

The Order of Divine Services

The order of divine services are divided into three cycles: daily, weekly, and yearly.

The Daily Cycle of Divine Services

The daily cycle of divine services consists of those services celebrated by the holy Orthodox Church during the course of one day. There are nine daily services: (1) Vespers, (2) Compline, (3) Midnight Office, (4) *Matins*, (5) First Hour, (6) Third Hour, (7) Sixth Hour, (8) Ninth Hour, and (9) the *Divine Liturgy*.

Following the example of Moses, who, describing the creation of the world by God, began the "day" with evening, the Orthodox Church begins the day with the evening service, Vespers.

Vespers is the service celebrated towards the end of daylight, in which we express our gratitude to God for the day which has passed.

Compline is composed of the reading of a series of prayers, in which we ask the Lord God for the forgiveness of sins. We also ask that He grant us repose of body and soul as we retire, and to preserve us from the wiles of the Devil as we sleep.

The Midnight Office is to be read at midnight in remembrance of the prayer of the Saviour during His night in the Garden of Gethsemane. This service summons the faithful to be ready at all times for the day of the Dread Judgement, which will come unexpectedly like "the bridegroom in the night" in the parable of the ten virgins.

Matins is celebrated in the morning prior to the rising of the sun. In this service we give thanks to God for the night which has passed, and we ask Him His mercy for the approaching day.

In Old and New Testament times, an "hour" meant a "watch" that lasted for three of our modern hours. Each service of the daily cycle corresponds to one of these three-hour divisions.

The First Hour covers the time from 6 A.M. to 9 A.M. The First Hour sanctifies the already breaking day with prayer.

The Third Hour covers the time from 9 A.M. to 12 P.M. It reminds us of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.

The Sixth Hour covers the time from 12 P.M. to 3 P.M. It reminds us of the Passion and Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Ninth Hour covers the time from 3 P.M. to 6 P.M. It reminds us of the death on the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Divine Liturgy is the main divine service. During the course of its celebration, the entire earthly life of the Saviour is called to mind, and the Mystery of Holy Communion is celebrated as instituted by the Saviour Himself in the Mystical Supper. It must be celebrated in the morning before the midday meal.

In ancient times, monastics and hermits conducted all of these services at the time appointed for each. Later, to accommodate the faithful, they were combined into three groups: evening, morning and daytime.

The evening services consist of the Ninth Hour, Vespers and Compline.

The morning services consist of Midnight Office, *Matins* and the First Hour.

The daytime services are the Third and Sixth Hours, and the *Divine Liturgy*.

On the eve of major feasts, and on Sundays, a service is conducted in the evening combining Vespers, Matins and the First Hour. This service is termed an All Night Vigil because early Christians (and some monasteries today) continued the service through the course of the entire night.

A Schematic Outline of the Daily Cycle of Services

Evening

1. Ninth Hour - three o'clock in the afternoon
2. Vespers - six o'clock in the afternoon
3. Compline - nine o'clock in the evening

Morning

1. Midnight Office - twelve midnight
2. Matins - three o'clock in the morning
3. First Hour - six o'clock in the morning

Daytime

1. Third Hour - nine o'clock in the morning
2. Sixth Hour - twelve noon
3. Divine Liturgy

The Weekly Cycle of Divine Services

The Weekly, or Seven-day, Cycle of Divine Services is the term for the order of services extending throughout the seven weekdays. Each day of the week is dedicated to an important

event, or else an exceptionally revered saint.

On Sunday, the Church remembers and glorifies the Resurrection of Christ.

On Monday, the first day after the Resurrection, the bodiless hosts are celebrated. They are the angels created before the human race, who are the servants closest to God.

On Tuesday, St. John the Baptist is glorified, as the greatest of the prophets and the righteous of the Old Testament.

On Wednesday, the betrayal of the Lord by Judas is remembered; the services are thus centered around the Cross of the Lord. This day is a fast day.

On Thursday, the Holy Apostles and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker are glorified.

On Friday, the Passion and death of the Saviour on the Cross is remembered, and the services honor the Cross of the Lord. This day is kept as a fast day also.

On Saturday, the Sabbath or Day of Rest, the Mother of God is glorified (she is also glorified every other day), along with the forefathers, prophets, apostles, martyrs, monastics, righteous and all the saints who have attained peace in the Lord. All those who have reposed in the true faith and in the hope of resurrection and life eternal are also remembered.

The Annual Cycle of Divine Services

The Annual Cycle of Divine Services is the term for the order of services conducted during the course of the entire calendar year.

Each day of the year is dedicated to the memory of one or more saints, as well as special sacred events, either in the form of feast days or fasts.

Of all the feasts, the greatest is that of the Bright Resurrection of Christ, Pascha. It is thus called the feast of feasts. Pascha occurs no earlier than the twenty-second of March (the fourth of April, new style), and no later than the twenty-fifth of April (the eighth of May). Pascha is on the first Sunday after the equinoxal new moon and always after the Jewish celebration of Passover.

In addition, twelve great feasts are held in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Theotokos throughout the year. There are also feasts in honor of the great saints and of the bodiless hosts of heaven, the angels. Thus, the festivals of the year are distinguished, by their content, into those of the Lord, the Theotokos, and the saints.

The celebration of the feasts is further divided into the immovable and the movable. The immovable occur every year on the same calendar date of the month; the movable occur every year on the same day of the week, but fall on various dates of the month due to their relationship

to Pascha.

The celebration of the church services of the feasts are distinguished according to various degrees of solemnity. The great feasts are always celebrated with an All Night Vigil; lesser feasts will have a Vigil according to custom. The solemnity and joy of all other days in the church year is indicated by guidelines in the rubrics.

The church year begins on the first of September, according to the Julian (Old Style) calendar. The entire yearly cycle of divine services is constructed around its relationship to Pascha.

Source: <http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/readings/divine/order.shtml> linked from <http://acrod.org/readingroom/worship/>