

GUIDE TO THE LENTEN SERVICES

The Great Compline (*Mondays: March 7 to April 11*)

The Great Compline service occurs after Vespers and before midnight. At this time we review our thoughts, words and deeds of that day and ask God's mercy or forgiveness for our sins. We sin when we disobey God's commandments; the teachings of Jesus, who is also God; and the teachings of the Orthodox Church guided by the Holy Spirit, who is also God. Our God is the Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - one God in Three Persons. (This is the best way humans can define the mystery of God.) We ask the Theotokos, Jesus' mother, to pray for us and to protect us. The Great Compline reminds us to live a Christian life every day. We sing this hymn or refrain between the chanted verses that praise God: *O Lord of the Powers be with us, for in times of distress, we have no other help but You, Lord of the Powers, be with us.* We kneel when singing this hymn.

The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts (*Wednesdays: March 9 to April 13*)

The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts is part Vespers (the service on Saturday evenings) and part Liturgy (the Sunday mornings worship service). There are no Liturgies on the weekdays of the Great Fast. Therefore, the Church offers us Holy Communion - sanctified or blessed on the previous Sunday - in the middle of the week to give us the strength to continue through the Great Fast. *O taste and see how good the Lord is.*

Salutations or Akathist to the Theotokos (*Fridays: March 11 to April 8*)

On the Fridays of the Great Fast we sing praises to the Virgin Mary. The Akathist Hymn is a poem with twenty-four stanzas, authored by Patriarch Germanos I (715-730). It is an alphabetic acrostic - every stanza begins with a letter of the Greek alphabet, from alpha through omega.

The service begins with the Small Compline. On the first four Fridays of the Great Fast, we chant six stanzas of the poem; the service is named the *Salutations* (Greetings) to the Theotokos. On the fifth Friday, we chant all four stanzas. In between each stanza, we chant segments of a long poem by St. Joseph the Hymnographer (died April 3, 886).

The words of the Akathist Hymn remind us that the Theotokos intercedes for us - brings our prayers to her son Jesus, watches over us, and at time, actually protects us from harm. The word *akathist* means "without sitting."

KATANYKTIKOS "SOLEMN" VESPERS (*Sundays: 3-13, 3-27, 4-10*)

Every weekend, the church lightens the fast, allowing oil and wine on Saturdays (the Sabbath of the Old Testament), and Sundays (the Day of Resurrection). On Sunday evenings this service is sung, announcing the return to the solemnness of Lent.