



HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

Rev. Fr. Christopher Foley
frc@holycrossoca.org

645 Greensboro Rd., High Point, NC
336-688-9820

www.holycrossoca.org

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APPRECIATING VESPERS

by Fr. Lawrence Farley



The service of Vespers is, I think, dramatically under-appreciated today. The temptation for us busy people is to reduce our church-going to Sunday mornings only, and let everything else slide. Since we under-appreciate Vespers, it often tends to slide with other things we deem relatively unimportant. But Vespers warrants a second look, and a renewed appreciation.

The word “vespers” comes from the Greek *hespera* and the Latin *vesper*, both meaning “evening”, because it is the evening service of the Church. Christians are to pray to God not just on Sunday mornings, but constantly, sanctifying time by offering prayer throughout the day. In the eighth chapter of the *Didache* (or “teaching”), a church manual dating from about 100 A.D., believers are urged to stop and pray three times throughout the day, at least saying the Lord’s Prayer. Soon enough a certain pattern would become standard, with believers praying at the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour (that is, at 9.00 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. respectively). Christians were encouraged to pray in the evening also, and the pious were even encouraged to rise at midnight and pray at home for a bit (easier to do then than now, since people then went to bed earlier).

In those days, the believers would say a prayer of thanksgiving when the evening lamp was brought in. Back then there was no electric light of course, and unless one lit a lamp for illumination, one sat in the dark. Accordingly, everybody kept the daily practice of lighting lamps when

it began to get dark (that is, when each evening came), and bringing in the lamp to the place where everyone was. Because the Lord described Himself as “the light of the world” (see Jn. 9: 5), believers inevitably thought of Him when they saw the comforting lights of evening. Thus, one prayer that became standard when the Christians gave thanks to God for the light of the lamp referred to Jesus. We know it today as the hymn “Gladsome (or joyful) light”:

O gladsome light of the holy glory of the immortal Father: heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ! Now that we have come to the setting of the sun, and behold the light of evening, we praise God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At all times You are worthy of praise, O Son of God and Giver of life. Therefore the world glorifies You!

Believers would recite this prayer every evening when the lamp was brought in to provide light for the evening until everyone went to bed.

This practice became the daily experience of Christians. St. Gregory of Nyssa relates that when his sister Macrina was dying, the evening lamp was brought into her room at dusk as usual. Seeing it, she tried to utter the customary prayer, but her voice failed before she could finish the prayer. She lifted her hand to sign herself with the Cross, drew a final breath, and died, praying silently the thanksgiving prayer for the lamp. (No bad way to die.)

This domestic rite was preserved when the Christians met together corporately in church at evening time. When dusk came, the lamps were brought into the church just as they were at home, and the customary prayer sung. Thus the hymn “Gladsome Light” became an invariable part of the evening Vespers service. As Gregory and Macrina’s contemporary St. Basil wrote,

Our fathers thought that they should welcome the gift of evening light with something better than silence, so they

gave thanks as soon as it appeared. We cannot say who composed these words of thanksgiving at the lighting of the lamps, but the people use these ancient words [of the hymn 'Gladsome Light']...

In St. Basil's day, this prayer/hymn was already ancient.

In the church in Jerusalem, the light was brought in, not from the outside (the usual custom), but from the lamp that burned perpetually before the Lord's Tomb. In Constantinople the more usual practice prevailed, and the lamps were brought in from outside and all the candles in the darkening church lit from them.

Today when the hymn is sung, often no lamps are lit, but the hymn remains as a reminder and vestige of the practical lighting of the lamps in church for the purpose of illumination. Even today at the evening Pre-sanctified Liturgy (which is essentially simply Lenten Vespers with a rite of Communion appended to it), the celebrant still brings forward a light with the words, "The light of Christ illumines all!" In Constantinople, these words were the signal for all the lamps in the church to be lit.

Vespers preserves other ancient features as well, including the offering of incense. The original sung Vespers service included three units each consisting of three psalms. One of these was Ps. 141, obviously chosen for the line

Let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.

The reference to "evening" dictated the choice of psalm; the reference to incense made the offering of incense more liturgically relevant. As such, when this psalm is chanted as part of the remnants of the original three-psalm units (consisting now of Psalms 141, 142, 130 and 117), the deacon censes the church as these psalms are chanted. The current practice is not simply to chant the psalms, but also to insert brief hymns or stichs into the final verses of the psalms. This incense reminds us of the acceptability of our worship to God—through Christ, we now have access to the Father, and He accepts our praises since we offer them to Him as disciples of His Son. The fragrant incense we smell as these psalms and hymns are sung remind us of our exalted status in Christ.

There are other elements in the service as well, such as the chanting of psalms. The monks originally lived far from parish churches and did not have the ability to sing complicated musical services, such as those who lived in urban parishes did. They therefore concentrated more on psalmody than on church-composed hymns, more on the Psalter than on troparia and stichs and hymns. Their practice was to chant the entire Psalter from beginning to end, as often as possible. One system of chanting the Psalter involved incorporating all the Psalms into the daily services of Matins (in the morning) and Vespers (in the evening) in such a way as to go through the entire

Psalter in one week. That is, they would incorporate two sizable "chunks" of the Psalter, in series, into each Matins service, and one "chunk" into Vespers. The Psalter was divided for this purpose into twenty "chunks", each chunk called a "kathisma" or sitting—so-called because sitting was allowed the monks while the Psalter was read. On Saturday, the first "kathisma", consisting of Psalms 1-8, was read at Vespers. Nowadays, this "chunk" is greatly abbreviated to a few verses, or even simply omitted. This is perhaps un-

fortunate, because it means we lack the exposure to the Psalter that the monks deemed essential to spiritual growth. But in many parishes the chanting of the Psalter is retained, even if only for a few short verses. The psalms of the first kathisma begin with the words "Blessed is the man". Many think this is another hymn, like "Gladsome Light". In fact it is the beginning of the first eight psalms, originally intended to be chanted in their entirety.

Thus, three main components of the Vespers service are the lamp-lighting prayer "Gladsome Light", and the offering of incense, the chanting of Psalmody. The structure of the service has of course changed over the years. The original service with its three series of three psalm units has given place to our present collection of psalms strung together and chanted as the temple in censed. Also, Vespers previously began in the center of the temple with the exclamation "Blessed is the Kingdom...", the clergy entering the altar area at the beginning of the second three-psalm unit. Also, the catechumens were prayed for at the end of Vespers, just as they are presently during the Divine Liturgy. Finally, Vespers concluded with processions to the sacristy (or skeuophylakion, the place where the



vessels were stored) and to the baptistry, where special prayers were said.

Why these processions? They were modelled after processions and prayers of the church in Jerusalem located at the Holy Sepulchre. In that church, when evening came, the people realized that they were at the very place and at the very time where Christ was taken down from the cross and prepared for burial. It was natural for them to stop at that place and at that time to offer special prayers. Jerusalem soon became the pattern for churches everywhere, even though these other churches did not enjoy the same geographical and liturgical advantage of being located at the holy places where Christ suffered, was buried, and rose from the dead. So, these other churches adapted their worship to Jerusalem's situation as best they could. The Jerusalem procession to the places where Christ was buried became processions to the places in their own churches which symbolically portrayed Christ's death and burial—places such as the (or "little altar") and the baptistry, in which the candidates for baptism sacramentally participated in Christ's death and resurrection (see Rom. 6).

So, though the structure of Vespers may have changed, its heart remains the same, and it still provides a good way to end the day. Vespers now opens with the chanting of Psalm 104. In this psalm we give thanks to God for creation, confessing that the whole world lies in His loving hands, and therefore we may commit ourselves into His hands as well. God made all that exists, and sustains it every day through His ceaseless care. As the Psalmist says,

He made the moon for the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting; You appoint darkness and it is night. How manifold are Your works, O Lord! In wisdom have You made them all.

We may lie down in peace and rest in confidence, knowing that God in His wisdom is in control.

After Psalm 104 is sung and prayers are said, other psalms are chanted and incense offered, as we sing

Let our prayer arise in Your sight as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice.

Through the sacrifice of prayer and praise, we seek for and receive the forgiveness we need daily from God. The world can be a hard place, and we often stumble and fall, sinning against our good Lord. In these prayers we lift up our hands and hearts to God, asking for pardon for whatever we may have done amiss during the day.

Then the prayer of the lamplighting is sung ("Gladsome Light"), as well as the hymn

Grant us, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin...

Through these hymns, prayers and litanies, we offer ourselves with our multitude of needs into God's hands. God who provides food for the young lions which call to Him, and gives to all their food in due season (Ps. 104:21, 27), can be trusted to provide for us also. It is as St. Paul said:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

Having made our evening requests, we may lie down in the peace of God.

The service of Vespers therefore provides a fit conclusion to the day. But it also prepares us to greet the coming day, since the day begins not with morning, but with evening. (We think of the Jewish reckoning of the Sabbath as beginning Friday evening, and of the order of creation:

"Here was evening and there was morning, one day (Gen. 1:5).

Note: evening comes first. The restful repose we receive from God is His gift to us to prepare us for the challenges of the coming day. It is also why the Church serves Saturday evening Vespers as a liturgical preparation for Sunday morning Liturgy. First comes the preparation, then



the fulfillment. First the repose, then the rising. First the darkness, then the light. First the incense of Vespertal penitence, then the festal Eucharistic rejoicing. This sequence is why the Old Testament lessons are most appropriately read on Saturday evening, following the prokeimenon (which always functions to introduce a lesson)—for the Old Testament serves to prepare us for the New, and the Law gives way to the Gospel.

For many of us who do not live close to a church or monastery where Vespers is served every day, ending each day with Vespers is not possible. But certain of its prayers can still be offered at home privately. Rather than ending the day by watching the 11.00 news and then falling into bed fretting about all the evil we have seen reported, how much better to end the day by singing to God, by chanting one of the Vespertal psalms or hymns. Regardless of what the newscaster might suggest, God is still in control of His world: the sun knows its time for setting; He appoints darkness and it is night.

How manifold are Your works, O Lord! In wisdom have You made them all.

Source: <https://oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/appreciating-vespers>



PREGNANCY AND INFANT LOSS AWARENESS MONTH

Amelia Weesner

Every year, approximately 1 in 4 expectant parents experience the death of their baby during pregnancy or shortly after birth. The loss of a baby at any stage in pregnancy, as well as the loss of a newborn, is the loss of a precious loved one. In fact, the loss of a child is widely believed to cause the most intense grief; and, it is a leading cause of prolonged grief. Unfortunately, many bereaved parents

suffer silently and alone. When an older loved one dies—for example, a wife or a brother—communities usually recognize the loss with words of sympathy, hugs, cards, flowers, and funerals. In contrast, parents of departed babies are often told that their beloved babies were meant to die, or can be replaced, or weren't really people, or weren't unique enough or old enough to be worthy of grief. Bereaved parents who lack support from their community can experience debilitating consequences such as posttraumatic stress disorder or depression.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed October as Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, in order to “[offer] us the opportunity to increase our understanding of the great tragedy involved in the deaths of unborn and newborn babies. It also enables us to consider how, as individuals and communities, we can meet the needs of bereaved parents and family members on work to prevent causes of these problems.” All across the country during the month of October, events are held that recognize baby--loss, in an effort to support bereaved parents.

When friends and family show sympathy and acknowledge the loss of a baby, they are providing invaluable healing for the grieving parents. Many of you know that my husband and I personally have experienced this and have benefitted from this wonderful parish's support concerning our loss. In addition to that community support, we have the teachings and services of the Orthodox Church, which provide immeasurable healing. In the Orthodox Church, grief is recognized as an appropriate reaction to death. Services allow us to grieve, and our community to grieve alongside us. Our babies' names are spoken aloud at services—for 40 days after death, and during moliebens and pannikhidas. And finally, our babies are not simply forgotten after just 40 days or 1 year. Whether we lost them recently or many years ago, we may remember them and pray for them, always.

MOLIEBEN FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE AT THE LOSS OF AN INFANT

From Father Christopher

After Vespers on Saturday, October 22, we will be serving the Molieben for Those Who Grieve at the Loss of an Infant. October has been named national pregnancy and infant loss awareness month. A number of parishes around the country have begun serving an annual Molieben (Service of Supplication) for those who have have lost infants in the womb or have had stillborn children. This is a great

way to offer to the Lord one's grief and memorialize these dear children.

Please send me names of the children that were lost and we will remember them at the service by name. For those of you who may have never named these children, I would encourage you to consider giving them names as we believe that they are indeed children who are known to God and are present with Him. This can also help those who may have had an abortion in the past, to remember them and mourn this loss as well. For more information you can go to this article on the OCA website.

<http://oca.org/resource-handbook/familylife/october-pregnancy-and-infant-loss-awareness-month>



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross! Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don't cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It's a "free" fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.

Studio St George Academy of Music and Art: Classes taught by George Fesenko-Navrotsky

Where: Jamestown Library

Date: Beginning October 1, 2016

Time: 10 AM to 1 PM (Come Early)

Cost: \$10.00 per family of Children

Age: Starting at 5 Years

Payment: Cash or Check to Cash at each session Registra-

tion

Each Student: Initial level of comprehension review

Classes teach:

- how to begin drawing
- how to paint
- how to use materials
- use of surfaces, white/off white, beige/grey

Helpers and Volunteers needed and gratefully accepted.

Students must furnish own supplies, suggestion secure at Hobby Lobby.

Please contact George if you are interested or have further questions.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

(Figures do not include the Capital Campaign or Building Fund.)

August	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$8062.54	\$9129.50
Expense	\$8649.96	\$8720.29

Thanks for your continued giving!



HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 6 PM Great Vespers
2 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	3	4 7 PM Choir Rehearsal	5	6	7	8 6 PM Great Vespers
9 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 12PM Annual Parish Picnic at City Lake Park	10	11	12 7 PM Catechism	13	14 7 PM OCAT House Meeting	15 6 PM Great Vespers
16 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	17	18 6:30 PM Sisterhood Meeting	19	20 7PM Men's Group	21	22 6 PM Great Vespers 7PM Pregnancy Loss Molieben
23 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	24	25	26	27	28 5PM Open Door	29 6 PM Great Vespers
30 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	31					