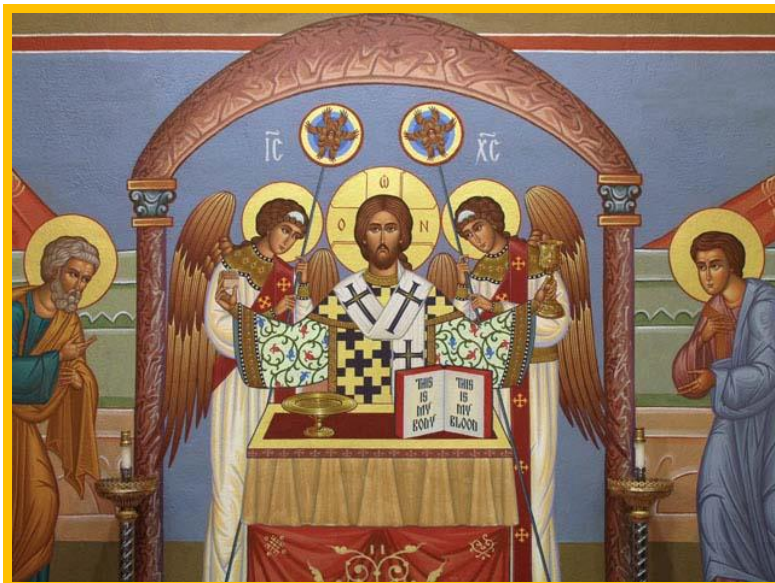


# THE PROSKOMEDE



**The Service of Preparation  
Prior to the Divine Liturgy**

An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 2

**HOLY ASCENSION  
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MISSION**

**[www.ascensionorthodox.org](http://www.ascensionorthodox.org)**

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## Introduction

Since the early Church, the Service of the Proskomedie has been a service of offering gifts to God in preparation for the Sacrament of Holy Communion in the Divine Liturgy. The Proskomedie is thus a prerequisite for the Divine Liturgy.

Today, the priest conducts the Proskomedie inaudibly during Matins (in the Byzantine Orthodox Churches) or the Third and Sixth Hours (in the Slavic Orthodox Churches) inside the Sanctuary. The Table of Offering (Prothesis) is located to the left of the Holy Altar. The Table of Offering represents the cave of Bethlehem where our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was born.

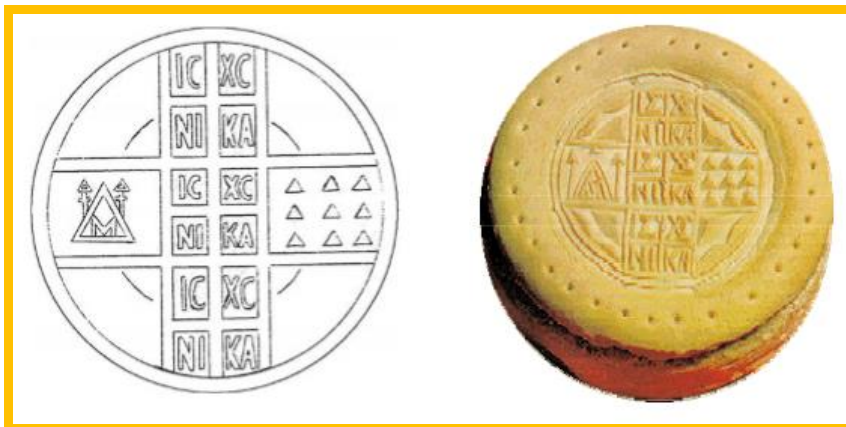
For the Proskomedie, members of the congregation (baptized Orthodox Christians) bring wine and bread as an offering to the Church. During the Divine Liturgy, the wine will be consecrated into the Blood of Christ, while the bread (prosphoro: Holy Bread of Offering) will be consecrated into the Body of Christ.

The wine is a pure grape sweet wine.

The holy bread (also called prosphora or offering) must be made from pure flour and water, and is leavened and well baked (see prayer and recipe at end). In some traditions, there are five loaves to represent our Lord's miracle of feeding of "five thousand men besides women and children" with only five loaves of bread (Matthew 14: 17 - 21). But if it is not possible to make five loaves, at least one is necessary for the offering.

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 5

In the center of the top of the proskomede is a round seal. During the Proskomede, the priest cuts small portions of the proskomede to prepare for Holy Communion. The seal on the proskomede is illustrated below:



Left: Proskomede Seal.

Right: Proskomede Bread

The priest will prepare the elements that will become the Body and Blood of Christ. As he begins the service you will see a dual theme running through, one being that of the birth of Christ, the second being “Christ of the Extreme Humility.” We learn from the Book of Revelation 1: 8 that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The Service of Proskomede (Preparation or Oblation) gives us both the beginning of our salvation, with Christ coming into the world, and the end or continuation of our salvation with Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross for us.

## The Service of the Proskomede

The Service of the Proskomede begins with the Priest coming before the Altar of Offering (Prothesis). He bows, makes three reverences, and says quietly 3 times: "O God, be gracious to me a sinner, and have mercy upon me."

In the Byzantine Orthodox Churches, the following prayer is read by the priest: "Prepare O Bethlehem, Eden is open for all. Adorn yourself O Efratha for, in the cave, the Tree of Life has blossomed forth from the Virgin. Her womb has been revealed as a noetic Paradise wherein lies the Divine Seedling. If we partake of it we shall live, if not, then we shall die as Adam. Christ is born, restoring the once fallen image."

The priest then kisses each of the items and utensils that will be used in the Proskomede, saying the following prayer (in Byzantine Orthodox Churches, the priest takes the prosphoro in his hands, elevates it to his forehead with the seal of the prosphoro upward, and says the following prayer): "You have redeemed us (priest kisses Star/Asteriskos) from the curse of the law (priest kisses Paten/Diskos) by your precious blood (priest kisses Chalice). By being nailed to the Cross and pierced with a lance (priest kisses Lance), You have become a fountain of immortality for all people (priest kisses Communion Spoon). Glory to You, our Savior." And then he says: "Blessed is our God always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen."

The priest then begins the cutting of the prosphoro. He takes the prosphoro in his left hand and the spear (lance) in his right hand, makes the sign of the Cross over the seal with the

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomedie) 7

lance and says three times: "In remembrance of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ." Taken from Luke 22: 19.

### The Lamb

First, he moves to the central portion of the seal bearing the inscription ICXC NIKA (Jesus Christ Conquers) in its four corners. This portion is called the Lamb, which represents our Lord who takes on the sins of the world. The Lord is called Lamb, because like a lamb, He accepted His death with humility and without protest.



The Lamb. Central Portion of Proskophoro. IC XC NIKA.

The priest cuts along the right side of the Lamb, saying from Isaiah 53: 7: "As a sheep He was led to the slaughter." And along the left side of the Lamb, saying also from Isaiah 53: 7: "And as a blameless lamb, dumb before his shearer, He opens not His mouth." And along the top side of the Lamb, saying from Isaiah 53: 8: "In His humiliation His judgment was taken away." And along the bottom side of the Lamb, saying from Isaiah 53: 8: "And who shall declare His generation?" Then the priest inserts the lance in the bottom of the proskophoro beneath the Lamb. He lifts the Lamb up, and while

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 8

removing it, he says from Isaiah 53: 8: "For His life is raised up from the Earth."

The priest then places the Lamb upon the Paten, makes a deep crosswise cut on the back of the Seal without cutting through it and says from the Gospel of St John 6: 51; 1: 29: "Sacrificed is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, for the life and salvation of the world... By Your crucifixion, O Christ, tyranny was abolished and the power of the enemy was trampled upon, for it was neither an angel nor a man, but the Lord Himself who saved us. Glory to you."

The Lamb is then turned so the seal is upward, and pierces with the lance the section marked NI, saying again from the Gospel of St John 19: 34: "One of the soldiers pierced His side with a lance and immediately there came out blood and water. And he who saw it bore witness, and his witness is true." The priest then pours wine and a little water into the Chalice, blesses it and says: "Blessed is the union of your holy gifts, always, now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen."

## The Portion Commemorating the Theotokos

To the right of the Lamb (on the left of the prosphoro as the priest faces it) is the portion for the Mother of God. From this second portion, the priest cuts out the triangle with the letter M and Θ for Mother of God (in the Greek Language), and places it on the Paten. This is in commemoration of our Most Blessed Lady, the Theotokos, Mother of God, to whom we pray to intercede for us to her Divine Son. As the priest places this portion to the right of the Lamb, he says: "The Queen



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 9

stood at Your right hand, clothed in a garment made with gold and arrayed in diverse colors." (Ps. 44: 10).



## The 9 Portions Commemorating the 9 Orders of Angels & Saints

From the third prosphoron, the left of the Lamb (on the right as the priest faces it) cuts out the nine small triangles. He places them on the Paten on the left side of the Lamb, in the same position as they were on the prosphoron. These nine triangles symbolize the nine orders of saints and the angels in Heaven, as follows:

1. (In Byzantine Orthodox Churches) In honor and remembrance of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and of all the heavenly bodiless powers. (In Slavic Orthodox Churches) Of the honorable glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John.
2. (Of the honorable glorious Prophet and forerunner Baptist John); of the holy glorious Prophets Moses and Aaron, Elias,

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 10

and Elisha, David and Jesse; of the three holy Children; Daniel the Prophet, and of all the holy Prophets.

3. Of the holy, glorious, and praiseworthy Apostles Peter and Paul, of the twelve and the seventy, and of all the holy apostles and those equal to the apostles.

4. Of our Fathers among the saints, the ecumenical, great teachers and hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom; Athanasios and Cyril, John the Merciful, Patriarchs of Alexandria, Nicholas of Myra, Spyridon Bishop of Trimythous and Nektarios of Pentapolis the wonderworkers and all the holy hierarchs.

5. Of the holy Apostle, Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen; the holy and glorious Great-Martyrs George the trophy-bearer, Demetrius the myrrh-gusher, Theodore the Recruit, Theodore the General, and Theodore of Atra, and of all holy martyrs; and the martyred women: Thecla, Barbara, Cyriace, Euphemia and Parasceve, Catherine, and of all the holy martyred women.

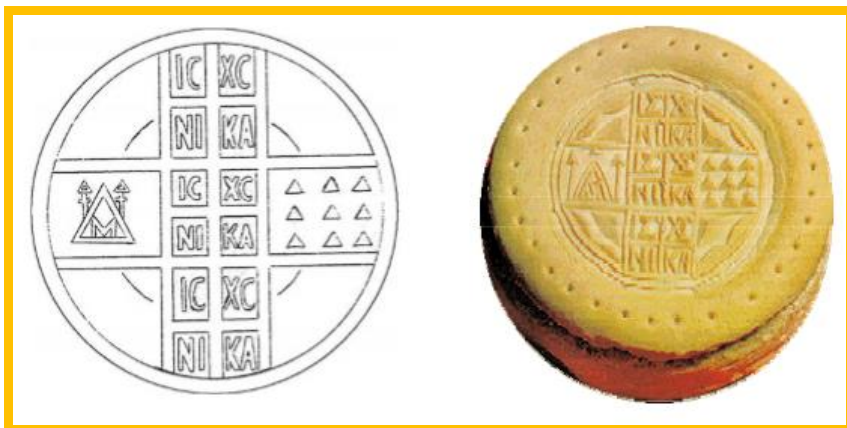
6. Of our holy and God-bearing fathers: Anthony, Euthymius, Sabbas the Sanctified, Onuphrius, Athanasius of Athos, Anthony and Theodosius of the Caves, Sergius of Radonezh, Barlaam of Hutyn, and of all the holy fathers; and of the holy mothers: Pelagia, Theodosia, Anastasia, Eupraxia, Febronia, Theodula, Euphrosyne, Mary of Egypt, and of all the holy mothers.

7. Of the holy, glorious, and wonder-working unmercenaries: Cosmas and Damian, Cyrus and John, Panteleimon and Hermolaus and of all the holy unmercenaries.

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 11

8. Of the holy and righteous Ancestors of God, Joacheim and Anna; of Saint(s) **N. (N.) whose temple it is** and whose day it is; of the holy Equals-of-the-Apostles Methodius and Cyril, teachers of the Slavs; of the holy Equals-of-the-Apostles Great Prince Vladimir, and of all the saints, through whose intercession You visit us, O God.

9. Of our father among the saints, [John the Golden-Mouth, Archbishop of Constantinople / Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia].



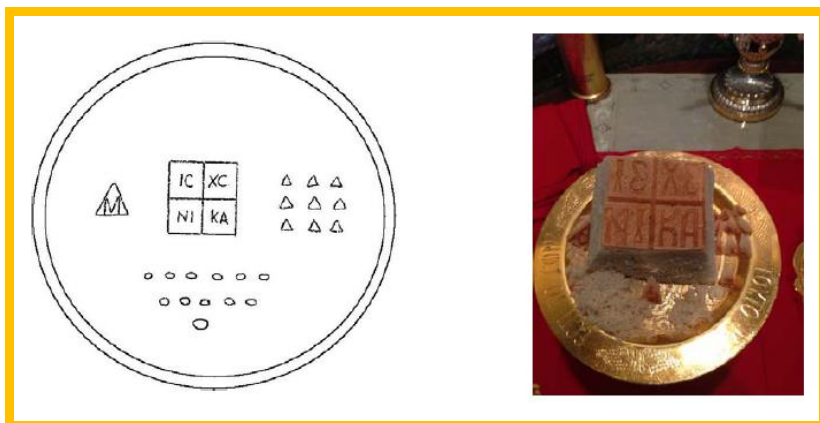
The 9 Small Triangles Commemorating the 9 Ranks of Saints

Then the priest cuts two portions from the same prosphoron. From the one, he commemorates the living by taking out particles, and from the other, he takes out particles to commemorate the dead. The congregation gives the names of the living and dead for whom they want the priest to pray. The priest commemorates the living by taking out their particles from the bread, calling each name that has been given to him to be remembered at this time, and places them below the Lamb and to the right of the Lamb (left of clergy).

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 12

To the left of the Lamb (right of the clergy), the dead are commemorated. The last portion is for the Priest who prays for his own salvation.

After cutting out the portions of the bread, the Paten should look as follows:



When the Priest completes the Service of Preparation, he places upon the Paten the Asteriscos (Star). The Paten with the Asteriscos and the Chalice are covered with separate veils. Both are then covered with a larger veil, which is called the Aer.



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 13

### **Sacred Objects Used During the Proskomede**

The following sacred objects and holy utensils are used during for the Service of Preparation:

The PROTHESIS (OBLATION TABLE) is the table used for the Proskomede. It is located to the left of the Holy Altar.



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 14

The PATEN (DISKOS/DISKARION) is the raised plate where the bread is placed. It symbolizes the manger of Bethlehem.



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 15

The CHALICE is the cup where the wine is poured. It symbolizes the cup that our Lord used at the Last Supper.



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 16

The SPEAR or LANCE is used to cut the bread. It symbolizes the spear that the soldier used to pierce the side of our Lord when Christ was hanging on the Cross.





## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 17

The ASTERISCOS is the star cover that is placed on the Paten. It is made of metal so that it can support and prevent the small veil from coming in contact with the bread. It symbolizes the star of Bethlehem.



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 18

The AER is a veil that covers both the Paten and the Chalice. It symbolizes the linen cloth in which Joseph and Nicodemus placed the most Sacred Body of our Lord when they took it down from the Cross. It also symbolizes the Loftiness and Glory of Jesus Christ and His Saving Grace by which His Church is covered and protected and even "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16: 18). Under the Aer, separate smaller veils cover the Paten with the Asteriscos and the Chalice. They are often in the shape of a cross, with the four points coming down as flaps over the Paten or the Chalice, as depicted below.



The Aer



Aer in the center with Paten and Chalice Covers

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 19

The HOLY SPOON is used to administer Holy Communion to the faithful. It symbolizes the tong that the Angel used to take the burning coal from the Altar in order to touch the lips of Isaiah to purify him from his sins (Isaiah 6: 7).



The ZEON is both the small vessel and the hot water it contains, which the priest pours into the Chalice. The hot water symbolizes the mixture of hot blood and water that flowed from the side of our Lord when the soldier's spear pierced Him.

An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 20



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 21

The ANTIMENSION is a silken or linen cloth, having upon it the representation of the Deposition of Christ in the tomb and the four Evangelists on the four Corners. It is placed on the Holy Altar, and the Paten and the Chalice are placed on it for the consecration of the gifts into the Holy Communion.



SPONGES are used for cleaning the sacred vessels after the Divine Liturgy. One is used to wipe the Paten after the portions of the bread have been dropped into the Chalice; this sponge is kept on the Altar in the Holy Antimension. The other sponge is used to wipe the Holy Chalice after it has been washed, and is kept on the Prothesis.

## Explanation of Terms

### ANTIDORON

The portions of bread remaining after the Service of Preparation. It is not consecrated. It is given to worshippers after the Divine Liturgy. Antidoron means "instead of the Gift."

### LAMB - The Host ICXC NIKA

The Lord is called Lamb, because like a Lamb He accepted His death with humility and without protest. This term is used to refer to the portion of the bread in the center of the seal inscribed ICXC NIKA.

### PROSKOMEDE (OBLATION)

The offering of gifts.

### PROSPHORON (singular) or PROSPHORA (plural)

Holy Bread offered for the preparation of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.



# Holy Ascension Orthodox Mission Prospora Recipe

## Equipment

Large Bowl

Wooden Spoon

Knife

Sifter

Gladwrap

Blanket/Tea Towels

Prospora Stamp

Baking Tray

Freezer Bags

## Ingredients

### To make 4 loaves

- 4 cups 'Special White' flour (*can get this from any European-style Deli*)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon dry yeast (*can get this from supermarket – then store in freezer*)
- 2 ½ cups water – hand hot (*hotter than lukewarm, but not boiling*)

### To make 6 loaves

- 8 cups 'Special White' flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons dry yeast
- 5 cups water – hand hot

## Method

1. Warm oven to 180°C.
2. Sift all flour into large bowl.
3. Make a cross in the flour three times, with wooden spoon.
4. Add the salt and yeast.



## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 25

5. Fold it all in, make a well in the centre to pour your lukewarm water.
6. Pour half the lukewarm water into the well, mix slowly into the flour. Then keep adding a little water at a time, and mixing.
7. Cover your board or bench-top with flour, and pour mixture onto it.
8. Flour your hands and kneed the bread until it becomes smooth. From the point that it becomes smooth, kneed it for an additional 10mins.
9. After 10mins roll mixture into a ball and place back into [washed] large bowl. Cut a cross into the upper half of mixture.
10. Cover mixture with gladwrap, and place a clean blanket/tea-towels over entire bowl. Set aside like this for 1hr & 15mins.
11. Kneed again to get rid of air bubbles (you will hear it stop squeaking).
12. Cut into 4 or 6 or 8 equal portions (depending on how many proshpora you are making).
13. Kneed each individual portion 40 – 60 times. Shape them flat and round. Be sure to get rid of all air bubbles, cracks, etc.

## An Explanation of the Service of Preparation (Proskomede) 26

14. Cover each portion of proskomoro with a little flour, then push down the stamp so that seal is very clear (*I hold down for at least 10secs*).
15. Let them sit like that for 1hr.
16. One hour later they should have risen a little. Cook each proskomoro for between 15-30mins, depending on your fan forced oven. They will sound hollow [when you tap them] when they are cooked, and should be a little browned on top and bottom. Can turn over and cook bottom for five mins if this has not browned by this stage.
17. Once cooked, place on baking tray and cover with tea towel for 10mins. Then let them cool down for at least 2hrs before placing each individual proskomoro into it's own freezer bag.



## Prosphora-Baking Prayer

**Making the Sign of the Cross, say:**

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us. Amen. Glory to You, our God, glory to You.

**(If it is Paschaltide then here we sing, "Christ is Risen," three times)**

O God, whose only-begotten Son has said, "Without Me, you can do nothing," my Lord and my God, in faith I bend the knees of my soul to bow before Your fatherly goodness and raise my hands to You: help me, a sinner, to do this work in conformity with Your will. And send down Your Holy Spirit to guide me in the making of these prosphora, that they may be worthy of the use for which they are intended.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, through the prayers of Your All-Pure Mother, by the power of the precious and life-giving Cross, by the intercessions of blessed Michael the Archangel, of the holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, John, of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, of the Holy Prosphora-Bakers of Kiev Spyridon and Nicodemus, of **[your patron saint or the patron saint of the church in which the Divine Liturgy is to be served]**, of my/our holy Guardian Angel, and of all the saints, have mercy on me/us and save me/us. Amen.