

116[117]) we express repentance and ask for forgiveness. Important elements of Vespers are incense and light. The rising smoke of incense expresses our penitential prayer ascending to the Lord. Then, in the ancient hymn "Tranquil Light," we sing of Christ who, through the weakness that he endured on the cross, overcame the devil's power and "gave life to all the world." In the hymn "Deign, O Lord," we ask for protection from sin "this evening. "We pray that the light of God's commandments will provide that protection.

543 Vespers culminates in the singing of the Song of Simeon, "Now you dismiss your servant, O Lord" (see Lk 2:29-32). Simeon is known as "the one who received God." In this canticle, the whole community, along with Simeon, expresses the joy of having encountered the Lord "this evening." But the hymn also voices our readiness to encounter him in glory, when we see him "face to face" (see 1 Cor 13:12). Then, we shall fully see the salvation of God, "prepared before the face of all peoples."

544 The core parts of Matins are the Six Psalms, the Gospel reading (when appointed), the Canon, the Psalms of Praise, and the Doxology The Six Psalms (also known as the Hexapsalm), which open Matins, reveal the faithful keeping watch in expectation of the victorious approach of Christ's light. In the history of salvation, the "morning," or "sunrise," is a theophany, the coming of "light into darkness." Its beginning was in Bethlehem. Thus, at the beginning of Matins we sing the angelic hymn of Christmas: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, among people good will." God's light shone on the river Jordan, and we confess this too when we sing: "The Lord is God and has appeared to us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. "The Resurrection of Christ is another victory of light over darkness. The joy of this victory is wonderfully expressed in the hymn "The angelic host was amazed," (the Evlogataria) sung every week at Sunday (Resurrection) Matins. Indeed, as the myrrh-bearing women hurried at sunrise to the Lord's tomb, an angel appeared to them proclaiming "the great Light," Christ's Resurrection.

545 In the Resurrection Gospel we hear the angel announce: "He has risen, he is not here" (Mk 16:6). And Christ himself declares: "Put your finger here ... do not doubt but believe" (Jn 20:27). Similar to the myrrh-bearing women, the faithful confess the Risen Lord in the hymn "Now that we have seen the Resurrection of Christ," and approach the tetra-pod to kiss the Gospel.

546 After Psalm 50[51] ("Have mercy on me, O God"), the Canon is sung. This is a poetic composition that narrates the liturgical event being celebrated. It does so in the light of biblical salvation history. The nine

odes of the Canon (though the second ode is only sung in Great Lent begin by hymning Israel's liberation from Egyptian slavery. Subsequently, the prayer-hymns of several Old Testament prophets comprise the other odes. The Canon culminates with the ninth ode and its Arai of the most pure Virgin Mary. She is extolled as "the Mother of G [Theotokos] and the Mother of Light." After the Canon, as the s becomes brighter, the Church exalts Christ, the life-giving Light: " Christ God, send me your light, and enlighten my heart."<sup>379</sup>

547 The joy of the soul illumined by Christ's Light is expressed in the Psalm of Praise (Ps 148-150). Here we call on all creation to glorify God and bless him for the gift of light—the revelation of his Son. Hence, at the culmination of Matins the priest introduces the Great Doxology with the words: "Glory to you, who have shown us the Light!" Beholding this light, we are led to divine contemplation. We thus sing: "In your light we shall see light." Indeed, in the light of Christ we are able to see the unapproachable light of God's glory. Matins concludes with thanksgiving and petitions for the entire Church community and for the life the world.

*b. Other Services of the Daily Cycle*

548 Corp/re is a service celebrated after Vespers—before retiring to bed During Lent and on the feasts of Christmas, Theophany, and Annunciation, we celebrate Great Corp/me. On other days we celebrate Small Compline. The service includes thanksgiving to God for the day just concluded and the work accomplished. It also contains petitions for the forgiveness of sins, fora tranquil night, and peaceful sleep. Saint Bad teaches: "The examination of our past actions is a great help toward not falling into similar faults again. Wherefore the Psalmist says: `The things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds' [Ps 4:4]."<sup>380</sup>

549 At Midnight Prayer (or Nocturne), as we keep vigil awaiting the coming of the Lord, we entreat him that the night be peaceful and without sin. Keeping also in mind death itself, we ask that it not come upon us unexpectedly. "We should anticipate the dawn by prayer," Saint Basil exhorts us, "so that the day may not find us in bed, according to the words: 'My eyes have preceded the morning that I might meditate on your words' [Ps 119[120]:147]."<sup>381</sup> The Saviour himself prayed in the middle of the night and called on his disciples to keep watch. The Mid

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<sup>379</sup> Horologion, Matins, Hymn of Light (Photagogica) in Great Lent, Tone 3.

<sup>380</sup> BASIL THE GREAT, The Longer Rules, 37, 4: PG 31,1009.

<sup>381</sup> BASIL THE GREAT, The Longer Rules, 37, 4: PG 31, 1009.