

Akathist Hymn of Romanos the Melode

I

*A glorious angel, a creature of heaven,
cried "Hail and rejoice" to the Mother of God.
He stood cold still in wonder, Lord,
at the thought of **you** in bodily form,
Then shouted with a bodiless voice:*

Rejoice: Through you shines forth all joy,
Through you the ancient curse is eclipsed.
Adam has been recalled,
Eve's tears have been redeemed.

The human mind cannot scale your height,
Angelic eyes cannot pierce your depth.

Rejoice: Throne of the King,
The One you carry sustains the world.

You are a star flaming forth the Sun,
The womb of the incarnation of God.

Rejoice: The whole creation is made new
As you make its Creator your unborn child.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

II

*Because she had never been touched by a man,
the blessed one looked for an answer from Gabriel:*

*"The paradox you utter
is utterly impossible.*

*What can you mean by a child
from a union without seed?"*

And she cried: "Alleluia."

*Trying to know what can never be known,
the Virgin called out to the servant of God:*

*"How can a son be born
from my pure womb __now tell me?"*

He answered, shouting in fear:

Rejoice: Initiate of God's secret will,
Faith of those who silently pray.
Prelude to Christ's miracles,
Chief theme of all his teaching,
Heavenly ladder by which God came down,
Stairway that leads souls up to heaven.

Rejoice: For the angels whisper in wonder,
And the demons loudly do bewail their wound.

Rejoice: Secret birthgiver of light
In the night's dark stillness.
Star that transcends the wisdom of the wise
Flooding the mind with radiance and faith.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

III

*The power of the Highest
overshadowed her then
that a virgin might conceive.*

*Her fruitful womb
became a meadow, rich
for all who harvest salvation
as they hymn: "Alleluia."*

*You carry God in your womb, O Virgin;
your cousin carries a prophet in hers.
When you call the mother, her child knows such joy
that he leaps and kicks and sings
and cries to God's mother:*

Rejoice: Branch whose blossom will not wither,
Field of a flower that blooms and will not fade.
Bride forever to the husbandman of love,
You nurture the seed that sows our very life.
Rich earth that yields a harvest of compassion,
Larder overflowing with atonement for our sins.

Rejoice: Lush and luxuriant meadow,
Also a harbor made ready for our souls.

Rejoice: White incense of intercession,
Propitiation for a fallen world.
Patent goodwill of God to mankind,
Boldness of mortal man before God.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

IV

*Driven half mad
by a storm of his own dreaming,
temperate Joseph was wracked with storms of doubt.
O spotless one, he thought
you faithless before marriage.
But when he learned you conceived
from the Holy Spirit of God,
He cried: "Alleluia."
Shepherds heard the angels sing
Christ present in the flesh.
They ran to see a Shepherd,
but found a spotless Lamb
who grazed in Mary's womb.
They sang to her and said:
Rejoice: Your son is both Lamb and Shepherd,
Within your walls his flock lies down in peace.
You guard them from wolves that roam by night,
Your gate is the gate of Paradise.
Rejoice, o heavens, make glad with the earth,
Resound, o earth, with heavenly choirs.
Rejoice: Voice of the apostles, throat of iron,
Steel courage of conquering faith,
Girder of truth,
Dazzling shimmer of grace,
Rejoice and rejoice:
For you have stripped Hell bare
And clothed us with glory.*

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

V

*Transfixed by a point of ineffable light
the Magi follow the godward-gleaming star,
By this lamp they seek an ominipotent King.
Approaching the unapproachable one
Their cry with joy: "Alleluia."*

*These sons of Chaldea
see in the Virgin's hands
he whose hands
 have fashioned mankind,
the master of all that is
now a servant to serve man.
With gifts they worship him,
and say to his Mother:*

Rejoice: Mother of the never_setting Sun,
 Dawn of the glorious, mystical day.
 The furnace flaming with lies has been doused,
 The threefold mystery flames forth in fire.
The man-devouring tyrant is dethroned,
 Christ has shown forth, the mankind_loving Lord.

Rejoice: You free us from strange and obscene rites
 And deeds that make us strangers to our God.
You utterly revoke the obsequies of fire
 And quench the proud spark of evil thoughts and dreams.

Rejoice: You teach the faithful self_control,
 Supreme joy of every generation.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

VI

*Having held God in their human hands,
they bring home the news that God has been brought forth.
Their mission fulfilled,
they proclaim you as the Christ,
But Herod, the simpleton, that dupe,
cannot even lisp: "Alleluia."*

*Your truth blazed forth
in the darkness of Egypt
and scattered her lies.
For, Savior, her idols fell
acknowledging your power,
And the people, set free,
exclaim to God's Mother:*

Rejoice: Lever of mankind's uplifting
Downfall of demons.

Error and deceit crushed under heel
The cunning face of idolatry exposed.

Rejoice: Sea overwhelming the spirit's Pharaoh,
Rock giving water when we thirst for life.

Fiery pillar, that guides us through the darkness,
Great cloud of light, protection of the world.

Food, second manna, God's love rained down again,
The banquet you set forth is pure, holy joy.

Rejoice: Land of promise
that flows with milk and honey.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

VII

*Hovering at the final threshold of his life,
your servant Simeon held you and was glad.
For when he saw a child,
he knew him as perfect God.
Crushed by your unspeakable wisdom,
he cried: "Alleluia."*

*He who created us
came down to those he made
to reveal a new creation.
Growing in a seedless womb,
he kept it chaste, as it was before.
We see this and wonder,
and sing to her and cry:*

Rejoice: Flower of incorruption,
Crown of self_control.
Shining symbol of the resurrection,
Manifestation of angelic life.
Tree of rich fruit, refreshing all the faithful,
Dark_shadowed forest that protects us with its shade.
Rejoice: In your womb lay the guide for those who wander,
You brought him forth who unenslaves our souls.
You plead our cause before the righteous judge,
And win full pardon when we go astray.
Rejoice: New franchise to the naked and enslaved,
And love that surpasses all desire.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

VIII

*Let the sight of this strange birth
make us strangers in this world.*

Let us plant our hope on heaven.

*High and almighty God
came to earth as a humble man
for this reason:
to exalt those who cry, "Alleluia."*

*Yet he remained on high
while present here below,
_the Word uncircumscribed,
present wholly in both places.*

*For there was no translatins,
but divine condescension
and birth from a virgin,
God-chosen,
who heard:*

Rejoice: Container of infinite God,
Gate to unfathomable mystery.
Distant rumor to the faithless heart,
Loud boast, bright joy to all who believe.
Chariot more holy than the Seraphs' wings,
Chamber more kingly than the Cherubs' throne.
Reconciliation of contrary things,
Union of parturition and virginity.
Rejoice: You are the pardon for our sins,
The gate to the Gates of Paradise,
The key to Christ's kingdom,
The hope of undying good things to come.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

IX

*Fear struck dumb the holy host of heaven,
their throng hushed, silent*

*at the thought of what occurred:
that God became a man.*

*For God the invisible
stood there in the sight of all,
God the creator*

*stood there as a mortal man,
sharing our human life,
while we shout: "Alleluia."*

*Smooth-tongued orators
gape silent as fishes
when they see you, O Virgin.*

*Their slow moving mouths
cannot hope to explain
how after giving birth
you still remain a virgin.*

*We marvel at the wonder
and cry out in faith:*

Rejoice: Vessel of the wisdom of God,
Storehouse of every wonder he creates.

Fiddling Philosophers fumble like fools,
Logicians are unlogicked, refuted by your faith.

Keen disputants cackle and grow dull,
The makers of myths mumble, their dreams run cold and dry.

Rejoice: You snip through the web that Athens made
And cumber the fishermen's nets with great gain,

Souls are drawn up from the depths of unknowing
To breathe the pure light that compasses all truth.

Rejoice: Container-ship of souls being saved,
Harbor for those who sail through life's journey.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

X

*Drawn by his deep desire
yearning to save the world,
he who rules over worlds without number
appeared by his own self_voluntary will.
He whom we know as our shepherd and our God
appears before us as a man for our sake.
Like unto like, deep unto deep he calls ___
as God, he hears: "Alleluia."*

*You protect the innocent
O virgin Theotokos,
and all who run to you for protection.
For the maker of earth and heaven
made you ready, O undefiled,
by dwelling in your womb
and teaching us to say:*

Rejoice: Pillar of virginity,
Pathway of salvation,
The recreation of our mental life,
The kindling of virtue in hearts grown dry.
Rebirth to men born under sin
And healing balm for the despoiled mind.
Rejoice: You destroy the destroyer of our souls,
You carry the planter of the holy seed.
Rejoice: Bridal suite for a seedless marriage
Union of the faithful with their waiting Lord.
Rejoice: Fair nursemaid of virgins,
Bridesmaid of holy souls.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

XI

*All hymns fail,
None can arrive at the depth of your bounty,
the multitude of your mercies unto us.
Most holy king,
if we sang and sang you songs
as numberless as the sands of the sea,
we still could not praise
all the gifts you give when we shout: "Alleluia."*

*We see the holy Virgin
as a light_receiving lamp
that illuminates the darkness.
Blazing forth an immaterial light,
she beacons all men to a knowledge of God.
This light enlightens the mind,
this cry is her glory:*

Rejoice: Ray of the spiritual sun,
Shaft of the radiance that shines and never sets,
Flicker of lightning that thrills the soul forever,
Loud clap of thunder, our adversary's doom.
Rejoice: Your image is the picture of the font
That laves away the last shadow of our sin.
Laver that cleanses our conscience from its stains,
Chalice where wine mingles with great joy.
Rejoice: Fragrance of the sweetness of Christ,
Life of the mystical feast beyond time.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

XII

*In order to cancel our debt from of old,
he who makes all men truly free
came and dwelt among us by his own free will.
We were exiles from his grace,
but he tears the deed against us in half
to hear us shout: "Alleluia."*

*When we sing to your son,
You are praised, O Theotokos,
O living temple of incarnate God.
The one who sustains all creation by his hand
dwelt within your womb
to hallow you,
glorify you,
and teach us to sing:*

Rejoice: Tabernacle of God the Word,
 Holiest of Holies, holier by far,
New Ark, made golden by the Holy Spirit,
 Treasury containing all the gifts of life.
Rejoice: Proud diadem of holy kings,
 August adornment of God-fearing priests.
Unscalable tower of the Church of Christ,
 Wall of the Kingdom unshaken by assault,
Rejoice: Streaming banner of triumph,
 Headlong catastrophe for all our foes.
The healing of my body
 The salvation of my soul.

Rejoice: Virgin Bride.

Translated by Frank Dobbs
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