DECEMBER 24
Eve of the Nativity of Christ
Royal Hours (sung on the morning of December 24)

(at the First Hour) **The Three Psalms:** *Ps. 5, Ps. 44/45, Ps. 45/46*

Tone 4 **Troparion of the Forefeast**

Mary was of David's seed,
so she went with Joseph to register in Bethlehem.
She bore in her womb the Fruit not sown by man.
The time for the birth was at hand.
Since there was no room at the inn,
the cave became a beautiful palace for the Queen.//
Christ is born to raise up again what fell in former times, His image.

Theotokion

What shall we call you, O full of grace?
Heaven, for from you shone forth the Sun of Righteousness;
Paradise, for you have budded forth the flower of immortality;
Virgin, for you have remained undefiled;
Pure Mother, for you have held in your arms the Son, Who is God of all?
Beseech Him to save our souls!

Stichera at the First Hour

Tone 8 *(by Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem)*

Make ready, O Bethlehem!
Let the manger be prepared!
Let the cave show its welcome!
The Truth comes, and the shadow flees.
God is born of a Virgin and is revealed to men.
He is clothed in our flesh and makes it divine.
Therefore Adam is renewed and cries out with Eve:
"Your favor has appeared on earth, O Lord,//
for the salvation of the human race."

℣. *O Lord, I have heard what You have done, and am filled with awe.* *(Habakkuk 3:2)*

Tone 3

Now the prophecy approaches its fulfillment,
for it had mystically proclaimed:
"You, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means the least among Judah's rulers.
Prepare your cave!
From you the Ruler of the nations comes to me in the flesh:
Christ our God, born of a young virgin.
He will feed His flock, the new Israel."//
Let us all give Him glory!

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

Tone 8

Joseph said to the Virgin:
"What has happened to you, O Mary?
I am troubled; what can I say to you?
Doubt clouds my mind; depart from me!
What has happened to you, O Mary?
Instead of honor, you bring me shame.
Instead of joy, you fill me with grief.
Men who praised me will blame me.
I cannot bear condemnation from every side.
I received you, a pure virgin, from the priests of the temple of the Lord.//
And what is this that I now see?"

Tone 4 Prokeimenon

The Lord said to me: "You are my Son, / this day have I begotten You." *(Ps. 2:6)*

℣. *"Ask of Me, and I shall give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Your possession."* *(Ps. 2:8)*

Old Testament Reading: Micah 5:2-4

Epistle: (303) Hebrews 1:1-12

Gospel: (2) Matthew 1:18-25

Tone 3 **Kontakion** *(Forefeast)*

Today the Virgin comes to the cave
to give birth to the Eternal Word.
Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe!
Glorify with the Angels and the shepherds//
the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little Child!

(at the Third Hour) **The Three Psalms:** *Ps. 66/67, Ps. 86/87, Ps. 50/51*

Tone 4 **Troparion of the Forefeast**

Mary was of David's seed,
so she went with Joseph to register in Bethlehem.
She bore in her womb the Fruit not sown by man.
The time for the birth was at hand.
Since there was no room at the inn,
the cave became a beautiful palace for the Queen.//
Christ is born to raise up again what fell in former times, His image.

Theotokion

O Theotokos,
you are the true vine from whom the Fruit of Life blossomed.
We entreat you, O Lady:
"Intercede together with the Apostles and all the Saints,//
that mercy may be granted to our souls!"

Stichera at the Third Hour

Tone 6

He is our God;
there is no other to compare with Him.
Born of a Virgin, He comes to live with men.
The only-begotten Son appears as a mortal man.
He rests in a lowly manger.
The Lord of Glory is wrapped in swaddling clothes.
A star leads the Wise Men to worship Him,
and with them we sing://
"O Holy Trinity, save our souls!"

℣. *God shall come from Teman and the Holy One from the dark and shady mountain.* *(Habakkuk 3:3)*

Tone 8

Before Your birth, O Lord,
the hosts of Angels already perceived the mystery.
They were struck with wonder and trembled,
for You, Who adorned the heavens with stars,
are now well-pleased to be born as a babe.
You hold the ends of the earth in Your hands;
but now You are laid in a manger of dumb beasts.
Yet all these things fulfilled Your saving plan,
by which Your compassion was revealed to us.//
O Christ of great mercy, glory to You!

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

Tone 3

Tell us, O Joseph,
how is it that you bring to Bethlehem, great with child,
the Maiden whom you received
from the Holy of Holies?
"I have searched the Prophets," he said.
"I have been instructed by an Angel.
I am convinced that Mary will give birth to God
in a manner beyond understanding.
Wise men from the East will come to worship Him,
offering precious gifts in adoration."//
O Lord, incarnate for us, glory to You!

Tone 4 Prokeimenon

For unto us a Child is born, / unto us a Son is given. *(Isaiah 9:6)*

℣. *And the government shall be upon His shoulder.* *(Isaiah 9:6)*

Old Testament Reading: Baruch 3:35-4:4

Epistle: (208) Galatians 3:23-29

Gospel: (5) Luke 2:1-20

Tone 3 **Kontakion** *(Forefeast)*

Today the Virgin comes to the cave
to give birth to the Eternal Word.
Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe!
Glorify with the Angels and the shepherds//
the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little Child!

(at the Sixth Hour) **The Three Psalms:** *Ps 71/72, Ps. 131/132, Ps. 90/91*

Tone 4 **Troparion of the Forefeast**

Mary was of David's seed,
so she went with Joseph to register in Bethlehem.
She bore in her womb the Fruit not sown by man.
The time for the birth was at hand.
Since there was no room at the inn,
the cave became a beautiful palace for the Queen.//
Christ is born to raise up again what fell in former times, His image.

Theotokion

We have no boldness because of the multitude of our sins,
but entreat Him Who was born of you, O Virgin Theotokos,
for the prayer of a mother has great power to win the favor of the Master.
Do not despise the supplications of sinners, O all-pure one,
for merciful and strong to save is He Who willed to suffer for us!

Stichera at the Sixth Hour

Tone 1

Come, O God-inspired faithful,
arise and behold the descent of God from on high!
He manifests Himself to us in Bethlehem.
Let us cleanse our minds and offer Him a life of virtue instead of myrrh.
Let us prepare with faith to celebrate His Nativity,
storing up spiritual treasure and crying out:
"Glory in the highest to God in Trinity!
His good pleasure is now revealed to men.//
In His love for mankind He sets Adam free from the ancestral curse."

℣. *O Lord, I have heard what You have done, and am filled with awe.* *(Habakkuk 3:2)*

Tone 4

Hearken, O heaven! Give ear, O earth!
Let the foundations of the earth be shaken!
Let trembling seize the regions beneath the earth,
for our God and Creator has clothed Himself in created flesh;
He fashioned all creation, yet reveals Himself in the womb of her that He formed.
O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How incomprehensible are His judgments,//
and how unsearchable His ways!

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

Tone 5

Come, O Christ-bearing people,
let us behold wonders that will amaze every mind!
As we worship in faith, let us sing praises!
Today a Maiden great with child goes up to Bethlehem.
There she will give birth to the Lord.
Choirs of Angels go before her.
Joseph, her husband, cried out when he saw these things:
"What is this strange mystery in you, O Virgin?
How will you bear a child,//
O calf, who never bore the yoke of man!"

Tone 4 Prokeimenon

"Out of the womb before the morning star have I begotten You." / The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind. *(Ps. 109:4a-b)*

℣. *The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool."* *(Ps. 109:1)*

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 7:10-16; 8:1-4, 8-10

Epistle: (304) Hebrews 1:10-2:3

Gospel: (3) Matthew 2:1-12

Tone 3 **Kontakion** *(Forefeast)*

Today the Virgin comes to the cave
to give birth to the Eternal Word.
Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe!
Glorify with the Angels and the shepherds//
the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little Child!

(at the Ninth Hour) **The Three Psalms:** *Ps. 109/110, Ps. 110/111, Ps. 85/86*

Tone 4 **Troparion of the Forefeast**

Mary was of David's seed,
so she went with Joseph to register in Bethlehem.
She bore in her womb the Fruit not sown by man.
The time for the birth was at hand.
Since there was no room at the inn,
the cave became a beautiful palace for the Queen.//
Christ is born to raise up again what fell in former times, His image.

Theotokion

O loving Lord, Who for our sakes was born of a virgin,
and has endured crucifixion, trampling down death by death,
and as God revealed the Resurrection:
despise not the works of Your hands,
but show Your love for mankind, O merciful One.
Accept the prayers made on our behalf by her who gave You birth,
and save Your despairing people, O our Savior!

Stichera at the Ninth Hour

Tone 7

Herod was filled with alarm
when he saw the righteous wise men.
Overcome by fury,
he determined precisely when the Child was born.
Mothers were robbed of their infants;
their tender lives were reaped as a bitter harvest.
Milk stopped flowing, and breasts dried up.
Great was the suffering.
Therefore, assemble in holy fear, O faithful,//
to worship the birth of Christ!

℣. *God shall come from Teman and the Holy One from the dark and shady mountain.* *(Habakkuk 3:3)*

Tone 2

When Joseph went up to Bethlehem,
his heart was filled with sadness.
But you cried out to Him, O Virgin:
"Why are you so troubled?
Why are you in misery seeing me with child?
Do you not understand at all?
I bear a fearful mystery.
Cast your fears away, and learn a strange wonder:
God, in His mercy, descends from heaven to earth.
Within my womb He has taken flesh.
When He is pleased to be born, you will see Him.
You will rejoice, and worship Him, your Creator.
The Angels ceaselessly praise Him in song,//
glorifying Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit."

Following this sticheron, in the Slavonic Menaion, it indicates that "the canonarch stands in the middle of the church, and in a loud voice..." reads (or chants) this entire sticheron: Today He Who holds the whole creation in His hand...":

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 He Who holds the whole creation in His hand is born of a Virgin.
He Whose essence none can touch is bound in swaddling-clothes as a mortal Man.
God, Who in the beginning fashioned the heavens, lies in a manger.
He who rained manna on His people in the wilderness is fed on milk from His mother's breast.
The Bridegroom of the Church summons the wise men;
the Son of the Virgin accepts their gifts.
We worship Your birth, O Christ.
We worship Your birth, O Christ.
We worship Your birth, O Christ.//
Show us also Your Holy Theophany!

Tone 4 **Prokeimenon**

"Zion is my mother," a man will say, / "and such a man was born in her."
(Ps. 87:5a)

℣. *His foundations are on the holy mountains.* *(Ps. 86:1a)*

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 9:6-7

Epistle: (306) Hebrews 2:11-18

Gospel: (4) Matthew 2:13-23

Tone 3 **Kontakion** *(Forefeast)*

Today the Virgin comes to the cave
to give birth to the Eternal Word.
Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe!
Glorify with the Angels and the shepherds//
the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little Child!

(at the Typika)

Tone 3 **Kontakion** *(Forefeast)*

Today the Virgin comes to the cave
to give birth to the Eternal Word.
Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe!
Glorify with the Angels and the shepherds//
the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little Child!

Liturgical texts for this service represent modified versions of translations provided by the Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, ("The Services of Christmas", 1981).