

Glossary of Liturgical Terminology

Archpriest Paul Lazor Notes for the Liturgical Theology 11 course at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary

Akathist – a long hymn of 24 stanzas, similar to the ancient **Kontakion**. Greek word itself means that the hymn is to be sung while everyone stands. Many Akathist hymns have been composed for saints and even particular icons. They are generally used for devotional purposes and may be inserted after the ode 6 of the Matins **Canon** during the celebration of a feast (for which an Akathist has been composed). The Akathist to the Theotokos is in regular liturgical use and is prescribed in the Triodion for the 5th Saturday of Great Lent. In Greek and Antiochian use this Akathist is divided into sections and spread throughout the Friday evenings of Great Lent.

Antiphon – a general title for a hymn or a section of the Psalter; the title describes the manner in which the hymn or Psalter are to be chanted, i.e., by two choirs in turn.

Apostikha – **stikhera** that appear together with selected Psalm verses before St. Simeon's Prayer at Vespers as well as near the end of Daily and Lenten Matins.

Automelon (*samopodoben*) – a **stikheron** having its own meter and melody and serving in turn as a model for other **stihhera**.

Canon – a principal element in Matins (although it may also appear elsewhere); a lengthy hymn composed of nine odes, with each ode being made up of many hymns (usually 12-14), the number and source of which are regulated by the *Typikon*. At least theoretically each ode takes its theme from the Biblical canticle (e.g., Ode 1 is patterned after Exodus 15:1-19, the Canticle of Moses) which serves as its prototype.

Dogmatikon – those **Theotokia** that conclude the **stikhera** on "Lord, I call" at Great Vespers on the eves of the Lord's Day. Their title comes from the fact that they are usually succinct presentations of the dogma of the Incarnation, with particular stress on the ever-virginity and motherhood of Mary.

Exapostilarion – a Greek word implying "to dismiss," which is used for the title of a short hymn that comes at the end of the **Canon** at Matins. In Slavonic service books this hymn is called the *Svetilen* or "song of light." For Sunday Matins, after the brief "Holy is the Lord our God," there are eleven other Exapostilaria – one for each week depending upon which of the eleven Gospel lessons of Sunday Matins is read.

Gospel Stikhera – hymns sung during Resurrectional Matins at "Glory" of the **Verses on the Praises**. There are eleven Gospel Stikhera, and they vary from week to week depending upon which of the eleven Gospel lessons for Sunday Matins is read.

Hypakoe – perhaps the most ancient title used by the Church to denote a piece of composed hymnography. In Greek this word means "to be obedient," "to hear," "to respond." Presently, the Hypakoe is the particular title of a hymn sung during Resurrectional Matins. It varies according to the tone of the week from the *Octoechos* and comes after the Resurrectional hymns which are sung together with the refrain from Ps. 119: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes." The Hypakoe of Pascha is the one most commonly known. It is sung after the third ode of the Paschal Canon, during the Paschal Hours, and again after the Little Entrance at Divine Liturgy.

Idiomelon (*samoglasen*) – a **stikheron** having its own meter and melody which never serve as a model for other **stikhera**.

Irmos – a word meaning "link" in Greek. The Irmos is the theme-song and the first hymn of each ode of a **Canon**. It has a double function: it "links" the ode thematically with the Biblical canticle which serves as its prototype, and, by establishing the meter and melody for all the other hymns (**troparia**) of the ode, it is the first "link" in their chain.

Katavasia – in Greek this word implies the act of "descending" or "coming down." It is the name given to the hymn that concludes the ode of a **Canon**. During the singing of the Katavasia the two choirs are to "descend" from their places (the *kliros*) and assemble in the center of the church. The Katavasia may be

the **Irmos** from another canon, or, as on Pascha, it may be the **Irmos** of the given ode repeated. These matters are regulated by the Typikon.

Kathisma – one of the twenty sections into which the Psalter is divided in the liturgical use of the Orthodox Church. Each Kathisma is composed of a number of Psalms, e.g., Kathisma #1 = Psalms 1-8, Kathisma #2 = Psalms 9-17, etc. A Kathisma is further subdivided into three parts called **Antiphons**, i.e., Kathisma #1, Antiphon #1 = Psalms 1-3.

Kathisma Hymn (*Sedalen*) – a hymn sung as an introduction to "sitting," i.e., a period of rest following such things as the lengthy chanting of the Psalter, the singing of the **Polyeleos**, or the singing of several Odes from the Canon at Matins.

Kontakion – derived from a Greek word that made reference to a wooden stick around which a parchment was wrapped. Originally, the Kontakion was a hymn of many stanzas (18-24) whose lengthy text indeed required the use of a scroll. St. Roman the Melodist (+556) is the most famous composer of such lengthy, free-style hymns. The hymns in their original, lengthy form have all but fallen into disuse in Orthodox worship. What now remains in the liturgical books as **Kontakia** are merely the short, preliminary stanzas of the earlier and longer hymns. The Kontakion is sung after ode 6 (together with the Ikos, or first strophe of the more ancient, lengthy kontakion) of the **Canon** at Matins, during the Hours, and after the **Troparia** at the Divine Liturgy.

Lity (*litia*) – a word implying a fervent, prolonged prayer. It generally designates the procession to the narthex of the church for petitions, hymns and the blessing of loaves, which is a typical feature of the latter part of Great Vespers on feast days.

Polyeleos – The Psalms of "much oil" or "many mercies" (Psalms 135-136) sung during Resurrectional and Festal Matins.

Prokeimenon – the Greek word implies something that is "set before" or "introduces." The Prokeimenon was originally an entire Psalm that served to "introduce" the reading of Scripture that followed it. One verse from the Psalm was selected as the refrain to the chanting of all the others. In current liturgical use, the Prokeimenon is reduced to the refrain and one to four verses of the Psalm being employed.

Prosomoia (*podoben*) – a **stikheron** whose meter and melody are taken from those of an **automelon**.

Stavrotheotokian – hymns to the Theotokos that refer to her standing at the Cross of Christ. They are typically found in the Octoechos in the hymnography for Wednesdays and Fridays.

Stikheron – another general title referring to a composed hymn written in verses. Such hymns occur throughout Orthodox worship, e.g.: they are inserted at the places appointed by the Typikon during the chanting of "Lord, I call" (Psalms 141, 142, 130 and 117) at Vespers. They are usually associated with Psalmody.

Theotokian – a hymn to the Theotokos that usually concludes a larger body of hymnography, e.g.: **troparia** at the end of Vespers, **stikhera** on "Lord, I call," **apostikha**, etc.

Troparion – one of the oldest titles used in the Orthodox Church for a particular piece of composed hymnography. In Greek the word means "a sign of victory" or a "way of life," and in general implies that the composed hymn is a succinct summary of the event or saintly person being celebrated in the Church. As a title, Troparion can be applied to virtually any composed hymn used in Orthodox worship. Present use, however, usually limits it to the hymn sung after the Lord's Prayer at Vespers, after "God is the Lord" at Matins, and after the Little Entrance at the Divine Liturgy. It also denotes the hymns that follow the **Irmos** in the ode of a canon.

Verses on the Praises – **stikhera** inserted at those places appointed by the *Typikon* during the chanting of the Psalms of Praise (148-150) at Matins.