

**A SIMPLE BYZANTINE
BREVIARY**
REVISED EDITION

Compiled by Rev. Joel Barstad, PhD

Denver, Colorado
2025

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Preface

The title of this book is a two-fold oxymoron, a contradiction of terms in two directions. First, in common parlance “simple” is the opposite of “Byzantine,” which connotes unnecessarily convoluted complexity. Secondly, adherents of the Byzantine Rite have long resisted the reduction of their liturgy of the hours to an individualized exercise of prayer, captured and carried around in a single liturgical book, that is, in a Latin-style “breviary.” The Byzantine cycle of services requires more than one book not only because of its size and complexity, but because it expects two or three or more to gather in a church to pray it, each one taking a part that has its proper book.

Such resistance, however, has a cost. One sympathetic outsider has remarked that the tragedy of the Orthodox is that their tradition has become so heavy that no one can carry it. If the tradition is to be used and handed on, which is what traditions are for, it is inevitably prayed in an abbreviated form. Indeed, where the Divine Praises are regularly prayed in parishes, they are abbreviated to a large extent.

The need to abbreviate still further, to the point of needing only one book, arises from the fact that for many contemporary adherents of the Byzantine Rite, prayer in community is not a viable daily practice, at least, not in the American context where religiously homogeneous villages and neighborhoods no longer exist, and parishioners must drive to their churches. This “Simple Byzantine Breviary” exists for them, or rather, for those of them who desire, despite their modern weaknesses and circumstances, to carry about and pray a very simplified form of their tradition.

This volume is by its nature “for private use” and not for parochial services. It gives the services in the form of lay reader services intended for individual use.

Special thanks are due to the Most Rev. Robert M. Pipta, who as Rector of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Pittsburgh, showed

an encouraging interest in this project and as bishop of the Eparchy of Parma has made supported the publication of the this edition. He gave a previous edition a slow, close reading, offering suggestions for improvements that on their own would have made this new edition worth issuing, quite apart from the added material. He should not, of course, be held responsible for any deficiencies and errors that may remain or may have crept into this new edition.

The texts, to the extent possible, are those promulgated for the Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh or published by the Metropolitan Cantor Institute. The MCI texts not included in officially promulgated publications are generally light re-workings of the earlier publications of the Sisters of the Order of Saint Basil the Great. From these some of the propers for Matins have been drawn, adapted directly from *The Office of Matins* (Uniontown, Pa.: 1989).

The MCI provides both official and unofficial liturgical, musical resources for the clergy and cantors of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh. The value of its work for the transmission of the Ruthenian Byzantine musical tradition to new generations is hard to overestimate.

Musical notation, however, takes space and does not lend itself to the kind of collection and simplification sought by this work. Nonetheless, the Institute's translations and redactions of services have been the touchstone for the services and translations found here. The editor gratefully acknowledges the generous policy of the MCI in making its resources freely available to the faithful of the Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh and beyond.

The compiler hopes that this revised edition of *A Simple Byzantine Breviary* will be found useful by those looking for a single-volume reader service abridgment of the Byzantine Divine Praises.

Rev. Joel I. Barstad, Ph.D.
Denver, Colorado
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Introduction

Understanding the Byzantine Hours

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. —St. Paul to the Ephesians

In these verses Saint Paul encapsulates a vision of Christian spirituality, a vision of life lived in the Holy Spirit received from the Father in the name of his Son. Christians live relatively ordinary lives, with families and jobs, civic duties and social obligations, but they live these lives with a distinctive melody in their hearts.

That melody is learned within a community that expresses its spirit in its selection of songs. The Byzantine rite is a one of the great historical collections of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs sung by Christians through the ages. To begin to pray the hours of this tradition, even in the limited form of this simple breviary, is to submit and join oneself to a communion of spiritual fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, whose times and places have somehow flowed and stretched to meet one's own.

Cathedral and Monastic Traditions

Two major currents combined to make the stream we call the Byzantine rite: the prayers sung by clergy and laity in the cathedrals and churches of the Eastern Roman Empire, and the prayers prayed in Eastern monastic communities. They were brought together and received a distinctive form in the city of New Rome, Constantinople, Byzantium, from which the rite flowed to other parts of the Greek-speaking Empire and to the Slav world of Eastern Europe and Asia. From that

point on, cathedrals and monasteries used the same rule of prayer, the same basic *typicon* of services.

Psalmody

The prayer of ancient Christian monasticism had for its form the simple ideal of prayer without ceasing and for its matter the Psalter and other hymns of the Scriptures. In its remote desert cells, it did not need the elaborate processions, articulated structures, and sophisticated hymnody of the cathedral offices. It prayed the psalms and canticles in simple daily and weekly rhythms, probably from memory. The point was to be praying constantly.

In the ancient cathedral services, where ritual and hymnody had a more prominent place than in monastic prayer, psalms nonetheless formed the skeleton of the liturgical offices. Certain psalms, like 103 and 140 in Vespers and the Hexapsalmos, Psalm 50, and Psalms 148 to 150 in Matins, are the bones on which the flesh of variable readings and hymns is knit. An essential part of learning to pray the Byzantine office is learning how to pray the psalms, not merely in a technical sense—the psalm tone is the easiest of the melodies—but in spirit and in truth, as the concentrated fiber and marrow of Scripture and Tradition.

The Byzantine rite currently divides the Psalter into twenty *kathismata*, which means “things read while seated.” Much of the monastic contribution to the Byzantine services pertains to the system of reading these chunks of psalmody so that the whole Psalter is prayed at least once a week. In parochial use, as in this volume, the *kathismata* are usually omitted, while the skeleton of psalms forming the services are retained.

Daily Cycle

The liturgical day begins with Vespers in the evening and continues with Matins the following morning, thus enacting the words of Genesis, “There was evening and there was morning, one day.” These services were the hinges of the common life of Christians living in the world, who gathered daily, evening and morning,

**BASIC MORNING AND EVENING
PRAYERS**

Morning Prayers

The following pages offer a simple morning and evening rule that might, with time, be memorized and used when one's prayerbook is not available.

Morning Prayers

+ Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

Amen.

Glory to you, our God, glory to you.

Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, everywhere present and filling all things, Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, come and dwell within us, cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O gracious One.

From Easter to the Ascension, the Paschal troparion "Christ is risen" is sung three times in place of "Glory to you" and "Heavenly King." See the Paschal Variants, p. 263. From the Ascension to Pentecost, begin with "Holy God".

+ Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us. (3)

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us; Lord, cleanse us of our sins; Master, forgive our transgressions; Holy One, come to us and heal our infirmities for your name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. (3)

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive

THE DIVINE PRAISES

Daily Vespers

+ Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

Amen.

CUSTOMARY BEGINNING PRAYERS

From Easter to the Ascension, the Paschal troparion “Christ is risen” is sung three times in place of “Glory to you” and “Heavenly King.” See the Paschal Variants, p. 263. From the Ascension to Pentecost, begin with “Holy God”.

Glory to you, our God, glory to you.

Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, everywhere present and filling all things, Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, come and dwell within us, cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O gracious One.

+ Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us. (3)

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us; Lord, cleanse us of our sins; Master, forgive our transgressions; Holy One, come to us and heal our infirmities for your name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. (3)

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (12)

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

+ Come, let us worship our King and God.

+ Come, let us worship Christ, our King and God.

+ Come, let us worship and bow before the only Lord Jesus Christ, the King and our God.

PSALM 103

| Bless the Lord, O my soul! * Lord my God, how great you are, | clothed in majesty and glory, * wrapped in light as in a robe. | You stretch out the heavens like a tent. * Above the rains you build your dwelling. | You make the clouds your chariot, * you walk on the wings of the wind; | you make your angels spirits * and your ministers a flaming fire. | You founded the earth on its base, * to stand firm from age to age. | You wrapped it with the ocean like a cloak: * the waters stood higher than the mountains. | At your threat they took to flight; * at the voice of your thunder they fled. | They rose over the mountains and flowed down * to the place which you had appointed. | You set limits they might not pass * lest they return to cover the earth. | You make springs gush forth in the valleys; * they flow in between the hills. | They give drink to all the beasts of the field; * the wild asses quench their thirst. | On their banks dwell the birds of heaven; * from the branches they sing their song. | From your dwelling you water the hills; * earth drinks its fill of your gift. | You make the grass grow for the cattle * and the plants to serve man's needs, | that he may bring forth bread from the earth * and wine to cheer man's heart; | oil, to make his face shine * and bread to strengthen man's heart. | The trees of the Lord drink their fill, * the cedars he planted on Lebanon; | there

the birds build their nests; * on the treetop the stork has her home. | The goats find a home on the mountains * and rabbits hide in the rocks. | You made the moon to mark the months; * the sun knows the time for its setting. | When you spread the darkness it is night * and all the beasts of the forest creep forth. | The young lions roar for their prey * and ask their food from God. | At the rising of the sun they steal away * and go to rest in their dens. | Man goes out to his work, * to labor till evening falls. | How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all. * The earth is full of your riches. | There is the sea, vast and wide, * with its moving swarms past counting, living things great and small. | The ships are moving there * and the monsters you made to play with. | All of these look to you * to give them their food in due season. | You give it, they gather it up; * you open your hand, they have their fill. | You hide your face, they are dismayed; * you take back your spirit, they die, returning to the dust from which they came. | You send forth your spirit, they are created; * and you renew the face of the earth. | May the glory of the Lord last forever! * May the Lord rejoice in his works! | He looks on the earth and it trembles; * the mountains send forth smoke at his touch. | I will sing to the Lord all my life, * make music to my God while I live. | May my thoughts be pleasing to him. * I find my joy in the Lord. | Let sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked exist no more. * Bless the Lord, O my soul.

And again:

| You made the moon to mark the months; * the sun knows the time for its setting.
| How many are your works, O Lord! * In wisdom you have made them all.

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

+ Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Glory to you, O God! (3)

LITANY OF PEACE

Lord, have mercy. (12)

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Lamp-Lighting Psalms

PSALM 140

Samahlasen tone of the first sticheron taken below O Lord, I have cried to you, hear me. * Hear me, O Lord! * O Lord, I have cried to you, hear me; * receive the voice of my prayer when I call upon you. * Hear me, O Lord! | Let my prayer ascend to you like incense * and the lifting up of my hands * like an evening sacrifice. * Hear me, O Lord!

Psalm Tone O Lord, set a guard before my mouth * and set a seal on the door of my lips. | Let not my heart be inclined to evil, * nor make excuses for sins I commit. | Let me never share in sinners' feasting. * If a just man strikes or reproves me it is kindness | but let the oil of the wicked not anoint my head. * Let my prayer be ever against their malice. | The princes were thrown down by the side of the rock; * then they understood that my words were kind. | As a millstone is shattered to pieces on the ground, * so their bones were strewn at the mouth of the grave. | To you, Lord God, my eyes are turned; * in you I take refuge; spare my soul! | From the trap they have laid for me keep me safe; * keep me from the snares of those who do evil. | Let the wicked fall into the traps they have set * while I pursue my way unharmed.

PSALM 141

| With all my voice I cry to the Lord, * with all my voice I entreat the Lord. | I pour out my trouble before him; * I tell him all my distress while my spirit faints within me. | But you, O Lord, know my path. * On the way where I shall walk they have hidden a snare to entrap me. | Look on my right and see: * there is no one who takes my part. | I have no means of escape, * not one who cares for my soul.

| I cry to you, O Lord. * I have said: “You are my refuge, all I have in the land of the living.” | Listen, then, to my cry * for I am in the depths of distress. | Rescue me from those who pursue me * for they are stronger than I. | Bring my soul out of this prison * and then I shall praise your name. | Around me the just will assemble * because of your goodness to me.

PSALM 129

| Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; * Lord, hear my voice! | Let your ears be attentive * to the voice of my pleading.

The following verses are chanted normally unless they introduce a sticheron. Then they are sung in the proper Pripiv tone.

6. If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive? * But with you is found forgiveness: for this we revere you.

5. My soul is waiting for the Lord. I count on his word. * My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak.

4. Let the watchman count on daybreak, * and Israel on the Lord.

3. Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption, * Israel indeed he will redeem from all its iniquity.

PSALM 116

2. Praise the Lord all you nations; * acclaim him all you peoples.

1. Strong is the love of the Lord for us; * he is faithful forever.

+ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

LAMP-LIGHTING STICHERA

Three stichera are provided for each weekday evening. Three stichera for saints can be found in the Commons for Classes of Saints, pp. 295ff.

SUNDAY EVENING

Samohlasen Tone 6 O Savior, give me tears of repentance and a contrite heart, so that I may wash the filth from my soul. Already I have greatly defiled it because of my many sins. In my favor I have your love for mankind, and also the prayers of her who gave you birth, and the prayers of the angelic choirs.

Approach, O soul, and repent of the many sins you have committed in life. With sighs and tears pray to the multitudes on high so that time for repentance will be given to you. In this you will not be like the unfruitful fig tree. You will not be exiled into the fire of Hades, O all-suffering soul.

I have not obeyed any of your laws on this earth. How shall I appear before you, O Christ? For you sit upon the judgment-seat to give sentence and pass judgment on all things visible and invisible which I have done. And so I call to you: Save me, a prodigal, through the prayers of your servants.

Pripiv + Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

O Theotokos, according to the archangel's promise, in your womb you conceived the Word of the unbegotten Father and the Spirit; you manifested yourself to be higher than the cherubim, seraphim, and thrones.

MONDAY EVENING

Samohlasen Tone 6 O Lord, behold my sickness and my sorrow and the multitude of my transgressions which cause turmoil in my soul and bewilderment in my mind. Understand the voice of one forsaken and judged, and grant me a contrite soul and humble heart. Bestow upon me the gift of tears, and also grant me the remission of my many sins for the sake of your great mercy.

O God, you want all mankind to be saved; therefore, consider and hear my prayers. Do not despise my tears as though they are of vanity; for who has come to you with tears and has not been saved, or who has cried to you tenderly and has not

COMMONS AND PROPERS

Paschal Variants

TROPARION AND KONTAKION

Special Tone Christ is risen from the dead! By death he trampled Death; and to those in the tombs he granted life.

Kontakion Tone 8 Although you descended into the grave, O Immortal One, you destroyed Hades' power. You arose as a victor, O Christ God. You exclaimed to the myrrh-bearing women: Rejoice! You gave peace to your apostles and granted resurrection to the fallen.

Samohlasen Tone 6 Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us bow to the holy Lord Jesus who alone is sinless. We bow to your Cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify your holy Resurrection, for you alone are our God and we know no other. We call you by name. Come, all you faithful, let us bow to the holy Resurrection of Christ, for, behold through the Cross, joy has come to the whole world. Always blessing the Lord, let us praise his Resurrection; by enduring the Cross for us, he destroyed Death by death.

INSTEAD OF "IT IS TRULY PROPER"

The angel exclaimed to her, full of grace: Rejoice, O pure Virgin; and again, I say: Rejoice! your Son is risen from the grave on the third day and has raised the dead. Rejoice, all you nations!

Shine in splendor, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. O Zion, now dance and be glad; and you, pure Theotokos, rejoice in the resurrection of your Son.

DISMISSAL DURING THE PASCHAL SEASON

Shine in splendor, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. O Zion, now dance and be glad; and you, pure Theotokos, rejoice in the resurrection of your Son.

Christ is risen from the dead! By death he trampled Death; and to those in the tombs he granted life. Lord, have mercy. (3)

+ Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

The Paschal Canon

ODE 1

Irmos It is the day of Resurrection. O People, let us be enlightened by it. The Passover is the Lord's Passover, since Christ, our God, has brought us from death to life and from earth to heaven. Therefore, we sing the hymn of victory.

✠. Christ is risen from the dead!

Let us cleanse our senses that we may see the risen Christ in the glory of his resurrection and clearly hear him greeting us: "Rejoice!"— as we sing the hymn of victory.

✠. Christ is risen from the dead!

Let the heavens properly rejoice, and let the earth be glad, and let the whole visible and invisible world celebrate; for Christ, our everlasting joy is risen.

Katavasia It is the day of Resurrection. O People, let us be enlightened by it. The Passover is the Lord's Passover, since Christ, our God, has brought us from death to life and from earth to heaven. Therefore, we sing the hymn of victory.

Commons and Propers for Pre- and Post-Festive Days

*In liturgical terminology the **ordinary** parts of a service, which do not change, are contrasted with those parts that change regularly. The contents for these changeable parts are call **propers**, when they pertain to a single feast or commemoration, and **commons** when they are shared by several.*

Feasts of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Vespers at Psalm 140

Samohlasen Tone 6 O Lord, you fill all things with your divinity, and through your mercy you have united yourself to us. Even though one of your natures is invisible, you have become visible in your birth from the Most Pure One, you manifest your bodily form in this holy feast. Therefore, we come before you and adore you, O Master; we recognize you as our Creator, and we pray: Blessed are you, O Savior, have mercy on us.

The incomprehensible mystery of your plan of salvation was foretold from the beginning, O Lord. Now, by your coming, you have revealed it clearly, and have given this present feast as a sign to the world. You have filled everything with joy and renewed our nature in your desire to save us. Blessed are you, O God, have mercy on us.

O Lord, how glorious is the goodness of your compassion! You dwelt on high in the bosom of the Father in a manner beyond description and comprehension. You are now seen in your coming upon earth. Therefore, we honor you in this present feast, through it, deliver us from our passions. Although we were dead in our sins, you have given us new life, O Master. Blessed are you, O Savior, have mercy on us.

O Lord, you became incarnate as you willed, and have filled our poverty with the abundance of your compassion, you have deified me, a creature taken from

Commons for Classes of Saints

The Holy Angels

Vespers at Psalm 140

Samohlasen Tone 4 As the most illustrious attendants of the thrice-holy God, the leaders of the heavenly hosts shout joyfully with all the powers on high: Holy are you, O Father; holy are you, O Unbegotten Son; holy are you also, O Holy Spirit, one glory, one kingdom and nature, one Godhead and power.

As your appearance is fiery, so your virtue is wonderful, O Michael and Gabriel, the leaders of the angels; for in your heavenly nature you travel to the ends of the world, carrying out the wishes of the Creator of All. You are acknowledged as sources of strength, and you make the temples dedicated to you to be sources of healing. You are venerated because of your holy call.

You make your angels your messengers, O Lord, and your ministers flames of fire, as it is written. You have revealed your archangel Michael to be the leader, together with Gabriel, the chief captain. At a sign from you, they obey you, O Word; and with fear they sing the thrice-holy hymn to your glory.

Pripiv + Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Samohlasen Tone 6 Rejoice with us all you ranks of angels; for your leaders and our intercessors gloriously appear in the temple today and bless us. Therefore, we dutifully sing to them and cry out: Shelter us under the shadow of your wings, O you leaders of the heavenly hosts.

Pripiv Now and ever and forever. Amen.

All you choirs of virgins rejoice with us, for our intercessor and mediatrix, our shelter and refuge, today comforts the afflicted in her honorable and divine temple. Therefore, let us dutifully sing to her and cry out: Shelter us with your divine intercession, O most pure Theotokos and all-holy Lady.

CALENDAR

Calendar of Saints

Legend

F1 Great Feast of our Lord or of the Theotokos

F2 Feast with an All-night Vigil

F3 Feast with the Polyeleos at Matins

D1 Feast with the Great Doxology at Matins

D2 Feast with Six Stichera at Vespers

Note: FEASTS written in all-caps are designated as Major Holy Days in the Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh

SEPTEMBER

September 1

F3 The Beginning of the Church Year.

Our Venerable Father Simeon the Stylite and his Mother (459).

The Synaxis of the Theotokos of Miasena.

The Holy Martyr Aeithalas (380).

The Forty Holy Women martyred with their Instructor Ammon the Deacon (313).

The Holy Martyr Callista and her two Brothers, Evodius and Hermogenes (309).

Joshua the Just, Son of Nun.

September 2

The Holy Martyr Mammias (274).

Our Venerable Father John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople (595).

September 3

The Holy Martyr Anthimus, Bishop of Nicomedia (303).

Our Venerable Father Theoctist, Companion of our Venerable Father

Euthymius the Great (431).