

ACATHISTUSⁱ

Gratitude to God for Everythingⁱⁱ

Introduction and translation from Ukrainian by

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The aim of this brief introduction is not to give a full insight of an acathistus as a genre but rather to give a general understanding of what an acathistus is. Although acathisti are an important part of Slavic culture and of Ukrainian Orthodox tradition in particular, there has been little said about it in scholarly literature. To demonstrate the significance of acathisti, it is enough to say that Ukrainian cathedrals often open early in the morning to serve a special service during which an acathistus is sung, e.g. Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Zaporizhzhya (<http://sobor.zp.ua/>) where all Tuesday mornings are devoted to an acathistus to Great Martyr Barbara. All people are invited to participate by attending the Church. An acathistus is usually sung before Matins early in the morning. When an acathistus is sung, Churches open early and working Ukrainians often pass by to light a candle and pray.

The translation of the *Gratitude to God for Everything* acathistus is not motivated by the outstanding form of the hymn, but rather by the inspiration from the content and in hope to encourage scholars and translators to do more translations and explore both structure and meaning of this type of discourse.

Below is a short outline of the history and a typical structure of an acathistus followed by the translation itself and the sources used to write this introduction.

Acathistus or **akathist Hymn** (Gr.: Ἀκάθιστος Ὕμνος, 'unseated hymn') is a Christian hymn dedicated to a saint, holy event, or One of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The name derives from the fact that during the chanting of the hymn, the congregations do not sit down but remain standing in reverence (Ancient Gr.: ἀ+κάθισις [a+káthisis] = without, not + sitting).

During Eastern Orthodox services, sitting, standing, and bowing are set by rules, as well as individual discretion. However, standing is considered mandatory for all healthy

people during acathisti as well as readings of the Gospel and Eucharist. The very first acathistus was written in the 6th century to the Theotokos (Mother of God)ⁱⁱⁱ and since then has become a popular type of hymn to honour God and saints during and in addition to regular services. In its use as a part of the service of the Salutations to the Theotokos, an acathistus is also known by its Greek or Arabic names: Chairetismoι (Gr. *Χαιρετισμοί*) and Arab. *Madayeh*. meaning literally "Rejoicings"; in the Slavic tradition, it is known as *Akafist* (Ukr. *Акафіст*).

Many of the modern acathisti are written in the same elevated style as the 6th century acathistus praising Mother of God. Later acathisti, though, may be devoted to Jesus Christ or a saint. Akasthists are often a part of Eastern Orthodox Ukrainian prayer books (e.g. *Molytovnyk*). Several of the most well-known acathisti include *The acathistus to Jesus the Sweetest or The acathistus to Saint Nicholas, The acathistus to Great Martyr Barbara* (Ukr. *акафіст Ісусу Найсолодшому, акафіст Святому Миколаю, акафіст Великомучениці Варварі*).

The translation of the acathistus below is the English version of the Ukrainian acathistus *Podiaka Bobovi za vse*. The author of this acathistus is unknown. However, it is believed that it has been compiled on the basis of works by St. John Chrysostom (http://ukrlib.comli.com/Relig/097_Podyaka_Triytsi.pdf).

Structurally this acathistus consists of 13 kontakia and 12 oikoi. A kontakion and a oikos form one relatively independent unit. Each kontakion ends with "Alleluia" and each oikos contains refrain, "Glory to you" in this acathistus. Such a structure is typical of an Eastern Orthodox acathistus. In addition to such a strict form, there are also rules as to how an acathistus should be read: the last kontakion is read three times, after this the first kontakion and the first oikos are read again. This is normally followed by a prayer. Although there is no prayer in the source text for this hymn, some internet versions give a prayer at the end (e.g. http://molytva.at.ua/index/akafist_podjaki_isusu_khristu_slava_bogovi_za_vse/0-321).

Kontakion¹ 1

Immortal Lord of Ages, You Who hold in Your hand all the roads of man's life. We thank You for all Your visible and invisible gifts – for the earthly life and the heavenly joy of Your Future Kingdom. Continue spreading Your graciousness in front of us who sing to You:

Glory to You, Lord, forever!

Oikos² 1

I was born a weak and helpless baby but Your angel spread his bright wings protecting my cradle. Since then, Your love has been shining on all the roads of my life, wonderfully directing me to the Light of eternity. The gifts of Your life are the most gracious, and I, together with all who know You, sing:

Glory to You, for You called me to life.

Glory to You, for You showed me the beauty of the Universe.

Glory to You, for You as if an eternal book opened the sky and the earth to me.

Glory to Your eternity in the temporal world.

Glory to You for Your visible and invisible favours.

Glory to You for every bitter sigh of mine.

Glory to You for my every step of life and every minute of joy.

Glory to You, Lord, forever!

Kontakion 2

Lord, how pleasant it is to be at Your place: fragrant air, mountains which extend to the skies, waters like an endless mirror that reflect gold of rays and lightness of clouds. All nature whispers secretly; it is all full of caresses; and birds, and animals bear the seal of Your Love. Blessed is mother earth with her passing beauty which awakens longing for the eternal motherland where in it rings immortal beauty: Alleluia.

1 **Kontakion** (from Gr.: *κόνταξ* [kontax] - 'pole', specifically the pole around which a scroll is wound) – a part of an acathistus preceding oikos.

2 **Oikos** (Gr.: *οἶκος*, 'house, household' or 'family') – a part of an acathistus following kontakion in which the topic of kontakion is expanded.

Oikos 2

You led me into this life as if into a marvellous heaven. As if a deep blue bowl, we saw the sky, in the azure of which birds were flying. We heard the peaceful noise of a forest and harmonious music of waters; we ate sweet fruit and fragrant honey. It is so beautiful on Your earth and it is so joyful to be Your guest.

Glory to You for the joy of life.

Glory to You for the fragrant lilies of the valley and hollyhocks.

Glory to You for various sweet tastes of fruits and berries.

Glory to You for the diamantine shining of the morning dew.

Glory to You for the smile of bright awakening.

Glory to You for the our life in this world which precedes eternal life.

Glory to You, Lord, forever!

Kontakion 3

Every flower has fragrance of the Holy Ghost's power, gentle flowing of aromas, tenderness of colours, and beauty of big things in little things. Praise and honour to the life-giving God Who spread meadows like a flourishing carpet, Who crowns fields with golden wheat and azure of cornflowers; and souls endows with joy to observe this all. So rejoice and sing to Him Alleluia!

Oikos 3

How admirable You are in the triumph of spring. When all arise and a thousand voices call to You: You are the source of life, You are the conqueror of death. In the moonlight, when a nightingale is singing, valleys and forests are all dressed in their snow-white wedding gown. All the earth is Your bride: she is waiting for her Immortal Bridegroom. If You dress up grass this way, then how much will You change us in the future age of the resurrection! How our bodies will lighten! How our souls will be shining!

Glory to You, leading out of darkness various colours, tastes, and fragrances.

Glory to You for beauty and the caress of all nature.

Glory to You, embracing us with thousands of Your creatures.

Glory to You for the depth of Your intelligence that is reflected as a seal on the whole world.

Glory to You because I kiss reverently Your invisible feet.

Glory to You, lighting clear light of eternal life in front of us.
Glory to You for hope of immortal, unfading, and ideal beauty.
Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 4

How You sweeten those who think about You! How life-giving and holy Your Word is! Talk with You is milder than olive oil and sweeter than honey. A prayer to You inspires and revives! My heart fills up with awe, nature and the whole of life becomes intelligent then! Where there is You, there is soul wealth and a song flows like a life-saving stream: Alleluia!

Oikos 4

At the sunset, when calmness of eternal sleep and silence of a fading day reign, I see Your dwellings underneath the starry domes. Fire and the purple, gold and the azure which are prophetically speaking about the inexpressible beauty of Your dwellings. They are majestically calling: let's go to Father!

Glory to You in evening quietness.
Glory to You Who poured great serenity into the world.
Glory to You for the parting ray of a setting sun.
Glory to You for the rest of refreshing sleep.
Glory to You for the placidity of darkness when all the world is far away.
Glory to You for soothing prayers of an anxious soul.
Glory to You for the promise to awaken us for the happiness of the eternal life.
Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 5

He who has the light of Your fire in his heart is not afraid of storms of everyday. Hurricane and darkness, fear and tempest are all around. But quietness and light are inside of his soul and Christ is there! And his heart is singing: Alleluia!

Oikos 5

I see Your sky that shines with stars. O how rich You are, how much light You have! The eternity looks at me with the rays of faraway celestial bodies. I am so small and miserable but the Lord is with me and His loving hand protects me everywhere.

Glory to You for Your everyday care about me.

Glory to You for the arranged meetings with people.

Glory to You for my relatives' love and our friends' devotion.

Glory to You for the obedience of cattle which serve me.

Glory to You for the bright moments of my life.

Glory to You for the clear joy of my heart.

Glory to You for the happiness to live, to move, and to see.

Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 6

How great and close You are in the strength of a storm. How Your powerful hand is seen in a dazzling lightening! Marvellous is Your greatness! The Lord's voice is above the fields and in the rustling of forests. The Lord's voice is above all the waters. Glory to You in the fire-breathing, seething mountains. You shake the earth as clothes. You raise sea waves up to the sky. Glory to You that You tame man's pride and encourage to call compassionately: Alleluia!

Oikos 6

Sometimes when lightening illuminates a gorgeously decorated house, the light of the lamps appears dim. In the same way, You were shining brightly many times in my soul during the happiest moments of my life. And how colourless and dim the lamps seemed to me after Your shining light. My soul was craving for You.

Glory to You because You are the beginning and the end of man's highest desire.

Glory to You for our inexhaustible thirst for communicating with God.

Glory to You, for You inspired us with discontentment with earthly things.

Glory to You, for You dressed us in Your thinnest rays.

Glory to You, for You destroyed the reign of dark spirits and condemned all evil to be destroyed.

Glory to You for Your revelations, for our happiness to feel and live with You.

Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 7

Your call is heard in the marvellous harmony of sounds. You open to us anticipation of heavenly life. We feel it in melodious singing, in the beauty of tunes, in the height of musical hues and colours of fine arts. And everything which is truly beautiful elevates the soul by a vigorous call to You and makes us triumphantly sing: Alleluia!

Oikos 7

By the inspiration of the Holy Ghost You enlighten thoughts of artists, poets, and genial scientists. They prophetically understand Your laws by the strength of Heavenly mind and by this they open the abyss of Your creative wisdom. Their deeds speak about You; O how great You are in Your creations; O how great You are in man!

Glory to You for You showed tremendous power in the laws of the Universe.

Glory to You because all nature is filled with the laws about Your existence.

Glory to You for all that You graciously opened to us.

Glory to You for all that You wisely hid from us.

Glory to You for the perfection of man's intelligence.

Glory to You for the life-giving energy to work.

Glory to You for fiery sparks of inspiration.

Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 8

How close You are when I am ill. You Yourself visit the sick. You Yourself bend over the bed of a sufferer and his heart speaks with You. You light up my heart when I feel very bad and suffer. You send unexpected help. You console. You are love that tries and saves. We sing a song to You: Alleluia!

Oikos 8

When I first consciously called You in my childhood, You listened to my prayer and reverent peace settled in my heart. I then realized that You are Gracious, and blessed are those who come to You. I then began to call You again and again and I am still calling.

Glory to You, for You grant my good wishes.
Glory to You, for You take care of me in the day and at night.
Glory to You, for You cure sorrow and loss with the healing flow of time.
Glory to You, for with You there are no irretrievable losses, because You give eternal life to all.
Glory to You, for You gave immortality to all the elevated and righteous.
Glory to You, for You promised desirable meeting with the deceased.
Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 9

Why is nature mysteriously smiling on holidays? Why is relief the spreading in my heart? It cannot be compared with anything else and the air in the altar and the temple seems to be shining. Because this is the closeness of Your favour, this is the reflection of heavenly light. Then the sky and the earth praise: Alleluia!

Oikos 9

When You inspired me to serve my neighbour and lightened my soul with obedience, one of Your countless rays fell on my heart and it glowed like iron in fire. I saw Your invisible Face.

Glory to You, for You changed our life by kind deeds.
Glory to You for the joy that You sealed in Your every commandment.
Glory to You, for You live where one can feel charity.
Glory to You, for You send us trials and sorrow so that we were empathic towards our neighbours when they suffer.
Glory to You, for You place great reward in good deeds.
Glory to You, for You accept our high intentions.
Glory to You, for You raised love above all, earthly and heavenly.
Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 10

It is impossible to restore what has been crushed into dust but You do restore completely those whose conscience has turned into dust. You restore previous beauty to souls that have hopelessly lost it. There is nothing irrecoverable with You. You are pure love.

You are Creator and Saviour. We praise You with the song: Alleluia!

Oikos 10

My Lord, I am aware of the hell-deep fall of the proud angel Lucifer. Save me with the power of Your graciousness. Do not let me deviate from You. Do not let me doubt in You. Sharpen my hearing so that every minute of my life I can hear Your secretive voice and so that I can call to You:

Glory to You for the circumstances foreseen by You that happened to me.

Glory to You for the wondrous intuition.

Glory to You for the promptings of the inner voice.

Glory to You for Your revelations in dreams and in real life.

Glory to You, for You ruin our vain intentions.

Glory to You, for by suffering You sober us from inflaming passions.

Glory to You, for You subdue the pride of my heart.

Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 11

Through the icy chain of ages, Lord, I feel Your warm breath, I feel pulsing blood. You are already close The thickness of time has vanished. I see Your Crucifixion, and it is for my sake. My spirit is in the dust below the Crucifixion. Here love and salvation rejoice Here praise never quiets: Alleluia!

Oikos 11

Blessed is he who eats supper in Your Kingdom. But You have given me this gift on earth already. So many times from Your hand You gave me Your Body and Blood. And though most sinful of all, I accepted this blessing. I felt Your unspeakable and inexpressible love.

Glory to You for the inexplicable life-giving power of righteousness.

Glory to You for showing Your Church as a quiet harbour to the one who is tired of the world.

Glory to You for replenishing us with living waters of Baptism.

Glory to You for giving back a confessor the beauty of pure white lilies.

Glory to You because You are the inexhaustible abyss of forgiveness.
Glory to You for the bowl of life and the bread of eternal joy.
Glory to You, for You elevated us to heaven.
Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 12

I saw many times the seal of Your glory on dead people's faces. They were shining with heavenly beauty and happiness. The features of their faces were not material, as if from the air and that was the sign of joy and placidity that they had attained, and silently they were calling to You. In the hour of my death, enlighten my soul that is also calling to You: Alleluia!

Oikos 12

What is my praise to You worth? I have not heard the cherubs' singing because it is possible only for the saints, but I know how nature praises You. I was watching earth in winter in the moonlight quietly praying You. Dressed in white robes the earth was shining with diamonds of snow. I saw the rising sun rejoicing in You. Chorus of birds were praising Your glory. I heard the forest peacefully murmuring to You; winds were singing and waters were trickling. Myriads of celestial bodies were prophesying about You while they moved majestically in the endless space. What is my praise worth? Nature is obedient, but I am not. While I live, I see Your love; I want to thank You. I want to pray and call:

Glory to You, showing us the Light.

Glory to You, loving us with love so deep, immeasurable, and godlike.

Glory to You, embracing us with Light and leading us into the community of angels and saints.

Glory to You, Heavenly Father, that You bequeathed us Your Kingdom.

Glory to You, Holy Ghost, for You give Light of future life.

Glory to You for everything, the inexhaustibly rich in graciousness Holy Trinity.

Glory to You, Lord, forever.

Kontakion 13

O gracious and life-giving Trinity, accept our gratitude for all Your favours, and make us worthy of all Your kind gifts so that we can multiply the talents entrusted to us in order to enter our Lord's eternal joy with all-winning praise: Alleluia!

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i First of all I would like to thank God.

I would like to say thank you to the peer reviewers who have reviewed this translation and the brief introduction to it.

ii The translation of the acathistus was inspired by the content of the acathistus in hope to make it available to those for whom Ukrainian is not a native language. I have seen it for the first time during my stay at an Orthodox summer camp in Pliashcheva village (Rivne oblast' of Ukraine). The acathistus was given to me at the end of my stay at the camp as a present from a “secret friend”, a game during which people who play it have a secret friend and periodically send him/her a short notice or a small present (e.g. a cookie, a badge). My secret friend turned out to be my good friend, Volodymyr, who managed not to reveal himself until the very last day when he presented me the acathistus in the form of a little pocket book.

iii In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, there are three names that people use to address to St. Mary: (1) *Mother of God* and *Godbearer* or Theotokos (Gr. Θεοτόκος, Ukr. *Богородиця*), (2) *Holy Virgin Mary* or Aeparthenos (Gr. Ἁειπαρθένος, Ukr. *Приснодіва Марія*), as confirmed in the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553, and (3) *Most Holy Panagia* (Gr. Παναγία, Ukr. *Присвята*) (see also Fairbairn, 2002).