



“Tenderness” (“Merciful and Man-loving”) Icon of the Theotokos, painted by the great 20th-century iconographer Pimen M. Sofronov.

AKATHIST

to Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God

EDITOR’S NOTE: *The Akathist to the Theotokos has remained throughout the centuries as the highest poetic expression of her veneration. Composed in the imperial city of Constantinople in the 6th century by St. Romanus the Melodist (†556), it is used by the Orthodox Church up to today in its original form. The following translation was done by the late Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (1902–1992), who, as a missionary priest-monk of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, was in close association with St. John Maximovitch. Born and raised in England, Archimandrite Lazarus was a convert to the Orthodox Faith, and was said to be the first English Orthodox monk of the new era. Archimandrite Lazarus was a tireless laborer in the missionary field, working for many years in Israel, India, Australia and California, and finally in Alaska, where he reposed and is buried. He read the Holy Scriptures constantly, and was the first to translate into English many essential Orthodox Church services, prayers, and spiritual writings. The English-speaking Orthodox world is indebted to his zeal.*

KONTAKION 1

Queen of the Heavenly Host, Defender of our souls, we thy servants offer to thee songs of victory and thanksgiving, for thou, O Mother of God, hast delivered us from dangers. But as thou hast invincible power, free us from conflicts of all kinds that we may cry to thee:

Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

EIKOS 1

An Archangel was sent from Heaven to say to the Mother of God: Rejoice! And seeing Thee, O Lord, taking bodily form,



Vladimir Icon the Theotokos from Belozersk ("White Lake"), Russia. From the cell of St. Cyril of White Lake, before which this great Elder of the North poured out his heart in singing the Akathist to the Mother of God. During this singing, the Mother of God appeared to him and told him to found a monastery on White Lake.

he was amazed and with his bodiless voice he stood crying to her such things as these:

Rejoice, thou through whom joy will flash forth!
Rejoice, thou through whom the curse will cease!
Rejoice, revival of fallen Adam!
Rejoice, redemption of the tears of Eve!
Rejoice, height hard to climb for human thoughts!
Rejoice, depth hard to contemplate even for the eyes of
Angels!
Rejoice, thou who art the King's throne!
Rejoice, thou who bearest Him Who bears all!
Rejoice, star that causeth the Sun to appear!
Rejoice, womb of the divine incarnation!
Rejoice, thou through whom creation becomes new!
Rejoice, thou through whom the Creator becomes a babe!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 2

Aware that she was living in chastity, the holy Virgin said boldly to Gabriel: "Thy strange message is hard for my soul to accept. How is it thou speakest of the birth from a seedless conception?" And she cried: Alleluia!

EIKOS 2

Seeking to know what passes knowledge, the Virgin cried to the ministering spirit: "Tell me, how can a son be born from a chaste womb?" Then he spoke to her in fear, only crying aloud thus:

Rejoice, initiate of God's ineffable will!
Rejoice, assurance of those who pray in silence!
Rejoice, prelude of Christ's miracles!
Rejoice, crown of His dogmas!
Rejoice, heavenly ladder by which God came down!

Rejoice, bridge that conveys us from earth to Heaven!
Rejoice, wonder of angels blazed abroad!
Rejoice, wound of demons bewailed afar!
Rejoice, thou who ineffably gavest birth to the Light!
Rejoice, thou who didst reveal thy secret to none!
Rejoice, thou who surpassest the knowledge of the wise!
Rejoice, thou who givest light to the minds of the faithful!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 3

The power of the Most High then overshadowed the Virgin for conception, and showed her fruitful womb as a sweet meadow to all who wish to reap salvation, as they sing: Alleluia!

EIKOS 3

Pregnant with the Divine indwelling the Virgin ran to Elizabeth whose unborn babe at once recognized her embrace, rejoiced, and with leaps of joy as songs, cried to the Mother of God:

Rejoice, scion of an undying Shoot!
Rejoice, field of untainted fruit!
Rejoice, thou who laborest for Him Whose labor is love!
Rejoice, thou who givest birth to the Father of our life!
Rejoice, cornland yielding a rich crop of mercies!
Rejoice, table bearing a wealth of forgiveness!
Rejoice, thou who revivest the garden of delight!
Rejoice, thou who preparest a haven for souls!
Rejoice, acceptable incense of intercession!
Rejoice, purification of all the world!
Rejoice, favour of God to mortals!
Rejoice, access of mortals to God!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 4

Sustaining from within a storm of doubtful thoughts, the chaste Joseph was troubled. For knowing thee to have no husband, he suspected a secret union, O Immaculate One. But when he learned that thy conception was of the Holy Spirit, he exclaimed: Alleluia!

EIKOS 4

The shepherds heard Angels carolling Christ's incarnate Presence, and running like sheep to their shepherd, they beheld him as an innocent Lamb fed at Mary's breast, and they sang to her and said:

Rejoice, mother of the Lamb and the Shepherd!
Rejoice, fold of spiritual sheep!
Rejoice, defence against invisible enemies!
Rejoice, key to the gates of Paradise!
Rejoice, for the things of Heaven rejoice with the earth!
Rejoice, for the things of earth join chorus with the Heavens!
Rejoice, never-silent voice of the Apostles!
Rejoice, invincible courage of the martyrs!
Rejoice, firm support of faith!
Rejoice, radiant blaze of grace!
Rejoice, thou through whom hell was stripped bare!
Rejoice, thou through whom we are clothed with glory!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 5

Having sighted the divinely moving star, the Wise Men followed its light and held it as a lamp by which they sought a powerful King. And as they approached the Unapproachable, they rejoiced and shouted to Him: Alleluia!

EIKOS 5

The sons of the Chaldees saw in the hands of the Virgin Him Who with His hand made man. And knowing Him to be the Lord although He had taken the form of a servant, they hastened to worship Him with their gifts and cried to her who is blessed:

Rejoice, mother of the never-setting Star!
Rejoice, dawn of the mystic Day!
Rejoice, thou who didst extinguish the furnace of error!
Rejoice, thou who didst enlighten the initiates of the Trinity!
Rejoice, thou who didst banish from power the inhuman tyrant!
Rejoice, thou who hast shown us Christ as the Lord and Lover of men!
Rejoice, thou who redeemest from pagan worship!
Rejoice, thou who dost drag from the mire of works!
Rejoice, thou who hast stopped the worship of fire!
Rejoice, thou who hast quenched the flame of the passions!
Rejoice, guide of the faithful to chastity!
Rejoice, joy of all generations!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 6

Turned God-bearing heralds, the Wise Men returned to Babylon. They fulfilled Thy prophecy and to all preached Thee as the Christ, and they left Herod as a trifler, who could not sing: Alleluia!

EIKOS 6

By shining in Egypt the light of truth, Thou didst dispel the darkness of falsehood, O Saviour. For, unable to endure Thy

strength, its idols fell; and those who were freed from their spell cried to the Mother of God:

Rejoice, uplifting of men!
Rejoice, downfall of demons!
Rejoice, thou who hast trampled on the delusion of error!
Rejoice, thou who hast exposed the fraud of idols!
Rejoice, sea that has drowned the spiritual Pharaoh!
Rejoice, rock that has refreshed those thirsting for Life!
Rejoice, pillar of fire guiding those in darkness!
Rejoice, shelter of the world broader than a cloud!
Rejoice, sustenance replacing Manna!
Rejoice, minister of holy delight!
Rejoice, land of promise!
Rejoice, thou from whom flows milk and honey!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 7

When Simeon was about to depart this life of delusion, Thou wast brought as a Babe to him. But he recognized Thee as also perfect God, and marvelling at Thy ineffable wisdom, he cried: Alleluia!

EIKOS 7

The Creator showed us a new creation when He appeared to us who came from Him. For He sprang from an unsown womb and kept it chaste as it was, that seeing the miracle we might sing to her and say:

Rejoice, flower of incorruption!
Rejoice, crown of continence!
Rejoice, flashing symbol of the resurrection!
Rejoice, mirror of the life of the Angels!
Rejoice, tree of glorious fruit by which the faithful are nourished!

Rejoice, bush of shady leaves by which many are sheltered!
Rejoice, thou who bearest the Guide of those astray!
Rejoice, thou who givest birth to the Redeemer of captives!
Rejoice, pleader before the Just Judge!
Rejoice, forgiveness of many sinners!
Rejoice, robe of freedom for the naked!
Rejoice, love that vanquishes all desire!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 8

Seeing the Child Exile, let us be exiles from the world and transport our minds to Heaven. For the Most High God appeared on earth as lowly man, because He wished to draw to the heights those who cry to Him: Alleluia!

EIKOS 8

Wholly present was the infinite Word among those here below, yet in no way absent from those on high; for this was a divine condescension and not a change of place. And His birth was from a God-possessed Virgin who heard words like these:

Rejoice, container of the uncontainable God!
Rejoice, door of solemn mystery!
Rejoice, doubtful report of unbelievers!
Rejoice, undoubted boast of the faithful!
Rejoice, all-holy chariot of Him Who rides on the Cherubim!
Rejoice, all-glorious temple of Him Who is above the Seraphim!
Rejoice, thou who hast united opposites!
Rejoice, thou who hast joined virginity and motherhood!
Rejoice, thou through whom sin has been absolved!
Rejoice, thou through whom Paradise is opened!
Rejoice, key to the Kingdom of Christ!

Rejoice, hope of eternal blessings!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 9

All angel kind was amazed at the great act of Thy incarnation; for they saw the inaccessible God as a man accessible to all, dwelling with us and hearing from all: Alleluia!

EIKOS 9

We see most eloquent orators dumb as fish before thee, O Mother of God. For they dare not ask: How canst thou bear a Child and yet remain a Virgin? But we marvel at the mystery, and cry with faith:

Rejoice, receptacle of the Wisdom of God!
Rejoice, treasury of His Providence!
Rejoice, thou who showest philosophers to be fools!
Rejoice, thou who constrainest the learned to silence!
Rejoice, for the clever critics have made fools of themselves!
Rejoice, for the writers of myths have died out!
Rejoice, thou who didst break the webs of the Athenians!
Rejoice, thou who didst fill the nets of the fishermen!
Rejoice, thou who drawest us from the depths of ignorance!
Rejoice, thou who enlightenest many with knowledge!
Rejoice, ship of those who wish to be saved!
Rejoice, haven for sailors on the sea of life!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 10

Wishing to save the world, the Ruler of all came to it spontaneously. And though as God He is our Shepherd, for us He appeared to us as a Man; and having called mankind to salvation by His own Perfect Manhood, as God He hears: Alleluia!

EIKOS 10

Thou art a wall to virgins and to all who run to thee, O Virgin Mother of God. For the Maker of Heaven and earth prepared thee, O Immaculate One, and dwelt in thy womb, and taught all to call to thee:

Rejoice, pillar of virginity!
Rejoice, gate of salvation!
Rejoice, founder of spiritual reformation!
Rejoice, leader of divine goodness!
Rejoice, for thou didst regenerate those conceived in shame!
Rejoice, for thou gavest understanding to those robbed of their senses!
Rejoice, thou who didst foil the corrupter of minds!
Rejoice, thou who gavest birth to the Sower of chastity!
Rejoice, bridechamber of a virgin marriage!
Rejoice, thou who dost wed the faithful to the Lord!
Rejoice, fair mother and nurse of virgins!
Rejoice, betrother of holy souls!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 11

Every hymn falls short that aspires to embrace the multitude of Thy many mercies. For if we should offer to Thee, O Holy King, songs numberless as the sand, we should still have done nothing worthy of what Thou hast given to us who shout to Thee: Alleluia!

EIKOS 11

We see the Holy Virgin as a flaming torch appearing to those in darkness. For having kindled the Immaterial Light, she leads all to divine knowledge; she illumines our minds with radiance and is honoured by our shouting these praises:

Rejoice, ray of the spiritual Sun!

Rejoice, flash of unfading splendour!
Rejoice, lightning that lights up our souls!
Rejoice, thunder that stuns our enemies!
Rejoice, for thou didst cause the refulgent Light to dawn!
Rejoice, for thou didst cause the river of many streams to gush forth!
Rejoice, living image of the font!
Rejoice, remover of the stain of sin!
Rejoice, laver that washes the conscience clean!
Rejoice, bowl for mixing the wine of joy!
Rejoice, aroma of the fragrance of Christ!
Rejoice, life of mystical festivity!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

KONTAKION 12

When He Who forgives all men their past debts wished to restore us to favour, of His own will He came to dwell among those who had fallen from His grace; and having torn up the record of their sins, He hears from all: Alleluia!

EIKOS 12

While singing to thy Child, we all praise thee as a living temple, O Mother of God. For the Lord Who holds all things in His hand dwelt in thy womb, and He sanctified and glorified thee, and taught all to cry to thee:

Rejoice, tabernacle of God the Word!
Rejoice, saint greater than the saints!
Rejoice, ark made golden by the Spirit!
Rejoice, inexhaustible treasury of Life!
Rejoice, precious diadem of pious kings!
Rejoice, adorable boast of devoted priests!
Rejoice, unshaken tower of the Church!
Rejoice, impregnable wall of the Kingdom!

Rejoice, thou through whom we obtain our victories!
Rejoice, thou before whom our foes fall prostrate!
Rejoice, healing of my body!
Rejoice, salvation of my soul!
Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

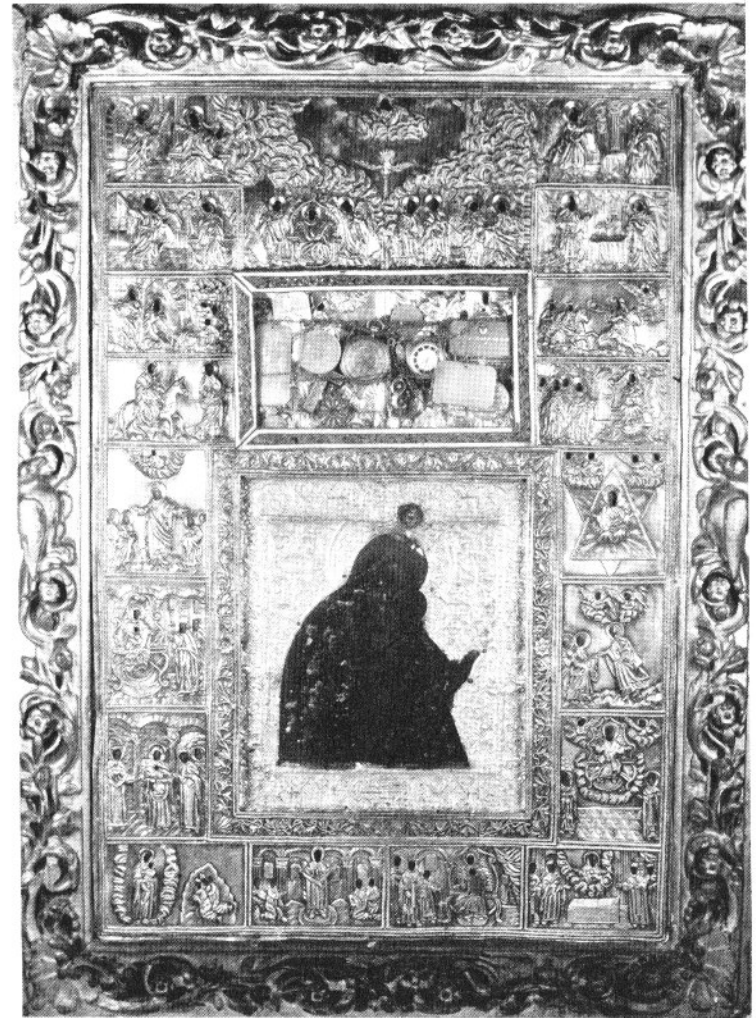
KONTAKION 13

O all-praised Mother who didst bear the Word holiest of all the Saints, accept this our offering, and deliver us from all offense, and redeem from future torment those who cry in unison to thee: Alleluia. (*Thrice*)

And again Eikos 1 and Kontakion 1 are read.

PRAYER to our Most Holy Lady the Mother of God

My most gracious Queen, my hope, Mother of God, shelter of orphans, and intercessor of travellers, strangers and pilgrims, joy of those in sorrow, protectress of the wronged, see my distress, see my affliction! Help me, for I am helpless. Feed me, for I am a stranger and pilgrim. Thou knowest my offence; forgive and resolve it as thou wilt. For I know no other help but thee, no other intercessor, no gracious consoler but thee, O Mother of God, to guard and protect me throughout the ages. Amen.



The Akathist Icon of the Theotokos, from Koutloumousiou Monastery on Mount Athos, where the Akathist to the Mother of God has been sung every day for centuries.