Great and Holy Wednesday

Vespers

Served Wednesday afternoon or evening

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us.¹

If the Hours and the Typica preceded Vespers, continue with Come let us worship ... and Ps 103 (see below). If the Hours & Typica were not said, proceed with the usual beginning, as shown here:

Glory to thee, our God, glory to thee.
O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of blessings and Giver of life: come and abide in us; and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (thrice)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for thy Name’s sake.

Lord, have mercy. (thrice) Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
[Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us.²]
Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (Twelve times)
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

¹ If a priest is present, he says the opening exclamation Blessed is our God....
² If a priest is present, he says the exclamation For thine is the Kingdom....
Come, let us worship God our King.
Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God.
Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ himself, our King and our God.

**Psalm 103**

Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art greatly magnified; thou art clothed with praise and majesty: covering thyself with light as with a garment, spreading out the heaven as a curtain; who covers his upper chambers with waters, who makes the clouds his chariot, who walks on the wings of the winds, who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire; who established the earth on its sure foundation: it shall not be moved for ever and ever. The abyss, like a garment, is his cloak; the waters shall stand upon the mountains. At thy rebuke they shall flee; at the voice of thy thunder they shall be afraid. The mountains rise up and the plains sink down unto the place where thou hast founded them. Thou hast set a bound which they shall not pass, neither shall they return to cover the earth. Thou sendest forth springs in the valleys; the waters shall flow between the mountains. They shall give drink to all the beasts of the field: the wild asses shall wait to quench their thirst. By them shall the birds of heaven dwell, they shall sing from amidst the rocks. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth shall be satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He makes grass to grow for the cattle, and green herb for the service of men, to bring forth bread out of the earth, and wine makes glad the heart of man; to make his face cheerful with oil, and bread strengthens man's heart. The trees of the plain shall be satisfied, the cedars of Lebanon which thou hast planted. There the sparrows will build their nests, and the house of the heron is chief among them. The high mountains are for the deer, and the rock is a refuge for the hares. He made the moon for seasons: the sun knows its going down. Thou didst appoint darkness, and it was night; wherein all the beasts of the forest will prowl: young lions roaring for their prey to seek their food from God. The sun arose, and they were gathered together and shall lie down in their dens. Man shall go forth to his work and to his labor until the evening. How magnified are thy works, O Lord! In wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is filled with thy creation: so is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, living things, both small and great. There go the ships; there this dragon whom thou hast formed to play therein. All things wait upon thee to give them their food in due season. When thou givest to them, they will gather it; when thou openest thy hand, they shall all be filled with good. But when thou turnest away thy face, they shall be troubled: thou wilt take away their spirit, and they shall die and return to their dust. Thou shalt send forth thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth. Let the glory of the Lord endure forever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works; who looks on the earth and makes it to tremble; who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord while I live; I will sing praise to my God
while I have being. May my words be sweet unto him, and I will rejoice in the Lord. O that sinners would cease from the earth, and they that work iniquity, that they should be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

AND AGAIN:
The sun knows its going down. Thou didst appoint darkness, and it was night. How magnified are thy works, O Lord! In wisdom hast thou made them all.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.
Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Glory to thee, O God. (thrice)

[Lord, have mercy. (Twelve times) Glory... now and ever... ³]

Read KATHISMA 18 (Ps. 119-133)

PSALM 140

In the first tone:
Lord, I call upon Thee, hear me.
   Hear me, O Lord.
Lord, I call upon Thee, hear me. Receive the voice of my prayer, when I call upon Thee.
   Hear me, O Lord.
Let my prayer arise in Thy sight as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice!
   Hear me, O Lord!

The following verses are read, until the stichera begin:
Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth, and a strong door about my lips.
Incline not my heart to words of evil, to make excuses for sins;
With men that work iniquity, and I shall never join with their elect.
A righteous man shall chasten me with mercy and reprove me, but let not the oil of the sinner anoint my head.
Since my prayer is even still for their good favor, their judges have been swallowed up near the rock.
They shall hear my words, for they were sweet: as a clod of earth has been crushed upon the earth, so have their bones been scattered near hell.
For mine eyes are toward thee, O Lord, Lord, I have hoped in thee; take not my soul away.
Keep me from the snare which they have set for me, and from the stumbling-blocks of them that work iniquity.
The sinners shall fall into their own net: I am alone until I pass by.

³ If a priest is present, he says the GREAT LITANY.
PSALM 141
I have cried to the Lord with my voice; with my voice have I made supplication to the Lord.
I will pour out my supplication before him, I will declare before him my affliction.
When my spirit was failing me, still thou knewest my paths.
In this way wherein I was walking, they hid a snare for me.
I looked on my right hand and beheld, that there was none that recognized me.
Refuge failed me, and there is none that looks out for my soul.
I cried to thee, O Lord, and said: Thou art my hope, my portion art thou in the land of the living.
Attend to my supplication, for I am brought very low; deliver me from them that persecute me, for they have grown stronger than I.
Bring my soul out of prison, that I may confess thy name.
The righteous shall await me, until thou shalt reward me.

PSALM 129
Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.
Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

(6) If thou, Lord, wilt mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? * For with thee is forgiveness.
Tone 1
A harlot recognized thee as God, O Son of the Virgin. With tears equal to her past deeds, she besought thee, weeping: “Loose my debt, as I have loosed my hair. Love the woman who, though justly hated, loves thee. Then with the publicans will I proclaim thee, O Benefactor, who loveth mankind.”

(5) For thy Name’s sake have I waited for thee, O Lord: my soul has waited for thy word, * my soul has hoped in the Lord.
The harlot mingled precious myrrh with her tears. She poured it on thy most pure feet and kissed them. At once thou didst justify her. O Lord, who didst suffer for our sakes, forgive us also and save us.

(4) From the morning watch until night, from the morning watch * let Israel hope in the Lord.
As the sinful woman was bringing her offering of myrrh, the disciple was scheming with lawless men. She rejoiced in pouring out her precious gift. He hastened to sell the priceless One. She recognized the Master, but Judas parted from him. She was set free, but Judas was enslaved to the Enemy. How terrible his slothfulness! How great her repentance! O Savior, who didst suffer for our sakes, grant repentance to us also and save us.
(3) For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption, * and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

O the wretchedness of Judas! He saw the harlot kiss the footsteps of Christ, but deceitfully he contemplated the kiss of betrayal. She loosed her hair while he bound himself with wrath. He offered the stench of wickedness instead of myrrh, for envy cannot distinguish value. O the wretchedness of Judas! Deliver our souls from it, O God!

(2) Praise the Lord, all ye nations: * praise him all ye peoples.

Tone 2
The sinful woman ran to buy the precious myrrh with which to anoint her Savior. She cried to the merchant: “Give me myrrh, that I may anoint him who has cleansed all my sins!”

(1) For his mercy has prevailed over us, * and the truth of the Lord endures for ever.

Tone 6
The woman who was engulfed in sin found in thee a haven of salvation. She poured out myrrh with her tears and cried to thee: “Behold the One who brings repentance to sinners. Rescue me from the tempest of sin, O Master, through thy great mercy!”

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Tone 6
Today Christ comes to the house of the Pharisee. A sinful woman crawls to his feet and cries: “Look at me who am engulfed in sin, in despair because of my evil deeds, but in thy goodness do not despise me. Grant me forgiveness of my evil deeds, O Lord, and save me.”

The evening thanksgiving hymn
O gladsome Light of the holy glory of the immortal Father – heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ! Now that we have come to the setting of the sun and beheld the light of evening, we praise the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God. For meet it is at all times to worship thee with voices of praise, O Son of God and Giver of life; therefore, all the world doth glorify thee.

The prokeimenon in the fourth tone:
O give thanks to the God of heaven, for he is good, * for His mercy endures forever.

Verse: O give thanks to the God of gods, for His mercy endures forever.
The reading from Exodus
(Exod. 2:11-22)

It came to pass in that length of time, that Moses having grown, went out to his brethren the sons of Israel: and having noticed their distress, he sees an Egyptian smiting a certain Hebrew of his brethren the children of Israel. And having looked round this way and that way, he sees no one; and he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And having gone out the second day he sees two Hebrew men fighting; and he says to the injurer, “Wherefore smitest thou thy neighbour?” And he said, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? wilt thou slay me as thou yesterday slewest the Egyptian?” Then Moses was alarmed, and said, “If it be thus, this matter has become known.” And Pharaoh heard this matter, and sought to slay Moses; and Moses departed from the presence of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Madiam; and having come into the land of Madiam, he sat on the well. And the priest of Madiam had seven daughters, feeding the flock of their father Jothor; and they came and drew water until they filled their pitchers, to water the flock of their father Jothor. And the shepherds came, and were driving them away; and Moses rose up and rescued them, and drew water for them, and watered their sheep. And they came to Raguel their father; and he said to them, “Why have ye come so quickly today?” And they said,  

“An Egyptian delivered us from the shepherds, and drew water for us and watered our sheep.” And he said to his daughters, “And where is he? and why have ye left the man? call him therefore, that he may eat bread.” And Moses was established with the man, and he gave Sepphora his daughter to Moses to wife. And the woman conceived and bore a son, and Moses called his name Gersam, saying, “I am a sojourner in a strange land.” And again she conceived and bore the second son, and Moses called his name Eliezer, saying: “For God of my father is my helper, and he delivered me out of the hand of Pharaoh.”

The prokeimenon in the fourth tone:

Thy mercy, O Lord, endures forever; * do not forsake the work of thy hands.  

Verse: I give thee thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; and before the angels I sing thy praise.

The reading from Job
(Job 2:1-10)

It came to pass on a certain day, that the angels of God came to stand before the Lord, and the devil came among them to stand before the Lord. And the Lord, said to the devil, “Whence comest thou?” Then the devil said before the Lord, “I am come from going through the world, and walking about the whole earth.” And the Lord said to the devil, “Hast thou then observed my servant Job, that there is none of those upon the earth like
him, a harmless, true, blameless, godly man, abstaining from all evil? and he yet cleaves to innocence, whereas thou has told me to destroy his substance without cause?” And the devil answered and said to the Lord, “Skin for skin, all that a man has will he give as a ransom for his life. Nay, but put forth thine hand, and touch his bones and his flesh: verily he will bless thee to thy face.” And the Lord said to the devil, “Behold, I deliver him up to thee; only save his life.” So the devil went out from the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from his feet to his head. And he took a potsherd to scrape away the discharge, and sat upon a dung-heap outside the city. And when much time had passed, his wife said to him, “How long wilt thou hold out, saying, ‘Behold, I wait yet a little while, expecting the hope of my deliverance?’ for, behold, thy memorial is abolished from the earth, even thy sons and daughters, the pangs and pains of my womb which I bore in vain with sorrows; and thou thyself sittest down to spend the nights in the open air among the corruption of worms, and I am a wanderer and a servant from place to place and house to house, waiting for the setting of the sun, that I may rest from my labours and my pangs which now beset me: but say some word against the Lord, and die.” But he looked on her, and said to her, “Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women. If we have received good things of the hand of the Lord, shall we not endure evil things?” In all these things that happened to him, Job sinned not at all with his lips before God.

The reading of the Holy Gospel according to Matthew
(Matt. 26:6-16)

Glory to thee, O Lord, glory to thee!

At that time: when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head, as he sat at table. But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for a large sum, and given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Glory to thee, O Lord, glory to thee!
VESPER: CONCLUDING RITES

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin. Blessed art thou, O Lord, God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is thy Name forever. Amen.
Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have set our hope on thee. Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes. Blessed art thou, O Master, make me to understand thy statutes. Blessed art thou, O Holy One, enlighten me with thy statutes.
Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth forever: despise not the works of thy hands. To thee is due praise, to thee is due song, to thee is due glory: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

[Lord, have mercy. (Twelve times) Glory... now and ever...]

APOSTICHA

Tone 6
The harlot spread out her hair to thee, O Master, Judas spread out his hands to lawless men: she in order to receive forgiveness; he in order to receive some silver. We cry to thee, who wast sold for us and yet didst set us free: “O Lord, glory to thee.”

Verse: He who ate of my bread has lifted his heel against me.
The corrupt and filthy woman drew near to thee, O Savior. She poured out her tears on thy feet and thus announced thy Passion. How can I gaze on thee, O Master? Yet thou didst come to save the harlot. Raise me from the depths, for I am dead in sin, as thou didst raise Lazarus from the tomb after four days. Accept me in my misery, O Lord, and save me.

Verse: When he goes out, he tells it abroad.
Despairing for her life, and despaired of for her deeds, the woman came bearing myrrh to thee and cried: “O Son of the Virgin, though I am a harlot, do not cast me aside. O Joy of the angels, do not despise my tears. As thou didst not reject me as a sinner, accept me now as a penitent, in thy great mercy!”

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

4 If a priest is present, he says the Litany of Supplication and the Prayer of Inclination.
Tone 8 Composition of Cassia the Nun

The woman had fallen into many sins, O Lord, yet, when she perceived thy divinity, she joined the ranks of the myrrh-bearing women. In tears she brought thee myrrh before Thy burial. She cried: “Woe is me! For I live in the night of licentiousness, shrouded in the dark and moonless love of sin. But accept the fountain of my tears, thou who didst gather the waters of the sea into clouds. Bow down thine ear to the sighing of my heart, O thou, who didst bow the heavens in thine ineffable condescension. Once Eve heard thy footsteps in Paradise in the cool of the day, and in fear she ran and hid herself. But now I will tenderly embrace those pure feet and wipe them with the hair of my head. Who can measure the multitude of my sins, or the depth of thy judgments, O Savior of my soul? Do not despise thy servant in thine immeasurable mercy.”

THE CANTICLE OF SAINT SIMEON

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people, Israel.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (thrice)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for thy Name’s sake.

Lord, have mercy. (thrice) Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

[Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us.] Amen.
When the glorious Disciples were enlightened at the washing of the feet before the supper, then the impious Judas was darkened, ailing with avarice, and to the lawless judges he betrays thee, the Righteous Judge. Behold, O lover of money, this man who because of money hanged himself; flee from the greedy soul which dared such things against the Master. O Lord, who art good towards all men, glory to thee.

Lord, have mercy. (40 times)
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

More honorable than the cherubim and more glorious, beyond compare, than the seraphim: without corruption thou gavest birth to God the Word; true Theotokos, we magnify thee.

O heavenly King, strengthen the Orthodox Christians, confirm the Faith, calm the nations, give peace to the world, preserve well this holy church (or: this household, or: this city), grant repose in the mansions of the righteous to our fathers and brethren who have departed this life and accept us in repentance and confession, for thou art Good and the Lover of mankind.

**PRAYER OF ST EPHREM**

O Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. (prostration) But give rather a spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to thy servant. (prostration) Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother: for blessed art thou unto ages of ages. Amen. (prostration)

And this prayer:
O All-holy Trinity, thou O consubstantial Power, undivided Kingship, the Cause of all good things, show thy mercy on me, a sinner, confirm my heart and fill it with understanding, and take away all my defilement. Enlighten my mind, that I may ever glorify, sing, and worship thee, and say: One is holy, one is Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

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5 This is the last time when the prostrations with the Prayer of St Ephrem are performed in the course of the Holy Week services. According to the Typicon, henceforth the prostrations are no longer performed in church, but may be done in one’s cell until Holy Friday.
Blessed be the Name of the Lord from henceforth and forevermore. (Thrice)
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

PSALM 33

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. In the Lord shall my soul be praised; let the meek hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his Name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all mine afflictions. Come unto him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his afflictions. The angel of the Lord will encamp round about them that fear him, and shall deliver them. O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that hopes in him. O fear the Lord, all ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him. Rich men have turned poor and gone hungry, but they that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is there that desires life, who loves to see good days? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, utterly to destroy their memory from the earth. The righteous cried, and the Lord heard them, and delivered them out of all their afflictions. The Lord is near to them that are of a contrite heart, and will save the humble in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord shall deliver them out of them all. The Lord keeps all their bones; not one of them shall be broken. The death of sinners is evil, and they that hate righteousness will go wrong. The Lord will redeem the souls of his servants, and none of them shall go wrong that hope in him.

DISMISSAL

It is truly meet to bless thee, O Theotokos, ever-blessed and most pure and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim: without corruption thou gavest birth to God the Word. True Theotokos, we magnify thee. (prostration)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.
Lord, have mercy. (Thrice) Lord, bless!

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6 If a priest is present, the dismissal is said according to the form established in Hieratikon (vol. 1).
O thou who art going to thy voluntary Passion for our salvation, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, through the prayers of thy most pure Mother and of all the saints, have mercy on us and save us, for thou art good and lovest mankind.