

Akathist Hymn

Background

Among the thousands of hymns attributed to St. Romanus, the Melodist of Constantinople, the AKATHIST was without doubt the most successful. Composed for liturgical use, c. 530, it must have entered at once into the life of monasteries and convents; at least of some of them.

On August 7, 626, after the great liberation of Constantinople, Patriarch Sergius chose it as a Hymn of Thanksgiving to the Mother of God, the Theotokos, adding the prelude in which is an allusion to Mary's part in the remarkable victory. This fact indicates that Romanus's Hymn was already considered the most beautiful of all hymns existing in the Greek Liturgy in honour of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God. It was moreover precisely on this occasion that Romanus's Hymn, composed for the feast of the Annunciation, became the AKATHIST.

The hymn is composed of 24 stanzas (corresponding to the 24 letters of the Greek Alphabet) and is sung "standing" by the clergy and the faithful.

This is an English translation of the most famous and liturgically important hymn of the Orthodox church, not only a timeless Christian prayer, but also a perennial source of theological doctrine and artistic inspiration. Reproduced here with thanks to the [Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America](#).

First Stasis

Priest: An Angel of the first rank was sent from heaven to say to the Theotokos: *[Theotokos is an ancient Greek title for the Virgin Mary that means "God-bearer" or "Mother of God"]* Rejoice! (3) And perceiving You, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe and with his bodiless voice cried aloud to her as follows:

Rejoice, through whom joy shall shine forth;

Rejoice, through whom the curse shall vanish.

Rejoice, fallen Adam's restoration;

Rejoice, redemption of Eve's tears.

Rejoice, height that is too difficult for human thought to ascend;

Rejoice, depth that is too strenuous for Angels' eyes to perceive

Rejoice, for you are the throne of the King;

Rejoice, for you hold him Who sustains everything.

Rejoice, star that shows forth the Sun;

Rejoice, womb in which God became incarnate.

Rejoice, through whom creation is renewed;

Rejoice, through whom the Creator becomes an infant.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: The holy one, beholding herself in innocence, says to Gabriel: The incredible tidings of your voice appear difficult for my soul to accept. For how do you speak of childbirth from a seedless conception, crying: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Curious to know knowledge what is knowable to no one, the Virgin cried out to the ministering angel: How is it possible for a son to be born of pure loins? Tell me. To whom the angel answered in fear, crying out:

Rejoice, initiate of ineffable counsel;
Rejoice, faith of silent beseechers.
Rejoice, introduction to Christ's miracles;
Rejoice, consummation of his doctrinal articles.
Rejoice, heavenly ladder by which God came down;
Rejoice, bridge leading those from earth to I heaven.
Rejoice, marvel greatly renowned among the Angels;
Rejoice, wound bitterly lamented by demons.
Rejoice, for you gave birth to the light ineffably;
Rejoice, for the "how" you taught to no one.
Rejoice, surpassing the knowledge of scholars;
Rejoice, dawn that illumines the minds of believers.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: The divine power of the Most High overshadowed the unwedded Maiden that she might conceive, and made her luxuriant womb appear as a luscious field for everyone who desires to reap salvation while chanting thusly: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: The Virgin, bearing God in her womb, hastened to visit Elizabeth, whose own babe at once knowing her greeting, rejoiced and leaping up as if in song, cried out to the Theotokos:

Rejoice, branch of an unwithered shoot;
Rejoice, land of unblemished fruit.
Rejoice, you who cultivate the husband and who loves humankind;
Rejoice, for you gave birth to the gardener of our life.
Rejoice, arable land yielding an abundance of compassion;
Rejoice, table laden an abundance of grace.
Rejoice, for you make flourish the meadows of luxury;
Rejoice, for you prepare a safe harbour for our souls.

Rejoice, intercession's acceptable incense;
Rejoice, expiation for all the world.
Rejoice, goodwill of God to mortals;
Rejoice, boldness of mortals before God.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: Fraught within with confusion, brought about by doubtful thoughts, the wise Joseph was troubled as he looked upon you the unwedded, and suspected you, O Blameless one. But when he learned of your conception by the Holy Spirit, he said: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Second Stasis

The shepherds heard the appearance of Christ in the flesh being glorified; and hastening as to a shepherd, they beheld him as a spotless lamb who had been pastured in the womb of Mary, to whom they sing praises saying:

Rejoice, mother of the Lamb and Shepherd;
Rejoice, sheepfold of spiritual sheep.
Rejoice, defence against invisible enemies;
Rejoice, key to the doors of Paradise.
Rejoice, for heavenly things are exulting with the earth;
Rejoice, earthly things that are dancing with the heavenly ones.
Rejoice, never-silent voice of the Apostles;
Rejoice, unconquered courage of the Martyrs.
Rejoice, faith's unshakable foundation;
Rejoice, shining revelation of grace.
Rejoice, through whom Hades is divested;
Rejoice, through whom we have been vested in glory.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: Beholding the star leading to God, the Magi followed its brightness; and holding it as a lantern, they searched for the powerful King, and reaching the Unreachable, they rejoiced and cried to him: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: The Chaldean children in the hands of the Virgin saw him who fashioned humankind. And perceiving him to be the Lord, even though he had taken the form of a slave, they hastened to pay tribute with gifts and to greet the blessed Lady:

Rejoice, mother of an unsetting star;
Rejoice, dawn of the mystic day.

Rejoice, who extinguished the furnace of error;
Rejoice, who enlighten initiates of the Trinity.
Rejoice, deposer of the inhuman tyrant from his rule;
Rejoice, discloser of the Lord Christ who loves humankind.
Rejoice, redeemer from pagan religions;
Rejoice, deliverer from the mire of sin.
Rejoice, for you have caused the worship of fire to cease;
Rejoice, releaser from the flames of passions.
Rejoice, guide of the faithful to chastity;
Rejoice, gladness of all generations.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: The Magi went to Babylon having become the God-bearing heralds. For they fulfilled Your prophecy and proclaimed You as the Christ to all, abandoning Herod as frivolous who did not know to sing: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Illumining in Egypt the light of truth, You dispelled the darkness of error; for her idols, O Savior, unable to endure your strength fell, while they who were delivered from them cried to the Theotokos:

Rejoice, the restoration of humankind;
Rejoice, the downfall of demons.
Rejoice, crusher of the delusion of error;
Rejoice, uncoverer of the deceit of idolatry.
Rejoice, sea that drowned the invisible Pharaoh;
Rejoice, rock that refreshed those thirsty for life
Rejoice, pillar of fire that guides those in darkness;
Rejoice, protection of the world wider than a cloud.
Rejoice, replacer of manna;
Rejoice, minister of sacred joy.
Rejoice, land of promises;
Rejoice, from whom flow milk and honey.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: Master, You were presented as a babe to Symeon on the threshold of being transported out of this present beguiling age, but also perceived by him to be perfect God; for which cause he marvelled at Your ineffable wisdom, crying: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Third Stasis

Priest: The new creation revealed the Creator by showing himself to us whom he created, sprouting up from an unseeded womb, while preserving it just as it was, unspoiled, so that beholding the miracle we might extol her by saying:

Rejoice, flower of incorruption;

Rejoice, crown of chastity.

Rejoice, illuminator of the impress. of the resurrection;

Rejoice, for the angelical life you exemplified.

Rejoice, tree with luscious fruit, by which the faithful are sustained;

Rejoice, foliaged tree of beautiful shade beneath which many are sheltered.

Rejoice, you who were pregnant with the guide for the wayward;

Rejoice, you who gave birth to the redeemer of captives.

Rejoice, by whom the righteous Judge is pacified;

Rejoice, forgiveness of many offenders.

Rejoice, robe of those without hope;

Rejoice, tender love that defeats every longing;

Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: Seeing the strange childbirth, let us be estranged from the mundane, transporting our mind to heaven. For this purpose the most high God appeared on earth as a lowly man, wishing to attract to heaven those who cry to Him: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Present below completely but in no way absent from on high was the uncircumscribable Logos. For this was divine condescension and not a change of place. He was born of a God-chosen virgin who heard this that follows:

Rejoice, uncontainable land of God;

Rejoice, doorway of sacred mystery.

Rejoice, unbelievable myth for the unfaithful;

Rejoice, unequivocal boast of the faithful.

Rejoice, all-holy vehicle of Him who rides the Cherubim;

Rejoice, exquisite domicile of Him who mounts the Seraphim.

Rejoice, bringer of opposites to harmony;

Rejoice, joiner of virginity -and childbirth.

Rejoice, through whom sin was nullified;

Rejoice, through whom Paradise was opened.

Rejoice, key of Christ's kingdom;

Rejoice, the hope of eternal blessings.

Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: All Angels were quite amazed by the great deed of Your incarnation. For they beheld the once inaccessible God accessible to all as- a man living among us, while hearing from everyone: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Eloquent rhetors we see mute as fish before you O Theotokos. For they are at a loss to explain how you had the power to give birth and yet remained a virgin. But we the faithful marvelling at the mystery cry out with faith:

Rejoice, vessel of God's wisdom;
Rejoice, storehouse of God's providence.
Rejoice, revealer of philosophers as fools;
Rejoice, expositor of the technologists as irrational.
Rejoice, for the fierce debaters are made foolish;
Rejoice, for the creators of the myths have wilted.
Rejoice, breaker of the webs of the Athenians' logic;
Rejoice, filler of the nets of the fishermen.
Rejoice, drawer of many from the abyss of ignorance;
Rejoice, enlightener of many with knowledge.
Rejoice, ship for those wishing salvation;
Rejoice, harbour for life's navigators.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: Wishing to save the world, the creator of all came down to it of his own will. And while being the shepherd as God, for us he appeared like us, as a man; and having called his own, like by like, as God he hears: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia

Fourth Stasis

Priest: Theotokos and Virgin, you are the fortress for virgins and for all who run to you for refuge. O immaculate Maiden, for the Creator of heaven and earth prepared you, inhabiting your womb and instructing all to address you thus;

Rejoice, pillar of virginity;
Rejoice, the gate of salvation.
Rejoice, initiator of spiritual renewal;
Rejoice, provider of godly benevolence.
Rejoice, for through you were born again those conceived in shame;
Rejoice, for you have admonished those whose intellects had been captured.
Rejoice, for you abolished him who corrupts reason;
Rejoice, for you have given birth to the savior of purity
Rejoice, bridal chamber of seedless marriage;
Rejoice, you who join the faithful to the Lord.

Rejoice, beautiful nursemaid of virgins;
Rejoice, bridesmaid of souls that are holy.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: Unsuccessful is every hymn that attempts to pay homage to the multitude of Your mercies. For even if we offer You odes in number equal to the sands, O holy King, yet we do nothing worthy of what You have given us who cry to You: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: We see the holy Virgin, as a light-bearing torch who brings light to those in darkness. For she lit the spiritual light, and thus leads everyone to divine knowledge, enlightening the mind with the light of dawn and is honoured by such praises:

Rejoice, ray of the spiritual Sun;
Rejoice, beam of the unsetting lustre.
Rejoice, lightning completely illuminating souls;
Rejoice, thunder that stuns the enemies.
Rejoice, for the glowing light you make rise upon the earth;
Rejoice, for you spring forth the flowing river.
Rejoice, you who illustrate the image of the font;
Rejoice, you who wash away the stain of sin.
Rejoice, water washing consciences clean;
Rejoice, cup that mixes great joy.
Rejoice, sweet smelling fragrance of Christ;
Rejoice, life of the mystical feasting.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: Wishing to grant pardon for ancient debts, he who cancels the debts of all people came himself and dwelt among those who were estranged from his divine grace; and tearing apart the record of sin, he hears from everyone: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Extolling your birth-giving, we all praise you as a living temple, O Theotokos. For the Lord whose hand sustains the world, having dwelt in your womb, sanctified and glorified you, and instructed all people to cry to you:

Rejoice, tabernacle of God the Logos;
Rejoice, holy one, holier than the holies.
Rejoice, ark that was gilt by the Spirit;
Rejoice, inexhaustible treasure of life.
Rejoice, precious diadem of godly kings;
Rejoice, honoured pride of the pious priests.
Rejoice, the Church's unshakable tower;

Rejoice, the kingdom's unassailable fortress.
Rejoice, through whom trophies of victory are raised;
Rejoice, through whom enemies are defeated.
Rejoice, healing of my body;
Rejoice, my soul's salvation.
Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

People: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded.

Priest: You, all-laudable Mother who gave birth to the Logos, the holiest of all who are holy (3), while accepting this offering now, deliver everyone from all calamities, and deliver from future punishment those who cry out: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.