

Classification of Feasts

In the Orthodox Church, liturgical celebrations are ranked according to a hierarchy of several classifications. Each class has its own characteristics and is expressed in the divine services and disciplines in a particular way.

Pascha is in a class of its own, ranking above all other commemorations. Holy Week before Pascha has a rich series of special services. The other twelve Great Feasts are divided between First Class Feasts (feasts of our Lord) and Second Class Feasts (feasts of the Theotokos). The lesser classes—Third Class Feasts, Fourth Class Feasts, and Fifth Class Feasts—commemorate the lives of the saints, holy events, and holy objects. Between the Third Class and Fourth Class there are two Intermediate Classes, Kathelicon and Small Bells.

First Class Feasts—Feasts of the Lord

Elevation of the Holy Cross, September 14
Nativity of Christ (Christmas), December 25
Theophany (sometimes called Epiphany), January 6
Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Pascha
Ascension, forty days after Pascha
Pentecost, fifty days after Pascha
Transfiguration, August 6

* Most of these feasts have both a forefeast and a leavetaking (exceptions: Palm Sunday has neither; Ascension and Pentecost have a leavetaking but no forefeast).

* An All-Night Vigil is appointed for the eve of the feast.

* At Great Vespers

- The kathisma reading from the Psalter that follows the litany of peace is omitted unless the feast coincides with a Sunday, in which case the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual (exceptions: the first kathisma is omitted on the eve of Pentecost and on the eves of Nativity, Theophany, and Transfiguration when those feasts fall on a Sunday).

- Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.

* Festal Orthros

- The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third reading from the Psalter).

- Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.

- There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration following).

- The praises and the great doxology are chanted.

* At the Divine Liturgy for the feast, the patronal troparion of the temple is suppressed.

* The divine services are for the feast alone; all other commemorations are suppressed (even on a Sunday).

* When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit fish, wine, and oil.

Second Class Feasts—Feasts of the Theotokos

Nativity of the Theotokos, September 8
Presentation of the Theotokos, November 21
Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos, August 15
Presentation of Christ, February 2+
Annunciation, March 25+

+ These are considered Feasts of the Theotokos, but they also share certain characteristics proper to First Class Feasts.

* These feasts have both a forefeast and a leavetaking.

- * An All-Night Vigil is appointed for the eve of the feast.
- * At Great Vespers
 - When the feast falls on any day other than Sunday, the kathisma reading appointed for the day is replaced by the first stasis of the first kathisma (Psalms 1-3) (exceptions: at the Great Vespers for the Presentation of Christ and Annunciation the kathisma reading is omitted altogether).
 - When the feast falls on a Sunday the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual.
 - Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.
- * At Festal Orthros
 - The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135, or Psalm 44 with its poetic refrains) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third reading from the Psalter).
 - Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.
 - There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration following).
 - The praises and the great doxology are chanted.
- * At the Divine Liturgy for the feast, the patronal troparion of the temple is suppressed.
- * When the feast falls on a Sunday the services for the feast are combined with those of the Resurrection from the Octoechos.
- * When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit fish, wine, and oil (exception: when Annunciation falls during Holy Week, wine and oil (but not fish) are permitted; when Annunciation falls on Holy Friday or Holy Saturday, wine (but not oil or fish) are permitted).

Third Class Feasts—Vigil and Polyeleos Commemorations (which include a complete akolouthia)

- * These feasts generally do not have a forefeast or a leavetaking (exceptions: the commemorations of St. Demetrios (October 26), the Nativity of the Forerunner (June 24), Ss. Peter and Paul (June 29), and the Beheading of the Forerunner (August 29) each has a leavetaking).
- * An All-Night Vigil may be appointed if there is a text for Little Vespers in the Menaion, in which case the commemoration is designated Vigil. Otherwise, an All-Night Vigil is not appointed and the commemoration is designated Polyeleos.
- * At Great Vespers
 - When the feast falls on any day other than Sunday, the kathisma reading appointed for the day is replaced by the first stasis of the first kathisma (Psalms 1-3).
 - When the feast falls on a Sunday the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual.
 - Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.
- * At Festal Orthros
 - The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135, or Psalm 44 with its poetic refrains) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third Psalter reading).
 - Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.
 - There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration).
 - The praises and the great doxology are chanted.
- * When the feast falls on a Sunday the services for the feast are combined with those of the Resurrection from the Octoechos.
- * When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit wine and oil (exception: the Beheading of the Forerunner (August 29) is always observed as a strict fast day when it falls on a weekday; when it falls on a Saturday or Sunday wine and oil are permitted). If it is the patronal feastday, fish may be permitted.

*This list was compiled and edited from various sources by Stan Takis.
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