

## **The Liturgical Cycles of the Orthodox Church**

### **The Daily Cycle**

The daily cycle is the cycle of prayers and praises offered by the Church, once every twenty-four hours. These services express our remembrance of events which happened at certain hours especially in the Life of Christ and contain petitions relevant to these memories.

In antiquity the day was considered to begin at sunset and thus was divided according to the following order. Night began at 6:00 p.m. (according to our reckoning) and was divided into four parts (called “watches” the time of changing guards):

Evening (6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)  
Midnight (9:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight)  
Cock-crow (12:00 midnight to 3:00 a.m.)  
and Morning (3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.)

The day began at 6:00 a.m. (our reckoning) and it, too, was divided into four watches (or hours):

First Hour (6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.)  
Third Hour (9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon)  
Sixth Hour (12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m.)  
and Ninth Hour (3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.)

Following this ancient pattern, Orthodox Christians begin each portion of the day with common prayer, which has resulted in the following eight Services, customarily divided into three groups:

Ninth Hour, Vespers, and Compline;  
Midnight Service, Matins, and First Hour;  
Third and Sixth Hours.

The Divine Liturgy is often included in this daily cycle, normally being served after the Sixth Hour. Often treated as part of the daily cycle, the Divine Liturgy is not prescribed to be celebrated every day (as it is in many cathedrals and monasteries) and in a theological and mystical sense actually stands outside of chronological time since it also serves as a point of contact with the eternal, where its participants (by virtue of their partaking of the Holy Eucharist) are transported to a point outside of time where there is no past, present or future, but only the eternal Now.

On days when the Divine Liturgy is not celebrated, the Service of the Typical Psalms, or Typica, is celebrated in its place after the Sixth Hour (it also

sometimes precedes the Liturgy), thus forming part of the third group of Daily Services with the Third and Sixth Hours.

In addition to these two cycles, there are also three others: The Weekly Cycle of the Eight Tones (or Octoechos, meaning 8 Tones. The Octoechos is an 8-volume hymn book in the Orthodox Church created by St John of Damascus), the Annual Cycle of Movable Feasts (dependent upon Pascha), and the Annual Cycle of Fixed Feasts, beginning on the first day of the Church Year September 1/14. These three cycles are combined and superimposed on each other, giving the Liturgical Year a constant and unfailing variety.

### **The Weekly Cycle**

Each day of the Weekly Cycle is dedicated to certain special memorials:

**Sunday** is dedicated to Christ's Resurrection

**Monday** honors the Holy Bodiless Powers (Angels, Archangels, etc.)

**Tuesday** is dedicated to the prophets and especially the greatest of the Prophets, St John the Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord

**Wednesday** is consecrated to the Cross and recalls Judas' betrayal

**Thursday** honors the Holy Apostles and Hierarchs, especially St Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in Lycia

**Friday** is also consecrated to the Cross and recalls the day of the Crucifixion

**Saturday** is dedicated to All Saints, especially the Theotokos, and to the memory of all those who have departed this life in the hope of resurrection and eternal life.

Each week of the Weekly Cycle is centered around the Eight Tones (the basis for Orthodox Church music) and each Week has its appointed Tone. On Saturday Evening of Bright Week (the Eve of St Thomas Sunday, which is the first Sunday after Pascha), the cycle of Tones begins with Tone One and, week by week, the sequence continues through the successive Tones, One to Eight, changing to a new Tone every Saturday Evening, throughout the year.

### **The Annual Cycle of Movable Feasts**

The yearly cycle of Movable Feasts is that centered around Holy Pascha and is called movable because, being linked with the Feast of Feasts, it shifts from year to year as Pascha itself falls on a different date each year. The Feasts which comprise this cycle are:

**Palm Sunday** (the Sunday before Pascha)

**Holy Ascension** (the fortieth day after Pascha)

and **Holy Pentecost** (the Descent of the Holy Spirit the fiftieth day after Pascha)

### **The Annual Cycle of Fixed Feasts**

Each day of the year is dedicated to the memory of particular events or Saints and these memorials always fall on the same Calendar date each year. Thus, in

honor of each event or Saint(s), special hymns have been composed which are added to the usual hymns and prayers of the day.

### **The Great Feasts**

Among the feasts of the Church Year, a place of special honor belongs to the Feast of Feasts, Holy Pascha. Next in importance come the Twelve Great Feasts, which can be divided into two groups: Feasts of the Lord and Feasts of the Theotokos.

#### **Great Feasts of the Lord**

1. The Universal Exaltation (or Elevation) of the Life-creating Cross (Sep 14/27)
2. The Nativity of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ (Dec 25/Jan 7)
3. Theophany of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ (Jan 6/19)
4. The Triumphant Entrance of Our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem (which is known as Palm Sunday in its abbreviated form and falls on the Sunday before Pascha)
5. The Ascension of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (40 days after Pascha)
6. The Descent of the Holy Spirit (Holy Pentecost 50 days after Pascha)
7. The Transfiguration of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ (Aug 6/19)

#### **Great Feasts of the Theotokos**

1. The Nativity of the Most-Holy Theotokos (Sep 8/21)
2. The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple (Nov 21/Dec 4)
3. The Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple (Feb 2/15)
4. The Annunciation to the Most-Holy Theotokos (March 25/Apr 7)
5. The Falling-Asleep (or Dormition) of the Most-Holy Theotokos (Aug 15/28)

All of the Feasts listed above, with the exception of Palm Sunday and Holy Pentecost are preceded by a period of preparation known as the Forefeast.

In addition, The Nativity of Christ and the Dormition are preceded by a special fasting period (the Nativity Fast begins on November 15/27 and the Dormition Fast begins on August 1/14).

Three of the Feasts are followed, on the next day, by a distinctive commemoration known as a Synaxis (a commemorative gathering or assembly of certain figures in relation to the feast):

The Nativity of Christ is followed, on Dec 26/Jan 8 by the Synaxis of the Most-Holy Theotokos

The Theophany is followed, on Jan 7/20 by the Synaxis of St John the Baptist; and the Annunciation is followed, on Mar 26/Apr 8 by the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel.

In addition, all except one (Palm Sunday) are followed by a festal period called the Afterfeast, during which the prior Feast is continually observed. The last day

of the Afterfeast the actual close of the Feast is called the Leavetaking (apodosis).

## Fasting Seasons and Days

### Paschal Cycle:

1. **Cheesefare Week:** The week before the beginning of Great Lent starts with Meatfare Sunday and is also known as the Sunday of the Terrifying Judgment (in reference to the Gospel reading for the Liturgy on this particular Sunday: Matthew 25: 31 – 46, when the Son of Man will come to Judge and separate the goats from the sheep). This is the last day we can eat meat. A vegetarian diet, with dairy, is only allowed for this week preceding Great Lent.
2. **Great Lent and Holy Week:** Great Lent begins on Clean or Pure Monday which is the day after Cheesefare Sunday. Also known as Forgiveness Sunday because we formally ask for forgiveness from each other for an honorable and noble beginning to the Great Fast. It is also known as the Sunday of the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. It is the final day we can consume dairy. Clean Monday is the beginning of Great Lent and is a strict vegan diet. The fast of Great Lent lasts for 6 weeks until the Saturday of Lazarus (commemorating the Resurrection of Lazarus) which is the day before Palm Sunday. The fast of Holy Week commences on Palm Sunday and concludes of Great Saturday, the day before Pascha.

### Yearly Cycle:

1. **Nativity Fast:** The fast in preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ (Christmas). It is a forty day fast before Christmas and therefore runs from Nov 15/27 through Dec 24/Jan 6.
2. **Apostles' (Peter and Paul) Fast:** from the Monday after All Saints Sunday (the Sunday after Pentecost) through June 28/July 11.
3. **Dormition (Theotokos) Fast:** Aug 1/14 through Aug 14/27.

### Fast Days:

1. The Wednesdays and Fridays of the Year, except for Fast-free Weeks
2. The Eve of Theophany Jan 5/18
3. The Beheading of St John the Baptist Aug 29/Sep 11
4. The Elevation of the Cross Sept 14/27

### Fast-free Weeks:

1. After-feast of the Nativity of Christ to Theophany Eve Dec 25/Jan 7 through Jan 4/17.
2. The week following the Sunday of the Tax-Collector and Pharisee (3 weeks before Great Lent)

3. Bright Week. The week after Pascha
4. Trinity Week the week after Pentecost, concluding with All Saints Sunday

### **Scripture Readings Throughout the Year**

The following list is an approximate guideline of Epistle and Gospel readings for the Divine Liturgy just for Sundays (there are slight variations from year to year depending on how early or late Pascha occurs).

There is also a list of Epistle and Gospel readings for the 12 Great Feasts and a list of Epistle and Gospel readings for Special Occasions and Special Needs.

There is another list of Epistle and Gospel readings for weekdays not included here.

The list begins with the Epistle and Gospel readings for Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, and continues through the Sundays after Pascha until Pentecost.

From Pentecost, the Liturgical Year is reckoned according to Sundays after Pentecost until we beginning the preparation for Great Lent for the following year.

<b>OCCASION</b>	<b>EPISTLE</b>	<b>GOSPEL</b>
<b>Sunday of Holy Pascha</b>	Acts 1: 1 - 8	John 1: 1 - 17
2nd Sunday after Pascha	Acts 5: 12 - 20	John 20: 19 - 31
3rd Sunday after Pascha	Acts 6: 1 - 7	Mark 15: 43 - 16: 8
4th Sunday after Pascha	Acts 9: 32 - 42	John 5: 1 - 15
5th Sunday after Pascha	Acts 11: 19 - 26, 29 - 30	John 4: 5 - 42
6th Sunday after Pascha	Acts 16: 16 - 34	John 9: 1 - 38
<b>6th Thurs after Pascha Holy Ascension</b>	Acts 1: 1 - 12	Luke 24: 36 - 53
7th Sunday after Pascha	Acts 20: 16 - 18, 28 - 36	John 17: 1 - 13
<b>Sunday of Pentecost</b>	Acts 2: 1 - 11	John 7: 37 - 52; 8: 12
1st Sunday after Pentecost	Hebrews 11: 33 - 12: 2	Matthew 10: 32 - 33, 37 - 38; 19: 27 - 30
2nd Sunday after Pentecost	Romans 2: 10 - 16	Matthew 4: 18 - 23
3rd Sunday after Pentecost	Romans 5: 1 - 10	Matthew 6: 22 - 33
4th Sunday after Pentecost	Romans 6: 18 - 23	Matthew 8: 5 - 13
5th Sunday after Pentecost	Romans 10: 1 - 10	Matthew 8: 28 - 9: 1
6th Sunday after Pentecost	Romans 12: 6 - 14	Matthew 9: 1 - 8
7th Sunday after Pentecost	Romans 15: 1 - 7	Matthew 9: 27 - 35
8th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Corinthians 1: 10 - 18	Matthew 14: 14 - 22
9th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Corinthians 3: 9 - 17	Matthew 14: 22 - 34
10th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Corinthians 4: 9 - 16	Matthew 17: 14 - 23
11th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Corinthians 9: 2 - 12	Matthew 18: 23 - 35
12th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Corinthians 15: 1 - 11	Matthew 19: 16 - 26

13th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Corinthians 16: 13 - 24	Matthew 21: 33 - 42
14th Sunday after Pentecost	2 Corinthians 1: 21 – 2: 4	Matthew 22: 1 - 14
15th Sunday after Pentecost	2 Corinthians 4: 6 - 15	Matthew 22: 35 - 46
16th Sunday after Pentecost	2 Corinthians 6: 1 - 10	Matthew 25: 14 - 30
17th Sunday after Pentecost	2 Corinthians 6: 16 - 7: 1	Matthew 15: 21 - 28
18th Sunday after Pentecost	2 Corinthians 9: 6 - 11	Luke 5: 1 - 11
19th Sunday after Pentecost	2 Corinthians 11: 31 -12: 9	Luke 6: 31 - 36
20th Sunday after Pentecost	Galatians 1: 11 - 19	Luke 7: 11 - 16
21st Sunday after Pentecost	Galatians 2: 16 - 20	Luke 8: 5 - 15
22nd Sunday after Pentecost	Galatians 6: 11 - 18	Luke 16: 19 - 31
23rd Sunday after Pentecost	Ephesians 2: 4 - 10	Luke 8: 26 - 39
24th Sunday after Pentecost	Ephesians 2: 14 - 22	Luke 8: 41 - 56
25th Sunday after Pentecost	Ephesians 4: 1 - 6	Luke 10: 25 - 37
26th Sunday after Pentecost	Ephesians 5: 9 - 19	Luke 12: 16 - 21
27th Sunday after Pentecost	Ephesians 6: 10 - 17	Luke 13: 10 - 17
28th Sunday after Pentecost	Colossians 1: 12 - 18	Luke 14: 16 - 24
29th Sunday after Pentecost	Colossians 3: 4 - 11	Luke 17: 12 - 19
30th Sunday after Pentecost	Colossians 3: 12 - 16	Luke 18: 18 - 27
31st Sunday after Pentecost	1 Timothy 1: 15 - 17	Luke 18: 35 - 43
32nd Sunday after Pentecost	1 Timothy 4: 9 - 15	Luke 19: 1 - 10
<b><i>Sundays Preparatory to Great Lent</i></b>		
Tax-Collector & Pharisee	2 Timothy 3: 10 - 15	Luke 18: 10 - 14
Prodigal Son	1 Corinthians 6: 12 - 20	Luke 15: 11 - 32
Meatfare Sunday <i>aka</i> The Terrifying Judgment	1 Corinthians 8: 8 - 9: 2	Matthew 25: 31 - 46
Cheesefare Sunday <i>aka</i> Forgiveness Sunday <i>aka</i> Expulsion of Adam & Eve from Paradise	Romans 13: 11 - 14: 4	Matthew 6: 14 - 21
<b><i>Sundays of Great Lent</i></b>		
Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy	Hebrews 11: 24 - 26, 32 - 12: 2	John 1: 43 - 51
St Gregory Palamas	Hebrews 1: 10 - 23	Mark 2: 1 - 12
Veneration of the Cross	Hebrews 4: 14 – 5: 6	Mark 8: 34 - 9: 1
St John of the Ladder	Hebrews 6: 13 - 20	Mark 9: 17 - 31
St Mary of Egypt	Hebrews 9: 11 - 14	Mark 10: 32 - 45
<b>Lazarus Saturday</b>	Hebrews 12: 28 - 13: 8	John 11: 1 - 45
<b><i>Holy Week</i></b>		
Palm Sunday	Philippians 4: 4 - 9	John 12: 1 - 18
Holy Monday		Matthew 24: 3 - 35
Holy Tuesday		Matthew 24: 36 – 26: 2
Holy Wednesday		Matthew 26: 6 - 16

Holy Thursday	1 Corinthians 11: 23 - 32	Matthew 26: 2 - 20 John 13: 3 - 17 Matthew 26: 21 - 39 Luke 22: 43 - 45 Matthew 26: 40 - 27: 2
Holy Friday (Matins)	The Matins Service of Holy Friday is served on the evening of Holy Thursday. It is also known as the 12 Passion Gospels because there are 12 readings from the Gospels on Christ's Crucifixion.	1. John 13: 31 - 18: 1 2. John 18: 1 - 28 3. Matthew 26: 57 - 75 4. John 18: 28 - 19: 16 5. Matthew 27: 3 - 32 6. Mark 15: 16 - 32 7. Matthew 27: 33 - 54 8. Luke 23: 32 - 49 9. John 19: 25 - 37 10. Mark 15: 43 - 47 11. John 19: 38 - 42 12. Matthew 27: 62 - 66
Holy Friday (Imperial Hours)	The Great or Imperial Hours are served on the morning of Holy Friday	1 <sup>st</sup> Hr: Matthew 27: 1 - 38 3 <sup>rd</sup> Hr: Mark 15: 16 - 41 6 <sup>th</sup> Hr: Luke 23: 32 - 49 9 <sup>th</sup> Hr: John 18:28-19: 37
Holy Saturday	Romans 6: 3 - 11	Matthew 28: 1 - 20
<b>12 Great Feasts</b>		
Nativity of the Theotokos (Sep 8/21)	Philippians 2: 5 - 11	Luke 10: 38 - 42; 11: 27 - 28
The Exaltation of the Precious Cross (Sep 14/27)	1 Corinthians 1: 18 - 24	John 19: 6 - 11, 13 - 20, 25 - 28, 30 - 35
The Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple (Nov 21/Dec 4)	Hebrews 9: 1 - 7	Luke 10: 38 - 42; 11: 27 - 28
The Nativity of Christ (Dec 25/Jan 7)	Galatians 4: 4 - 7	Matthew 2: 1 - 12
Theophany (Jan 6/19)	Titus 2: 11 - 14; 3: 4 - 7	Matthew 3: 13 - 17
Presentation of Christ (Feb 2/15)	Hebrews 7: 7 - 17	Luke 2: 22 - 40
Annunciation (March 25/April 7)	Hebrews 2: 11 - 18	Luke 1: 24 - 38
Transfiguration (Aug 6/19)	2 Peter 1: 10 - 19	Matthew 17: 1 - 9
Dormition (Aug 15/28)	Philippians 2: 5 - 11	Luke 10: 38 - 42; 11: 27 - 28

NOTE: Readings for Pascha and the Movable Great Feasts (Palm Sunday, Ascension and Pentecost) are to be found above.		
<b>Scripture Readings for Special Occasions</b>		
For the Departed		
Mondays	Romans 14: 6 - 9	John 5: 17 - 24
Tuesdays	1 Corinthians 15: 39 - 57	John 5: 24 - 30
Wednesdays	2 Corinthians 5: 1 - 10	John 6: 35 - 39
Thursdays	1 Corinthians 15: 20 - 28	John 6: 40 - 44
Fridays	1 Corinthians 15: 47 - 57	John 6: 48 - 54
Saturdays	1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 17	John 5: 24 - 30
For the New Year	1 Timothy 2: 1 - 7	Luke 4: 16 - 22
In Times of Strife	Ephesians 6: 10 - 17	Mark 11: 23 - 26
In Times of Drought	James 5: 10 - 16	Matthew 16: 1 - 6
In Times of Fear of Earthquake	Hebrews 12: 6 - 13, 25 - 27	Matthew 8: 23 - 27
For the Sick	James 5: 10 - 16	Matthew 8: 14 - 23 Mark 5: 24 - 34 John 4: 46 - 54
For Travelers by Land	Acts 8: 26 - 39	John 14: 1 - 14
For Travelers by Air, Sea or through Space	Acts 21: 1 - 7	Mark 4: 35 - 41
At the Beginning of Instruction (School Year)	Ephesians 1: 16 - 19; 3: 19 - 21	Mark 10: 13 - 16
At the Beginning of Every Good Work	Philippians 2: 12 - 16	Matthew 7: 7 - 11
For Every Need	2 Corinthians 1: 3 - 7	Matthew 7: 7 - 11 Mark 11: 23 - 26



For Giving Thanks	Ephesians 5: 9 - 21	Luke 17: 12 - 19
Baptism	Romans 6: 3 - 11	Matthew 28: 16 - 20
Marriage	Ephesians 5: 20 - 33	John 2: 1 - 11
Burial of Infants	1 Corinthians 15: 39 - 57	John 6: 35 - 39
Burial of Laymen & Monastics	1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 17	John 5: 24 - 30
Burial of Priests	1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 17	John 5: 24 - 30
	Romans 5: 13 - 21	John 5: 17 - 25
	1 Corinthians 15: 1 - 11	John 6: 35 - 39
	1 Corinthians 15: 20 - 28	John 6: 40 - 44
	Romans 14: 6 - 9	John 6: 48 - 54