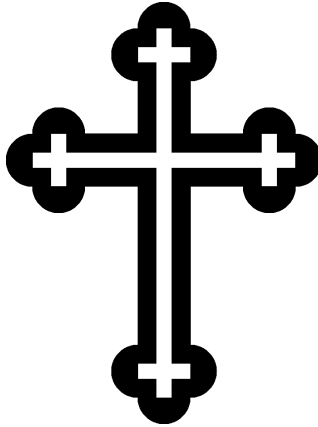


✠ SUNDAY ORTHROS ✠



AN ORTHODOX GUIDEBOOK

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Joshua Mattson

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✠ TABLE OF CONTENTS ✠

Introduction.....	2
Introductory Prayers.....	3
The Six Psalms.....	4
Apolytikion Resurrection.....	5
Kathismata.....	7
Evlogetaria.....	7
The Eothinon Gospels.....	8
Psalm 50.....	19
The Intercession.....	19
Kontakion.....	20
Synaxarion.....	20
The Canon.....	21
The Megalynaria	22
Exaposteilaria.....	23
The Praises	23
The Great Doxology.....	24

✠ Introduction ✠

***“Let us who have beheld the resurrection of Christ
worship our Holy Lord Jesus who is alone without sin...”***

As these words joyfully resound from the Orthros service each Sunday of the year, we are reminded to remember our witness of Christ’s resurrection and our calling to worship Him “who is alone without sin”. The Church supports us in this endeavor and command through giving us the spiritual feast of Sunday Orthros. This holy service is saturated with the light of the resurrection and greatly benefits our spirits. The word Orthros comes from the Greek word “dawn” or “daybreak” (sometimes referred to as Matins, it’s Latin counterpart) and just as the Myrrh Bearing Women came to anoint the body of Christ early at the dawn, so likewise each Sunday morning we have the opportunity to do the same. Not only does this service strengthen our faith in the resurrection of our Lord, by allowing us to witness the empty tomb, but it prepares us spiritually and intellectually for the Divine Liturgy, that we may go from “strength to strength” as the Psalmist declares. In this brief guidebook we will examine some of the key features of the Sunday Orthros service which assist us on our journey to behold the risen Lord, such as The Six Psalms, The Eothinon Gospel Readings, The Canon and The Synaxarion. The intent here is not to detail every aspect of the complex Orthros service, but to highlight some of the major features which guide and direct our spiritual senses to the tomb of Christ. May God grant us deep love and reverence for this service and may the stone be rolled away from our hearts that we may worship our *“Holy Lord Jesus who is alone without sin”*.

-Joshua Mattson

✠ INTRODUCTORY PRAYERS ✠

Every Orthros begins with the Priest making the glorious proclamation “Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.” Immediately proceeding, the Priest is given the censer and performs the Great Censing, which consists of a censing of the entire Church Temple, this includes the Altar, the Iconostasis, the Sanctuary, Icons, clergy and faithful present in the service. The burning of incense is an ancient practice that was performed in the first and second Temple periods, and was continued by the Church. The incense is symbolic of our prayers rising to heaven as a sweet aroma pleasing to God. While the Priest is censing, the Trisagion Prayers are prayed, followed by a chanting of “O Lord save thy people...” and a beautiful prayer to the Theotokos “O fearsome champion...” Following the censing, there is a Litany which concludes with a chanting by the Priest, which is unique to the Sunday Orthros service:

“Glory to the holy, consubstantial, life-giving and undivided Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.”

✠ THE SIX PSALMS ✠

“Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name” Psalm 102:1

The Six Psalms, known in greek as the *Hexapsalmos*, are read at the start of each Orthros service (except during Bright Week). They consist of the following: **Psalm 3, 37, 62, 87, 102, & 142 (LXX numbering)** These Psalms form a short summary of the Christian life, expressing the pains and joys we experience on our journey here. They exemplify and exhort us to pour out our hearts to the living God, whether we experience trial or blessing. While these Psalms are read, it is the tradition to stand still and not to move around in the Church, no lighting of candles, no venerating of Icons, we do not even make the sign of the cross. Furthermore, it is said that the time it takes to read The Six Psalms, is the identical length of time it will take for Christ to judge the earth at the Final Judgement. We are called to listen to these Psalms with great reverence and sobriety, calling to mind the end of our days and the time when we will be called to give an account for all we have done. While these Psalms are chanted, the Priest silently reads twelve prayers asking intercessions for the faithful. Following the first three Psalms, the priest moves from the altar and stands in front of the icon of Christ. It has been described that the Priest leaving the altar during the bitterness of Psalm 87, is likened to Christ hearing the cries of mankind and leaving the heavens to come and save us. At the completion of these six Psalms, there is a Great Litany also known as the **Litany of Peace**, because it begins with the petition “in peace let us pray to the Lord”. Then we hear the uplifting declaration: *“God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.”*

✠ APOLYTIKION OF THE RESURRECTION ✠

One Apolytikion is sung at the conclusion of Great Vespers, and is repeated at the beginning of Sunday Orthros, and then again during the Divine Liturgy. These magnificent eight Troparia detail the various resurrection accounts and the cosmic effects of Christ's rising. They are followed with a Little Litany. Let us commit these words to memory, holding their truth and joy in our hearts.

Tone 1

While the stone was sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. For which cause the heavenly powers cried aloud unto Thee, O giver of life. Glory to Thy Resurrection O Christ, glory to Thy kingdom, glory to Thy providence, O Thou Who alone art the lover of mankind.

Tone 2

When thou didst submit thyself unto death, O thou deathless and immortal One, then thou didst destroy hell with thy Godly power, and when thou didst raise the dead from beneath the earth, all the powers of heaven did cry aloud unto thee: O Christ, thou Giver of Life, glory to thee.

Tone 3

Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad, for the Lord hath done a mighty act with his own arm. He hath trampled down death by death and become the First born from the dead. He hath delivered us from the depths of hades, granting the world, the great mercy.

Tone 4

Having learned the joyful message of the resurrection from the angel, the women disciple of the Lord cast from them their parental condemnation, and proudly broke the news to the disciples, saying death hath been spoiled. Christ God is risen, granting the world great mercy.

Tone 5

Let us believers praise and worship the Word, coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our Salvation; for he took pleasure in ascending the Cross in the flesh, to suffer death, and to raise the dead by his glorious resurrection.

Tone 6

When Mary stood at thy grave looking for thy sacred body, angelic powers shown above thy revered tomb, and the soldiers who were to keep guard became as dead men. Thou led hades captive and wast not tempted thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and list give life to the world. O thou who art risen from the dead, O Lord, glory to thee.

Tone 7

Thou didst shatter death by thy Cross; thou didst open paradise to the thief thou didst turn the sadness of the ointment bearing women into joy, and did bid thine Apostles proclaim a warning that thou hast risen O Christ, granting to the world the Great Mercy.

Tone 8

From the heights thou didst descend, O Compassionate One; and thou didst submit to the three-day burial, that thou might deliver us from passion. Thou art our Life and our Resurrection O Lord, glory to thee.

✠ KATHISMATA ✠

"When Thou didst taste death in the flesh, O Lord, Thou didst check bitter death by Thy Resurrection, and didst make man to prevail over it..." -Resurrectional Kath.

The Orthodox Psalter is broken down into twenty different sections called "Kathismata". Originally, Kathismata from the Psalter would be read during Orthros, and in-between these sections, hymns would be sung which were themed according to the Church calendar. In most Parishes today, the Kathismata from the Psalter are no longer read (this is done mostly in monasteries) but the hymns are still sung, and are also referred to now as "Kathismata". On Sunday Orthros, these are themed according to the resurrection and offer splendid reflections on Christ, the Theotokos and Orthodox Theology.

✠ EVLOGETARIA ✠

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me thy statutes."

The Evlogetaria are a series of eight hymns which beautifully detail the account of the resurrection. They are only sung during the Sunday Orthros service and they especially highlight the Myrrh-Bearing Women. In between each verse is sung the refrain "Blessed art Thou, O Lord...". The text of the hymn is unchanging from week to week. On Church Feast days, the Polyeleos is sung in place of the Evlogetaria. Polyeleos, means "many mercies", a selection of Psalms are read, along with the chanting of "Lord have mercy".

✠ THE EOTHINON GOSPELS ✠

“And that we may be accounted worthy to hear the Holy Gospel, let us beseech the Lord our God.”

At the midpoint of the Sunday Orthros service lies the Eothinon Gospel readings. There are eleven total readings and one is read each Sunday during the Orthros service after the chanting of “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”. The readings follow a repeating eleven week cycle which begins the first Sunday after Pentecost and continues uninterrupted until Holy Pascha (with the exception of feast days). These readings are taken from the eleven resurrection appearances given by the four Gospel writers. The number eleven also corresponds to the eleven apostles who witnessed the risen Christ. Instead of the Gospel being read at the Ambon, the Priest reads from the Holy Altar, symbolizing Christ in the tomb. After the reading, the Priest enters the nave and presents the Gospel for all to venerate, which is likened to Christ appearing to the disciples after the resurrection. These readings are a feast for Christian joy, and even if we are unable to attend Orthros on a given Sunday we can be edified by reading them at home.

To follow along with the weekly Sunday readings, visit the liturgics webpage of the Antiochian Archdiocese website:

<https://www.antiochian.org/liturgicday>

Scroll to the bottom of the page, and open the pdf entitled “Liturgical Reading Calendar”. Here you will see the Eothinon Reading for every Sunday of the year.

✠ EOTHINON 1 - Matthew 28:16-20 ✠

The Commissioning of the Disciples

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

✠ EOTHINON 2 - Mark 16:1-8 ✠

The Resurrection of Jesus

¹⁶And when the sabbath was past, Mary Mag'dalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salo'me, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?” ⁴And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back—it was very large. ⁵And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. ⁶And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.” ⁸And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

✠ EOTHINON 3 - Mark 16:9-20 ✠

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

⁹ Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Mag'dalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰ She went out and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹ But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

Jesus Appears to Two Disciples

¹² After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

Jesus Commissions the Disciples

¹⁴ Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

The Ascension of Jesus

¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.

✠ EOTHINON 4 - Luke 24:1-12 ✠

The Resurrection of Jesus

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; ⁵ and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise.” ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Mag’dalene and Jo-an’na and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home wondering at what had happened

✠ EOTHINON 5 - Luke 24:12-35 ✠

The Walk to Emmaus

¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home wondering at what had happened ¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma’us, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near

and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cle’opas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning ²³ and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see.” ²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, ²⁹ but they constrained him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” ³³ And they

rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, ³⁴ who said, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

✠ EOTHINON 6 - Luke 24:36-53 ✠

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

³⁶ As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them. ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts?

³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.”

The Ascension of Jesus

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

✠ EOTHINON 7 - John 20:1-10 ✠

The Resurrection of Jesus

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Mag'dalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. ⁴ They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; ⁵ and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, ⁷ and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

✠ EOTHINON 8 - John 20:11-18 ✠

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rab-bo’ni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ¹⁸ Mary Mag’dalene went and said to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

✠ EOTHINON 9 - John 20:19-31 ✠

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send

you.”²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

✠ EOTHINON 10 - John 21:1-14 ✠

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

21 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe’ri-as; and he revealed himself in this way.² Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan’a-el of

Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zeb'edee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards^[a] off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

✠ EOTHINON 11 - John 21:15-25 ✠

Jesus and Peter

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than

these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go."¹⁹ (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, "Follow me."

Jesus and the Beloved Disciple

²⁰ Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"

²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" ²² Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"

²³ The saying spread abroad among the brethren that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

✠ PSALM 50 ✠

“Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right Spirit within me”

Proceeding the Eothinon Gospel Reading there is a reading of “Let us who have beheld the resurrection of Christ...”, followed by Psalm 50 (LXX). While this is taking place, the Priest brings the Gospel Book out into the nave for everyone to venerate. The words of this Psalm remind us of the sacrament of Baptism and likewise the necessity of the internal cleansing of our Spirit. As the Gospel Book represents Christ, we are reminded to approach our Savior with contrition, complete confession of our sins and a deep sense of our unworthiness. We are called to beg for God’s mercy, and to trust in His saving grace and power, as King David says, “a sacrifice unto God is a broken Spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise”.

✠ THE INTERCESSION ✠

At the conclusion of Psalm 50, the choir sings the beautiful hymn "Jesus, having risen from the grave as He foretold, hath given unto us life eternal and Great Mercy." Then the Deacon prays a glorious prayer known as The Intercession. In this prayer the Deacon calls upon a multitude of Saints to intercede for us, according to rank, beginning with the Theotokos and St. John the Forerunner and concluding with the Saints commemorated for the day.

✠ KONTAKION ✠

In the 5th century, St. Romanos the Melodist composed a collection of Kontakia, many of which are still used by the Church today. These Kontakia are poetic hymns which describe the feast or Saint of the day. As the original hymns were quite lengthy, over time it became the custom to read only the major Kontakion hymn for the day. This is sung at each Orthros service after the reading of Psalm 50.

✠ THE SYNAXARION ✠

The Synaxarion is a collection of miniature biographies of the lives of the Saints. This is read at each Orthros service and commemorates the Saint of the day, and also any feast that is being celebrated. These readings are intended to introduce us to the righteous men and women of the Church who model for us the Christian life and inspire us to “fight the good fight”. Most current editions of the Synaxarion are based on the work of St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite from the 18th century.

✠ THE CANON ✠

“It is the day of Resurrection, let us be radiant, O ye peoples; Pascha, the Lord’s Pascha” -Paschal Canon

Forming a total of nine odes, the Canon is a set of hymns which is formed by a pattern of Eirmos and Troparia. The Canons are themed based on Church feasts, seasons and saints. They sometimes give you a preview of what is to come as a form of “paramon”, a Greek word meaning extraordinary preparation. For example, on the first Sunday after the Feast of Ascension, we hear of the “fiery tongues” of Pentecost. The second ode of the Canon is generally omitted, except during Great Lent, because of its penitential nature. The final stanza of every ode of the canon is called the Katavasia, and at the conclusion of the Canon, the Deacon does a Great Censing which occurs during the Megalynaria. Finally, the Canon is always preceded by the Little Litany. The Litanies are repeated throughout Orthros as a transition between different major parts of the service.

✠ THE MEGALYNARIA ✠

“More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare the Seraphim, thou who without corruption bearest God the word, and art truly Theotokos we magnify Thee.”

According to Orthodox tradition, it was the Theotokos who was first to see her resurrected son at the tomb on Sunday morning. How fitting that we turn to Her many times in each Orthros service, offering Her hymns of thanksgiving as exhorted by the Deacon: “The Theotokos and Mother of the Light let us honor and magnify in song”. On most Sundays, while the Great Censing takes place, the choir sings the song of praise composed by the Theotokos when she visited her cousin Elizabeth (*Luke 1:46-55*). This famous hymn occurs during the 9th Ode of the Canon. After each line of the hymn, we sing the refrain “More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious...”. There are other forms of Megalynaria, for example during the Bright Season we sing “Shine, shine O new Jerusalem”. After the ninth ode, another litany is prayed, in which we again hear the Deacon call us to commemorate our all Holy Mother, as he does at the conclusion of every Litany.

“Calling to remembrance our all-holy, immaculate, most-blessed and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the saints: let us commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.”

✠ EXAPOSTEILARIA ✠

Exaposteilaria comes from the Greek verb meaning “to send out”, this is a practical reference to ancient times when a chanter was “sent out” into the middle of the Church for this chanting, and also a reference to a verse in Psalm 42, “send out thy Light Oh Lord”. These hymns are sung in the later half of Sunday Orthros and are always themed in accordance with the Sunday Eothinon Reading. They offer a brief summarization of the resurrection events read from the Gospel, giving us yet another opportunity to contemplate the wondrous resurrection of our Lord!

✠ AINOI - “PRAISES” ✠

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord...”

The “Praises” follow the Exaposteilaria and are sung according to the weekly tone. They begin with declarative verses from the Psalter calling all creation to praise God, for “to Thee O God, is due our song”. These are drawn from Psalms 148, 149 and 150. On Sunday Orthros, verses are sung between the concluding verses of these Psalms and are themed in accordance with the Resurrection and Church feasts.

“Come together, all ye people, and know the power of the dreadful secret; for Christ our Savior, the eternal Word, hath been crucified for our sake, and was buried willingly, and hath risen from the dead to save all...” -For the Resurrection in Tone 3

✠ THE GREAT DOXOLOGY ✠

“Glory to thee, who has shown us the light; Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men...”

Forming a bridge which connects and transitions Sunday Orthros into the Divine Liturgy service is the Great Doxology. This magnificent hymn is sung in accordance to the weekly tone, and traditionally is sung antiphonally between the Priest, or Bishop, and the choir. The content of the Great Doxology consists of both prayers and praises to God and concludes with the thrice singing of “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us...” After The Great Doxology, the final glorious hymn of Sunday Orthros is sung:

Troparia for Tones 1-4

Today is Salvation come into the world. Let us sing praises to Him Who arose from the grave, the Author of our life; for having by death destroyed death, He hath given us victory and Great Mercy.

Troparia for Tones 5-8

Having risen from the tomb, and having burst the bonds of Hades, Thou didst loose the condemnation of death, O Lord, releasing all mankind from the snares of the enemy. Having manifested Thyself to Thine Apostles, Thou didst send them forth to proclaim Thee; and through them Thou hast granted Thy peace unto the civilized world, O Thou Who alone art plenteous in mercy.