

**The Sunday which occurs on the 20<sup>th</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup> of December,  
Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ; the Sunday before the  
Nativity; the Commemoration of the Holy Fathers.**

**Note:** The Canon and stichera of the Commemoration in the Menaion are transferred to the Small Compline.

**Note:** See below for the Services on the Sunday falling on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December.

**Small Vespers**

**At “Lord, I call...,”** the stichera of the Resurrection and of the Theotokos, as usual.

**Great Vespers**

After the Introductory Psalm, “Blessèd is the man...,” the first Kathisma.

When this Sunday falls between the 20<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, at “Lord, I call...,” 10 stichera,

**4 of the Resurrection,**

**3 stichera of the Forefeast, in Tone 6:** *(the composition of Anatolius), to the melody, “Having set all aside....”*<sup>1</sup>

**T**he never-setting Sun /  
Cometh forth from the Virgin’s womb /  
To shine forth and enlighten the world. /  
Let us hasten to meet Him in purity of mind and deed, /  
And prepare to receive Him in spirit, /  
Who cometh into His own through a wondrous birth /  
As He wast well pleased to do /  
To lead us forth, who have been exiled from Eden; /  
In that He is compassionate, ///  
To be born in Bethlèhem.

**H**e who is carried on-high by the Cherubīm, /  
God the Word, /  
Who united Himself to the flesh in hypostasis /  
Hath made His abode in the all-pure womb /  
And hath become a man /  
Coming to earth to be born of the tribe of Judah. /  
Adorn thyself, O holy cavern, /  
As a beautiful palace for the King of all, /

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<sup>1</sup> **Note:** Different stichera of the Forefeast are given in the Greek Menaion.

And thou, O manger, blaze forth like a fiery throne /  
For the Virgin Mary layeth down upon thee ///  
The Ineffable One, as an infant, for the renewal of all creation.

**H**e who in a manner beyond all understanding /  
Hath no beginning, /  
The Unoriginate Word of God, /  
Is laid in a manger of dumb beasts, /  
To set aside the senseless foolishness /  
That through the serpent's envy I had assumed; /  
He cometh wrapped in swaddling clothes /  
To tear asunder the ragged clothes of my transgressions, /  
As the only Good Lord who loveth mankind. /  
Therefore I praise and glorify Thee /  
And most joyfully I worship Thee ///  
And Thy coming in the flesh whereby Thou hast set us free.

**And 3 stichera of the Fathers, same Tone: (and melody)**

**T**he memory of the Forefathers is revealed to the ends of the world /  
Truly filled with light and radiating with the rays of grace /  
For Christ, the brilliant Sun shining from above, /  
Leads them forth as an assembly of stars /  
Shining together with them, /  
And the Nativity of the God-Man is revealed in Bethlēm /  
Therefore, we all piously clap our hands with faith ///  
And rejoice with pre-festal praises.

**A**dam rejoices today /  
As the foundation and confirmation of the wise fathers of old /  
Being adorned with the glory of divine communion: /  
Abel also leaps for joy, /  
And Enoch is glad, /  
Seth rejoices and Noah together with them; /  
Abraham sings with the all-praised patriarchs, /  
And Melchizedek beholds the Nativity without a human father, from above. /  
Therefore, we who are celebrating the divine memory of the Forefathers of Christ ///  
Beseech Him to save our souls.

**T**he assembly of the divinely-wise children, /  
Danced with joy amidst the flames in the furnace /

FOREFEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST; SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY;  
SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS

Proclaiming the Nativity of Christ on earth. /  
For the Lord descended as a precious dew /  
Upon her that gave Him birth /  
And she, like the bush, remained unburnt by the fire, /  
Maintaining her chastity and enriching all with divine gifts. /  
Therefore, the God-pleasing Daniel rejoices /  
And clearly foreseeing the Stone from the unhewn mountain, he makes glad ///  
And now with boldness he ever prays for our souls.

**Glory..., of the Fathers, in Tone 6:**

**D**aniel, known as the man of desires, /  
When he saw Thee, O Lord, /  
The Stone not cut by human hands  
Prophesied Thee an infant born without seed, /  
The Word Incarnate from the Virgin, ///  
The Eternal God and Savior of our souls.

**Now and ever..., the sticheron of the Forefeast, in the same Tone.**

**M**ake ready, O cavern, /  
For the Ewe-lamb approaches thee /  
Bearing Christ in her womb. /  
Receive, O manger, Him who by a word hath released the earth-born from  
lawlessness. /  
Ye shepherds abiding in the fields, /  
Bear witness to the fearful wonder; /  
Ye Magi from Persia, offer to the King gold, frankincense and myrrh, /  
For the Lord hath appeared from the Virgin Mother, /  
And she, bending over Him as a servant, /  
Worships Him as He lays in her arms, saying to Him: /  
“How wast Thou sown in me? /  
How didst Thou spring forth from me, ///  
O my Deliverer and my God?

**The Entrance and the Prokeimenon of the day.**

**Three Readings:**

**The Reading from Genesis (Chapter 14: 14-20):**

<sup>14:14</sup> **A**nd when Abram heard that his nephew Lot was taken captive, he numbered his own homeborn servants, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. <sup>15</sup>And he came upon them by night, he and his servants, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hoba, which is on the left hand of Damascus. <sup>16</sup>And he brought back all the horse of Sodom, and brought back again his nephew Lot, and all his goods, and the women, and the people. <sup>17</sup>And the king of Sodom went out to meet him

after he returned from the slaughter of Chodollo-gomór, and of the kings that were with him, in the valley of Shaveh: this was the plain of the kings. <sup>18</sup>And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth loaves of bread and wine: and he was a priest of the Most High God. <sup>19</sup>And he blessed Abram, and said, “Blessèd be Abram of the Most High God, Which made the heaven and the earth, <sup>20</sup>and blessèd be the Most High God, Which hath delivered up thine enemies under thy hands unto thee”.

**The Reading from Deuteronomy (Chapter 1: 8-11, 15-17):**

<sup>1:8-11</sup> **I**n those days, thus saith Moses to the sons of Israel: Behold, God hath delivered the land before you: go in, and inherit the land, which I swore unto your fathers, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, to give it to them, and to their seed after them.’ <sup>9</sup>And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I shall not be able to bear you myself alone. <sup>10</sup>The Lord your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for number. <sup>11</sup>The Lord God of your fathers increase you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as He hath spoken unto you! <sup>15</sup>So I took of you wise men and understanding and prudent,

and made them to be rulers over you, captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, and captains of fifties, and captains of tens, and officers unto your judges. <sup>16</sup>And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. <sup>17</sup>Thou shalt not have respect unto the person in judgment; thou shalt judge according to small and great; thou shalt not shrink before the face of man; for the judgment is God’s.

**The Reading from Deuteronomy (Chapter 10: 14-21):**

<sup>10:14-21</sup> **I**n those days, thus saith Moses to the sons of Israel: <sup>14</sup>Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heaven is the Lord thy God’s, the earth also, with all that therein is. <sup>15</sup>Only the Lord chose thy fathers, to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. <sup>16</sup>Circumcise

therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stiff-necked. <sup>17</sup>For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and terrible, which accepteth not persons, nor taketh reward. <sup>18</sup>He doth execute the judgement of the stranger, and the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, giving

him food and raiment. <sup>19</sup>Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup>Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; Him shalt thou serve, and to Him thou shalt cleave, and swear by His Name. <sup>21</sup>He is thy praise, and He is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and wondrous things, which thine eyes have seen.

**At the Litya, and the stichera of the Forefeast, and the following of the Fathers, in Tone 1: <sup>2</sup>**

The illustrious and God-pleasing prophets /  
Now rest in eternal rays of Light /  
Having lived wondrous lives and attained a blessed repose, /  
As their words spoken by the Spirit continue bearing fruit ///  
Proclaiming the message of the ineffable Birth of Christ to all!

**Glory..., in Tone 3: (*the composition of Germanus*)**

Come all ye who love the feast /  
And let us praise the assembly of the fathers of old, /  
Adam, the forefather of us all, /  
Enoch, Noah and Melchizedek, /  
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; /  
And those who came after the Law: /  
Moses, Aaron and Joshua, /  
Samuel and David /  
Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel, /  
And with them the twelve prophets: /  
Elijah, Elisha, and the rest; /  
Zachariah and the Baptist, John; ///  
Who all preached Christ, the Life and Resurrection of mankind.

**Now and ever... of the Forefeast, in the same Tone:**

**M**ake ready, O Bethlēm, /  
For Eden is opened; /  
Prepare thyself, O Ephratha, /  
For Adam and Eve are renewed. /  
Salvation doth enter the world and the curse is destroyed; /  
Make ready, O ye hearts of the righteous, /  
And bring your offerings of wisdom instead of myrrh. /  
Receive salvation and immortality of your souls and bodies. /

<sup>2</sup> **Note:** This sticheron may be preceded by 3 of the Forefeast taken from the Aposticha of Vespers of the day of which the Sunday falls, with their Psalm verses.

So commandeth us the Master lying in the manger /  
To ceaselessly cry out to Him in song: ///  
O Lord, glory to Thee!

**The Aposticha is from the Octoechos.**

**Glory..., in the Tone 2: *(the composition of Cyprian)***

**R**ejoice, O honorable prophets /  
Who firmly established the Law of the Lord, /  
Who were revealed as unshakeable and invincible pillars by faith, /  
And as the mediators of the New Covenant of Christ. /  
Having been translated to heaven ///  
Entreat Him to grant peace to the world and to save our souls.

**Now and ever..., Theotokion of the Forefeast, in the same Tone: *(the composition of Cyprian)***

**N**ow cometh the hour of our salvation! /  
Make ready, O cave, /  
Behold, the Virgin approaches thee to give birth. /  
Rejoice and be glad, O Bethlēm in the land of Judah, /  
For the Lord shall arise like the Sun at dawn and shine forth from thee. /  
Hearken, ye mountains and hills, and all ye lands of Judaea, /  
For Christ cometh to save His creation, the human race, ///  
For He is the only Lover of mankind.

**At the blessing of the loaves, the Troparion: Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos..., *(twice)* and,  
The Troparion of the Fathers, in Tone 2:**

**G**reat are the accomplishments of faith, /  
For the three holy youths rejoiced in fountain of flames as though at the waters of rest. /  
And the prophet Daniel appeared /  
A shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep: ///  
So by their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls.

**Matins**

**At God is the Lord, the Troparion for the Resurrection *(twice)*; Glory..., of the Fathers:** “Great are the accomplishments..., Now and ever...,

**The Troparion of the Forefeast, in Tone 4:**

Prepare thyself, O Bethlēm, /  
For Eden hath been opened to all. /

THE SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Adorn thyself, O Ephratha, /  
For the Tree of Life hath blossomed forth in the cave from the Virgin. /  
Her womb appeared as a spiritual paradise /  
In which is planted the garden divine. /  
Eating of it we shall live and not die as did Adam: /  
Christ is born, ///  
That He may raise up again the image that before was fallen.

**The usual Sessional Hymns and Theotokia are from the Octoechos.**

**The Polyeley and the rest, as usual. Ypakoe of the Resurrection.**

**After the Polyeley, the Sessional Hymn of the Forefathers, in Tone 8: *To the melody, "Of Wisdom..."***

Come and let us sing a song of praise /  
To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, /  
The meek David and Joshua, /  
And to the twelve patriarchs /  
And together with them the three holy youths /  
Who quenched the flames through the power of the Spirit. /  
And let us cry out to them all: /  
Rejoice, all ye who bravely rebuked the wisdom of kings /  
And pray to Christ that He remits the sins ///  
Of them that lovingly celebrate your memory.

**Glory..., now and ever..., of the Forefeast, in the same Tone: *(and melody)***

**T**hou didst descend from the bosom of the Father /  
And in Thine ineffable forbearance /  
Partook, beyond nature, of our poverty, /  
O Lover of mankind, /  
Thou didst condescend to dwell in the cave, O Lord, /  
And as an infant thou wast nourished at Thy Mother's breast, /  
O Creator and Lord. /  
Therefore, the Magi, guided by star, /  
Brought Thee gifts as the Sovereign Creator. /  
Shepherds and angels were astonished, crying out: /  
Glory to God in the highest! ///  
Who is coming to be born on earth as a man.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Antiphon (Song of Ascents), the Prokeimenon, and the rest, as usual.**

## **The Canon**

The Canon of the Resurrection from the Octoechos, with 4 Troparia including the Irmos; the Canon of the Forefeast, with 4 Troparia; and the Canon of the Fathers, with 6 Troparia (excluding the first two Troparia, which are to the Resurrection). The Katavasia from the Canon of the Nativity.

—incomplete as of 11/2013

### **After the Third Ode, the Ypakoe, in Tone 8:**

The angel which bedewed the furnace for the three children, /  
Dried the tears of the women, saying: /  
Why do you bring myrrh? Whom do you seek in the tomb? ///  
Christ God is Risen, for He is truly the Life and the Salvation of the human race.

### **After the Sixth Ode:**

**The Kontakion, of the Forefeast, in Tone 1:** *To the melody, “The choir of angels....”*

**Rejoice**, O Bethlēhem, prepare thyself, O Ephratha! /  
The lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd she carries in her womb. /  
The God-bearing Forefathers will rejoice beholding Him, ///  
And with the Shepherds they will glorify the Virgin nursing Him.

**Ikos:** As they behold the radiance of thy birth giving shining forth, O Virgin, Abraham, the lover of God, and Isaac, the famed, and Jacob and all the choir of saints assembled by God rejoice, and they bring the creation forward to meet thee with joyful words. For she, who effects joy for all, is manifest, having conceived in her womb Him, who once was seen in Babylon, past all understanding preserving unconsumed the youths who were unjustly cast into the furnace. Therefore, they raise the song to Him who is being held in the arms of the Maiden nursing Him.

### **After the Eight Ode: The Magnificat is sung.**

### **The Exapostilarion of the Resurrection, then:**

### **Glory..., of the Forefathers:**

Truly, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the chiefs of the patriarchs and the fathers before the Law came, shone like stars with faith, for all the prophets and the righteous ones were illumined by them; and as they were shining beacons, the rays of their honored prophecy illumine all of creation, as they earnestly pray to God for the world.

### **Now and ever..., Theotokion of the Forefeast:**

This is truly a great wonder, the chaste and blameless Ewe-lamb giveth birth to the Lamb, the pre-eternal Word, in these latter days! He is the grandchild of Adam and

the heir of David. Therefore, the multitude of the fathers celebrates the coming feast of His ineffable Nativity.

**At the Praises, 4 stichera of the Resurrection from the Octoechos,  
and 4 of the Fathers, in Tone 5: To the melody: “Rejoice ....”**

**R**aise up thy voice, O Sion, /  
Thou divine city of God /  
And proclaim the divine memory of the fathers, /  
Honoring with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of everlasting memory. /  
For behold, with Judah and Levi we magnify Moses the great, /  
And Aaron, the wonderful; /  
And with David, we celebrate the memory of Joshua and Samuel, /  
Inviting all with divine songs and praise to the preparation of the Nativity of Christ, /  
Praying to receive His goodness; ///  
For He it is who grants the world great mercy. (twice)

**Verse:** Blessèd art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers and praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

**C**ome, O Elijah, /  
Who once ascended in the divine fiery chariot, /  
And thou, divinely-wise Elisha, /  
And rejoice together with Ezekiel and Josiah! /  
Exchange glad tidings with them, /  
O venerated rank of the twelve prophets inspired by God, /  
About the Nativity of the Savior. /  
And all you righteous ones, sing hymns; /  
And you all-blessed youths who quenched the flames in the furnace with the  
dew of the Spirit. ///  
Pray for us, pleading with Christ to grant our souls great mercy.

**Verse:** For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us.

**T**ruly, the Virgin Mother of God, /  
Who was proclaimed from the ages /  
By the words of the prophets here on earth, /  
And whom the wise patriarchs and the ranks of the righteous foretold, /  
With whom, the glory of women: Sarah, Rebecca and Aнна, /  
And Miriam, the sister of Moses, shall exchange glad tidings. /  
With them the ends of the earth shall rejoice /

As well as all creation, ///  
For God comes to be born in the flesh and grant the world great mercy.

**Glory..., in Tone 8:**

**The** divine Nativity of Christ /  
Was clearly preached in the teachings of the Law /  
And through grace, by those before the Law, /  
Who, transcended the Law through faith. /  
And as the Incarnation is the cause of salvation from corruption /  
Thus they foretold Thy Resurrection /  
To the souls imprisoned in Hades. ///  
O Lord, glory to Thee!

**Now and ever..., as usual:** “Thou art most-blessèd...”

**The Great Doxology**, the Troparion of the Resurrection, usual litanies and the Dismissal.

The Gospel sticheron, as appointed, sung in the narthex and then the First Hour, followed by the final Dismissal.

**Hours**

First and Sixth Hour: **Troparia:** Resurrection, Glory..., **Forefeast:** Prepare thyself, O Bethlēm...; **Kontakion:** Forefeast Rejoice, O Bethlēm, prepare thyself, O Ephratha!...

Third and Ninth Hour. **Troparia:** Resurrection, Glory..., **Fathers:** Great are the accomplishments of faith...; **Kontakion:** Forefeast: Rejoice, O Bethlēm, prepare thyself, O Ephratha!...

**Liturgy**

**At the Beatitudes**, 12 Troparia: 4 of the Resurrection; 4 from the Third Ode of the Canon to the Fathers; 4 from Ode 6 of the Canon of the Forefeast.

**1-4.** From the Octoechos.

**5-6.** Faithfully preserving the glory of the image and likeness of God by the burning fire of the Spirit, the victorious children extinguished the fire of the golden image, singing: “We know that Thou, O Lord, alone art God!” *(twice)*

**7.** The captive children, clothed with the wisdom and power of the Spirit, put to shame the wise men of Babylon and boldly cried aloud: “None is holy save Thee, O Lord, Thou Lover of mankind!”

**8.** The Law doth rejoice and joins chorus with the children and the prophets and doth exult today before the divine advent of the Lord. And Abraham doth also rejoice, for the Lord hath appeared incarnate from his seed.

**9-10. O** Lady, thou didst come as the new heaven, so that Christ, the Sun of glory, might shine forth in the flesh from thy womb, as through a cloud shining in a cave; for, in His boundless lovingkindness, He wished to illumine all those on earth with the rays of His brilliant light. *(twice)*

**11.** Thou didst perceive our infirmity and misery, O compassionate Christ, and didst not disdain us; but, without leaving the Father, Thou didst empty Thyself and made Thine abode in the womb of her who knew not wedlock, who doth now come forth to give Thee birth, without travail, in the cave.

**12. Theotokion:** O ye mountains and ye hills, ye fields and vales, ye people of every generation and nation, and every creature on the earth; rejoice now, and be filled with divine gladness, for the deliverance of all, the Word of God, the Timeless Creator of time, in His loving-kindness, hastens now come forth in time.

### **The Troparion of the Resurrection and**

#### **The Troparion of the Fathers, in Tone 2:**

Great are the accomplishments of faith, /  
For the three holy youths rejoiced in fountain of flames as though at the waters of rest. /  
And the prophet Daniel appeared /  
A shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep: ///  
So by their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls.

#### **The Troparion of the Forefeast, in Tone 4:**

Prepare thyself, O Bethlēhem, /  
For Eden hath been opened to all. /  
Adorn thyself, O Ephratha, /  
For the Tree of Life hath blossomed forth in the cave from the Virgin. /  
Her womb appeared as a spiritual paradise /  
In which is planted the garden divine. /  
Eating of it we shall live and not die as did Adam: /  
Christ is born, ///  
That He may raise up again the image that before was fallen.

**Glory...,**

**The Kontakion, of the Fathers, in Tone 1: To the melody, “The choir of angels....”**

**Rejoice**, O Bethlēm, prepare thyself, O Ephratha! /  
The lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd she carries in her womb. /  
The God-bearing Forefathers will rejoice beholding Him, ///  
And with the Shepherds they will glorify the Virgin nursing Him.

**Now and ever...,**

**The Kontakion of the Forefeast, in Tone 3:** *To the melody: "Today the Virgin...."*

**T**oday the Virgin comes to the cave /  
To give birth ineffably to the pre-eternal Word. /  
Hearing this, be of good cheer, O inhabited earth, /  
And with the angels and the shepherds, ///  
Glorify Him whose will it was to be made manifest a young Child the pre-eternal  
God.

**Note:** Except when the Sunday is the 21<sup>st</sup> of December,

**The Kontakion of the Forefeast, in Tone 2:**

**H**e who holds the earth in the hollow of His hand /  
Now is beheld in Bethlēm wrapped in swaddling clothes. /  
And we offer pre-festal hymns to His mother, who maternally rejoices ///  
Having held to her bosom the Son of God.

**The Prokeimenon, in Tone 4 (Fathers):** Blessèd art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers / and praised and glorified is Thy name forever! *Verse:* For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us.

**The Epistle (Sunday Before):** (328) Heb. 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40

**The Alleluia in, Tone 4 (Fathers):** We have heard with our ears, O God, for our fathers have told us. *Verse:* For Thou hast saved us from them that oppose us, and hast put to shame them that hate us.

**The Gospel (Sunday Before):** (1) Matthew 1:1-25

**The Communion Hymn:** Praise the Lord from the heavens.... Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous! Praise befits the just!