

AKATHISTOS HYMN

TO THE MOTHER OF GOD

Translation
for Chant and Choral Recitation
by

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PRESENTATION

1. *Name.* -The liturgical hymn of the Byzantine Church of the 5th century, called by nomenclature or antonomasia : «Akathistos» was and still remains the model of many of the ancient and recent descriptive hymn-like and litany-like compositions. «Akathistos» is not the original title but a direction: «not-seated », because the Church enjoins to sing it or recite it «while standing», as is done when listening to the Gospel, in sign of reverent respect to the Mother of God.

2. *Structure.* -The hymn consists of 24 stanzas divided into two parts, each of 12 stanzas: one is a liturgical-narrative, the other is dogmatic, both are subdivided into two sections of 6 stanzas: the first is Christocentric, the second is ecclesiocentric. The odd numbered stanzas are amplified with 12 Marian greetings.

3. *Liturgical importance.* -The Byzantine Church has devoted to this hymn a liturgical memorial on the fifth Saturday of Lent, «Saturday of the Akathistos», and a section of it is sung on every preceding

Saturday in Lent. But monks, priests and the faithful recite it on many other occasions, also even every day, because they instinctively notice its beauty and they recognize as the highest expression of their doctrine and piety toward the holy Mother of God. Almost all of the monasteries and the Byzantine and Slavic Churches reproduce scenes of the Akathistos on the walls of the sacred buildings, on the vestments, on the liturgical objects, or as frame to the most famous icons. It has also exercised a notable influence on our medieval tradition, thanks to the Latin version that dates back to the year 800.

4. *Theological value.* -The Akathistos is indeed an inspired composition, that contemplates the Virgin-Mother in the historic-salvific plan of God from the creation to the last fulfillment, indissolubly uniting the Mother of the Word and immaculate Spouse of the divine Bridegroom to Christ and to the Church. The hymn harmonizes the Christological and Marian dictations, wisely subordinating the Mother to the Son, the Marian praise to the divine glorification. It draws - according to the oriental and liturgical methodology - the contents and their expressions both from the

images of creation, that manifest the Creator, as well as from the episodes, preannouncements and figures of the Old Testament, which prepared the advent of the Savior; but above all from the faith professed and celebrated by the Church: professed in the councils of Nicea (325), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), from which it directly depends; celebrated especially in the cycle of Christmas oriented to Easter, that it faithfully follows and interprets. The Akathistos therefore sings the mystery of the Virgin-Mother in the mystery of Christ and the Church, and the event of the Incarnation and Christmas in the light of the Resurrection of the Savior and of the redeemed. For this the author intentionally constructed it on the symbolic numbers that represent Christ and the Church: the number 2, that indicates the two natures of the Son - the divine and the human natures - convergent in the one person of the Word; and the number 12, that reveals the heavenly Jerusalem described in Revelation or Apocalypse, that Spouse of the Lamb, resplendent of the divine glory (Rev/Ap: 19 and 21). From this vision the hymn infers the “efimni”: «Hail, Virgin and Bride» and «Álleluia», presenting as

already accomplished that which the whole Church desires and hopes to be.

5. *Ecumenical significance.* -The Akathistos is the only text that proposes in a prayer form how much the Church of the origins, still all united, has believed and expressed about Mary in its official pronouncements and in its universal consent of faith.

6. *Author.* - Many names have been proposed. One only is reliable: that of Basil of Seleucia, a profound theologian and elegant writer, expert of the traditions of Alexandria, Antioch and Syria, one of the most influential Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon (451).

7. *Object.* -The hymn was not composed for a particular Marian feast but presumably to celebrate the great mystery of the Mother of God patron of Constantinople in her sanctuary of Blacheme, built by the Empress Pulcheria (450-453) which was a sign and pledge of the heavenly protection of the Virgin on the city and on the empire.

8. *Version and song.* - Composed for the song in a most refined Greek meter, the hymn is untranslatable. We present it in the rhythmic version made by Paul M. Addison, Servant of Mary, which is as much as

possible faithful to the original text. The text can be sung with the melody of *Maestro* Luigi Lasagna, present in our internet site *www.akathistos.net*, or with another suitable melody.

9. *Indulgences*. -The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, who presided in various celebrations of the Akathistos, granted for the recitation of the hymn, the same indulgences of the holy Rosary. Thus the *Manual of the Indulgences* (4th edition, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2003, no. 23, p. 76) states: « the *plenary indulgence* is granted to the faithful who recites the hymn *Akathistos* in a church or oratory, or in a family, in a religious Community, in an association of the faithful and in a general way when more of the faithful gather for an honest motive. In other circumstances instead the indulgence is a *partial one*».

This is a happy wish because the Church returns to breathe with its «two lungs», as desired by John Paul II in the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 34.

Ermanno M. Toniolo, o.s.m.

THEMATIC SEQUENCE OF THE AKATHISTOS

- Stanzas 1-4: the Annunciation
- Stanza 5: the Visitation
- Stanza 6: the revelation to Joseph
- Stanza 7: the adoration of the shepherds
- Stanzas 8-10: the adoration of the Magi
- Stanza 11: the flight to and return from Egypt
- Stanza 12: the meeting with Simeon
- Stanza 13: the Virgin Mary, the new Eve
- Stanza 14: the Word who came down to raise us
- Stanza 15: the Mother-Virgin, throne of God and door of heaven
- Stanza 16: the angels, surprised, contemplate
- Stanza 17: the mystery of the virgin birth
- Stanza 18: the Son of God came to save us
- Stanza 19: the ever Virgin, model and support of the virgins
- Stanza 20: the incessant praise of the faithful to the Lord
- Stanza 21: Mary, source of the Light, Mother of the Easter mysteries
- Stanza 22: Christ nailed our sentence on the cross
- Stanza 23: Mary, holy ark that precedes and accompanies the people of God
- Stanza 24: the Mother of God, suppliant, our Advocate

AKATHISTOS HYMN

BIBLICAL-LITURGICAL SECTION

- T**he foremost of the Angels
was sent down from Heaven
to say “Hail!” to the Mother of God.
At his greeting of spirit, not earth,
when he saw you made flesh in her womb,
 saving Lord,
your Angel was joyful,
proclaiming your Mother’s great praise:

Rejoice:through you is our joy made resplendent;
Rejoice: through you is our curse now eclipsed.

Rejoice, the saving of Adam who fell;
Rejoice, annulment of tears of Eve.

Rejoice, inaccessible summit
 beyond understanding;
Rejoice, wondrous deepness of depth
 for the knowledge of angels.

Rejoice, holy place where the King
 did establish His Throne;
Rejoice, who gave birth to the Life
 and sustainer of all.

Rejoice, the Star who announces the Dawn;
Rejoice, the Womb wherein God is made Flesh.

Rejoice, for through you is Creation made new;
Rejoice, for its Maker is a Child born through you.

Rejoice,holy Virgin and Bride!

2. Since well Mary knew of
her virginal calling,
with courage to th'Angel she spoke:
“Your singular word of announcement
seems strange for my spirit to grasp
and to know;
from the womb of a virgin
a child you fortell, as you cry:

Alleluia!”

3. The Virgin then pondered
to enter the mystery
and asked of the Angel of God:
“How then can my virginal womb
ever bring forth a child to the world?
You must say!”.
Then the Angel most reverently
sang of her praises and said:

Rejoice, the guide to the planning of God:
Rejoice, the light of a mystery profound.

Rejoice, the first of the wonders of Christ;
Rejoice, in whom all His Truths are brought forth.

Rejoice, stair of Heaven, providing
the pathway for God;
Rejoice, for you span the great gulf
between Heaven and Man.

Rejoice, splendid sign whom the choirs
of angels proclaim;
Rejoice, fearful scourge of the legions
and powers of ill.

Rejoice, o Bearer of ineffable Light;
Rejoice: sole keeper of the means of this sign.

Rejoice, ever greater than knowledge of sages;
Rejoice, in the hearts of the faithful you shine.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

4. **T**he Power of the Highest
o'ershadowed and made Mother
the Virgin unknowing of man:
Her womb thus awakened by God, did
become a good field of rich life
unto all
who are longing to welcome salvation
and sing forth in praise:

Alleluia!

5. **W**ith the Lord in her womb,
holy Mary most caring,
paid visit and greeted her cousin.
The child whom Elizabeth bore
heard the words that the Virgin pronounced
and was glad,
and with dance for his song he gave praise
to the Mother of God:

Rejoice, o branch of a root that is holy;
Rejoice, the tree with most perfect of Fruit.

Rejoice, you nurture the God of creation;
Rejoice, producing the Planter of life.

Rejoice, holy field bearing fruit\$
of abundance of mercies;
Rejoice, too, the table o'erladen
with heavenly gifts.

Rejoice, for you bring shoots of life
to a land that was arid;
Rejoice, for you build for the faithful
a refuge secure.

Rejoice, fine incense of all supplication;
Rejoice, sweet pardon for sorrowing World.

Rejoice, sign of mercy of God to our Race;
Rejoice, sign of hope of our Race before God.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

6. **W**ith his heart in great turmoil,
his thoughts much opposed,
wise Joseph turned backwards and forth:
while seeing you still ever pure,
he feared that you may have been faithless,
o Virgin!
But once having heard of your Child
through the Spirit, he exclaimed:

Alleluia!

7. **T**he Shepherds had heard
the great chorus of angels
singing of Christ in our Flesh.
They ran to behold Him the Shepherd,
and looked on Him, innocent Lamb
of the Lord,
being nourished by Mary the Virgin,
to whom they sang praise:

Rejoice, o Mother of Shepherd and Lamb;
Rejoice, the Fold for the Faithful of God.

Rejoice, o bolt barring evil assault;
Rejoice, the Key turning Heaven's own door.

Rejoice, for through you all the heavens
exult with the earth;
Rejoice, for through you do the earth
and the heav'n sing as one.

Rejoice, tireless voice of the chosen
Apostles of God;
Rejoice, restless longing of Martyrs
whose blood is for Christ.

Rejoice, o powerful foundation for Faith;
Rejoice, o wonderful ensign of Grace.

Rejoice, for through you evil Hell was laid bare;
Rejoice, for through you were we clothed in God's glory.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

8. In heaven a star
pointing out the Eternal
was followed by Wise Men in light.
For them a sure lantern of guidance,
it helped them to seek You, o God,
the Most High.
On attaining the Lord unattainable
great was their cry:

Alleluia!

9. In the hands of His Mother
they saw Him at last,
the great God, whose own hand made us all.
Full well did they know He was Lord,
though hidden in form of a servant,
and gifts
did they offer in kindness and said
to His Mother so blest:

Rejoice, o Mother of Sun without setting;
Rejoice, the dawning of spiritual Day.

Rejoice, extinguishing firebrands of falsehood;
Rejoice, o beacon to Trinity's Truth.

Rejoice, for you darken the throne
of the Tyrant so hated;
Rejoice, for you show us the Christ
of great mercy as Lord.

Rejoice: you absolve us from cruel
and terrible rites;
Rejoice, for you save us from murk
and the squalor of fate.

Rejoice: the worship of fire you destroy;
Rejoice: the burning of vice you extinguish.

Rejoice, clearest guide for the mind of believers;
Rejoice, purest joy of the world and its peoples.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

10. **T**he heralds of God
did the Magi become
on the path back to Babylon bound.
Your prophecy, Lord, they fulfilled,
and your Name, saving Christ, they announced
to the world,
ever heedless of Herod, the foolish,
who never could sing:

Alleluia!

11. **S**hining forth into Egypt
the splendour of Truth,
you drove out the darkness of error:
at your Power of God, blessed Lord,
the Idols fell down in their weakness
made naught.
And men being saved
to the Mother of God sang in praise:

Rejoice, raising up of humanity fallen;
Rejoice, tearing down of the Underworld's Reign.

Rejoice: the trampling of lies and of error;
Rejoice, unmasking idolatry's fraud.

Rejoice, blessed ocean engulfing
the Pharaoh supreme;
Rejoice, blessed rock pouring forth
the sound waters of Life.

Rejoice, fiery pillar, a light
in the darkness for all;
Rejoice, never cloud of protection
will shield us like you.

Rejoice: you give us the Manna of Heaven;
Rejoice: you serve us the holiest of Food.

Rejoice, ever spiritual Land of His Promise;
Rejoice, ever flowing with honey and milk.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

12. **O**n the point of departing
this world so deceiving
was Simeon, the watchman, inspired.
As a baby presented, so small,
yet as Lord in perfection he knew You,
o Christ,
and moved by the Wisdom Eternal,
he cried out in praise:

Alleluia!

THEMATIC SECTION

13. **T**he Maker of all
made Creation anew
to appear amid us, His dear children:
the Lord blossomed forth from the Virgin,
whose Womb He preserved ever pure
and unstained.
Thus thrilled by this wonder
we sing to the Virgin with joy:

Rejoice, bright flower of a life uncorrupted;
Rejoice, chaste crown of possession of self.

Rejoice: awarding a glimpse of the Risen;
Rejoice, unveiling the life of the angels.

Rejoice, fairest plant bearing fruit
to be food of the Faithful;
Rejoice, tree of beauty, whose shade
is protection for all.

Rejoice: in your Womb you bore Him
who would guide those who wander;
Rejoice: you brought forth to the light
the Releaser of slaves.

Rejoice, People's plea to the righteous Judge;
Rejoice, forgiveness for all who are lost.

Rejoice, welcome garment for souls stripped of grace;
Rejoice, fullest love more than any desire.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

14. **E**nthralled by His birth
we go forth from this world
to consider the wonders of heaven.
In humanity's lowliest likeness,
He came and was born in our midst,
 the Most High,
to lead to the heavens all those
who acclaim Him with joy:

Alleluia!

15. **H**e came to His earth
yet the heav'ns still were filled
by God's Word in His infinite glory.
Our God, not by changing His place,
but inclining most humbly in love
 to our race,
was born of the Virgin, the Mother,
to whom we declare:

Rejoice, o Throne of the infinite God;
Rejoice, the door of the Mystery sublime.

Rejoice, sure Truth which unsettles th'incredulous;
Rejoice, reliable boast for believers.

Rejoice, holy dwelling more holy than
 throne of the Cherubim;
Rejoice, precious vessel more blessed than
 throne of the Seraphim.

Rejoice: for in you are extremes
 of greatness united;
Rejoice: for together as one
 you are Virgin and Mother.

Rejoice: in you came forgiveness of sin;
Rejoice: in you Heaven's gates were flung wide.

Rejoice, blessed key of the Kingdom of Christ;
Rejoice, hopeful way to the treasure of God.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

16. **A**mazed were the angels
to witness the awesome
event of your bless'd Incarnation:
inaccessible God above all
they saw giving access to us
in our Flesh,
and dwelling with us, so that each
can acclaim You and cry:

Alleluia!

17. **T**he finest of speakers
are silent as fish
before you, holy Mother of God.
Never word from their lips will express
how a Mother you are, yet a Virgin
remain.
But we, full of wonder can sing
of the Mystery in faith:

Rejoice, o vessel of Wisdom Eternal;
Rejoice, the treasure of God's loving care.

Rejoice: you show how the clever are foolish;
Rejoice: you send into silence the wise.

Rejoice: before you subtle schemes
of disputors are stupid;
Rejoice: before you mortal myths
and their makers are empty.

Rejoice: all the sophists are snared
in confusion by you;
Rejoice: simple fishermen catch
their fulfillment in you.

Rejoice: you draw us from depths of dark error;
Rejoice, great lighthouse to lead us to Truth.

Rejoice, saving vessel for those who seek Rescue;
Rejoice, port and haven on seaways of life.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

18. **T**o save the creation
the Lord of the universe
freely came down to the earth.
The God, who was always our Shepherd,
now chose to appear in our midst
as the Lamb;
in our image He called us
whose image we are, thus we pray:

Alleluia!

19. **D**efender of virgins
who follow your way,
are you, blessed Virgin and Mother:
for thus, Purest Creature, He made you,
the Lord who holds sway over Heaven
and Earth,
as He dwelt in your Womb while inviting us
all to proclaim:

Rejoice, blest column of holy virginity;
Rejoice, o passage and portal to Rescue.

Rejoice, beginning of birth for the spirit;
Rejoice: bringing forth all the bounty of God.

Rejoice: you have given back Life
to those born in disgrace;
Rejoice, for in you have the foolish
found fulness of wisdom.

Rejoice: the Seducer of Hearts was made
pow'rless by You;
Rejoice: the Begetter of Chastity
touched us through you.

Rejoice: where Heaven and Earth are encoupled;
Rejoice: where Faithful and Lord are made one.

Rejoice, loving Woman: you nourish all virgins;
Rejoice, holy Maid: you lead brides to the Groom.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

20. **N**o song has been written
that ever could equal
your numberless graces, o Lord.
Indeed, were we offering canticles
countless as grains in the sand
of the sea,
we never could compass your gifts
to your servants, who sing:

Alleluia!

21. **W**e look to the Virgin
most holy, the beacon
who brightens the camp of our darkness.
In her shines the light of God's presence:
she shows us the way to the knowledge
of God.
A splendour is she for our minds
as all praise her with song:

Rejoice, bright ray of the Sunlight of Heaven;
Rejoice, the beam of a Light never setting.

Rejoice, clear lightning to flash in our minds;
Rejoice, o thunder of fear for our foes.

Rejoice, for from you comes the Light
who illumines the world;
Rejoice, blessed spring giving
manifold waters of Life.

Rejoice, Pool of Healing where people
were bathed as of old;
Rejoice, for in you comes the One
who now washes our sins.

Rejoice, bless'd Font where our souls are made pure;
Rejoice, the cup overflowing with joy:

Rejoice, pleasant fragrance of Christ who anoints us;
Rejoice, from whose life comes the Mystical Banquet.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

22. **H**is wish to redeem
that most ancient of Debts
brought the Saviour to dwell in our midst.
In His person was payment for all,
who had lost every title to gift
of God's Grace.
He cancelled Sin's charter and therefore
we chant in His praise:

Allelula!

23. **A**t the birth of your Son
all His creatures rejoice,
Living Temple, o Bearer of God.
Your Womb was the worthiest dwelling
of Him who holds all in His hand
as the Lord.
Most haly and glorious He made you
and taught us to sing:

Rejoice, o Tent where God's Word finds repose;
Rejoice, excelling the "Holy of Holies".

Rejoice, the Ark that the Spirit has burnished;
Rejoice, unfailing rich treasure of Life.

Rejoice, precious crown: saintly Rulers
acclaim you their glory;
Rejoice, noble banner: good priests all
proclaim you their boast.

Rejoice, mighty fortress defending
the Church of the Lord;
Rejoice, wall of strength for protecting
the Nations of God.

Rejoice: through you spoils of vict'ry are raised;
Rejoice: through you the great enemies fall.

Rejoice, healing remedy, curing my weakness;
Rejoice, for my soul finds salvation with you.

Rejoice, holy Virgin and Bride!

24. **O** merciful Mother:
who bear us the greatest
of Saints, God's own Word ever holy:
accept, in your kindness, our song!
From every misfortune and malice
 preserve us!
From threatening punishment free us,
your children who call:

Alleluia!