustained the Sustainer of all.

Rejoice, Star that causes the Sun to appear. Rejoice, Womb of the divine Incarnation.

Rejoice, you through whom creation is renewed. Rejoice, you whom the Creator is born a Babe.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin

Kontakion

Unto you, O Theotokos, invincible Champion, your City, in thanksgiving ascribes the victory for the deliverance from sufferings. And having your might unassailable, free us from all dangers, so that we may cry unto you:

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

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