

Division and Content of the 24 Verses of the Akathistos Hymn (Theodore Rokas)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The Service of the Akathistos Hymn is sung at Mattins on the Saturday of the fifth week of Lent or in the evening of Friday of that week, attached to the service of Small Compline. It is sung in full on these days, but in parts on the four Fridays of Lent before then, “*as a pre-festal and post-festal*” feature. This is because there are elements of the Feast of the Annunciation which are not celebrated because of the “mourning” and compunction of Great Lent.



If we examine the Service of the Akathistos Hymn for its content, we see that the individual parts of which it consists (the canon of the Mother of God and the 24 verses of the Salutations to the Mother of God) are of a glad and cheerful nature, projecting a sense of joy with the repetition of the word “rejoice” [connected in Greek with the word for joy, rather as “rejoice” is in English] and the phrases “Rejoice, you who are full of grace”, “Rejoice, Bride Unwedded”, which recall the salutation of the Archangel as recorded in the Gospel according to Saint Luke: “Rejoice, you who are full of grace, the Lord is with you” (1, 28). They also highlight the unique role of the Mother of God in the Divine Dispensation and in the salvation of the human race.

The canon of the Service of the Akathistos Hymn, “I shall open my mouth”, which includes many of the troparia also found in the canon for Mattins on the feast of the Annunciation, is a poem by Iosif the Hymnographer [feast day April 3]; while the irmi (the first tropario in each ode) were written by Saint John the Damascan.

Both hymnographers focus on four main points:

- a) the prefigurations of Christ and the Mother of God in the Old Testament,
- b) the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ,
- c) the personality and role of Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God in the completion of the plan of God's dispensation, and
- d) the salvation of the world, in Christ.

The twenty-four verses of the Akathistos Hymn form an acrostic, that is to say they are written with the first letter of each verse in the same order as in the Greek alphabet. This acrostic is evidence of the overall integrity of the hymn but, alas, reveals nothing about the poet, whose identity remains a mystery to this day.

The verses are divided into two large units, each with two sub-units. In the first, the hymn-writer attempts to present the historical revelation of God, while in the second he aims to describe Christology and soteriology.

The first unit comprises verses 1-12, in which the wonderful events of the life of Christ, from the moment of the Annunciation of the Mother of God until His Reception in the Temple. It is historical, with the first unit (verses 1-6 in Greek) related to the Annunciation, beginning at once with "A guardian angel was sent from heaven to greet ['to say rejoice to'] the Mother of God, while the second sub-unit (verses 7-12) refers to the Nativity of Christ, as this is described in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. It begins with the phrase "The shepherds heard the angels singing the presence of Christ incarnate", and has as its foundation the narrative in the Gospel according to Saint Luke, according to which: "the angel told the shepherds 'Do not fear. For behold, I bring tidings of great joy to you that will be for all the people. Today, in the city of David, a saviour has been born to you who is Christ the Lord" (2, 10-11).

The second unit contains verses 13-24 and sets out the dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church, in particular on the Christological and soteriological level. The first sub-unit (verses 13-18) examines the main points of the divine incarnation, with reference to the divinity of Jesus Christ, the purpose of the Incarnation, and our salvation in Him. Christ is called "King", "Lord", "Word beyond description", "unapproachable God", "immaterial Light" and "sublime God", with the hymnographer aiming to demonstrate His divine capacity, the transcendence of God, and the divine, inconceivable, consubstantial and equally-enthroned hypostasis of the Son and Word of God as the second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Naturally, the incarnation of the Son and Word of God should not be understood as a local movement, but as extreme condescension. The Fathers of the Church often use, improperly, the term “a movement of the Word”, to describe the event of the self-emptying of the Word and His assumption of human nature.

The divinity of the Word and Son of God cannot be divided, nor broken up. The Word was “entirely in the things below”, without abandoning “in any way the things above”. Another hymnological passage that could clarify for us the fact that the divinity is not broken up or constrained by local or chronological dimensions is one of the troparia of the 7th ode of the Mattins canon for Holy and Great Saturday, which explains very clearly: “The divinity of Christ, with the Father and Spirit, was one- in Hades, in the grave and in Eden”.

Finally, the second sub-unit of the second part of the 24 verses of the Akathistos Hymn (verses 19-24) clearly refer to the important role played by the Mother of God in God’s plan for our salvation in His dispensation, as the 24th and last verse of the Salutations puts it: “All-Hymned Mother, who bore the Word more Holy than all that is holy”.