

## The Office of Oblation (Proskomide)

### Introduction

Since the early Church, the Office of Oblation (Proskomide) has been a service of offering gifts to God in preparation for the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion in the Divine Liturgy. The Office of Oblation is thus a prerequisite for the Divine Liturgy.

Today, the priest conducts the Office of Oblation inaudibly during the Orthros (Matins) service behind the Altar Iconostasis (Icon Screen). The Table of Oblation (Prothesis or sometimes Proskomide) is located to the left of the Holy Altar table. The Table of Oblation represents the cave or stable of Bethlehem where our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was born.

For the Oblation, members of the congregation 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 will be consecrated into the body of Christ.

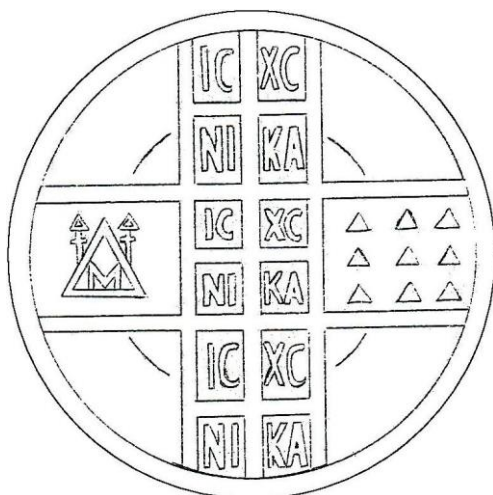


The wine is a pure grape sweet wine. It is often Greek sweet wines from Samos or Cyprus. We use either St. John Commandaria, or Roussos Nama for our wines.



The holy bread (also called prosphoron or offering) must be made from pure flour and water and is leavened and well baked. 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 (Matt. 14:17-21). But if it is not possible to make five loaves, at least one is necessary for the offering.

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



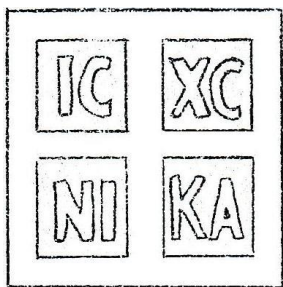
The priest will prepare the elements that will become the body and blood of Christ. As he begins the service you will see a dual theme running through, one being that of the birth of Christ, the second being Christ's extreme humility. We learn from the book of Revelation 1:8 that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The service of Proskomidi (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 Office of Oblation

The Service of the Office of Oblation begins with the Priest coming before the Oblation table (Prothesis). He bows, makes three reverences, and says quietly three times: *"May God have mercy upon me, the sinner, and save me."* He reads the prayer *"O Bethlehem, prepare, Eden is opened unto all. And be ready, Ephrata, for the Tree of life has in the cave blossomed forth from the Virgin. Indeed her womb is shown to be spiritually a Paradise, in which is found the God-planted Tree. And if we eat from it we shall live, and shall not die, as did Adam of old. Christ is born, so that He might raise up the formerly fallen image."* (Romans 5:11-21) He takes the bread in his hands, elevates it to his forehead with the seal of the loaf upward, and says: *"You ransomed us from the curse of the Law by Your precious Blood. You were nailed to the Cross, and You were pierced with a spear, and You gushed forth immortality for humanity. Our Savior, glory to You."* And then he says: *"Blessed is our God always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen."*

The priest then begins the cutting of the bread. He takes the bread in his left hand and the spear (lance) in his right hand, makes the sign of the Cross over the seal with the lance and says three times: *"In remembrance of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ."* Taken from Luke 22:19.

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 Amnos, or the Lamb, which represents our Lord who takes on the sins of the world. The Lord is called "Amnos" or Lamb, because like a lamb, He accepted His death with humility and without protest.



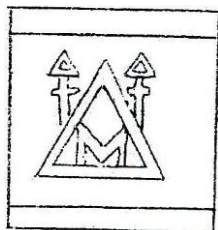
The priest cuts along the right side of the Amnos, saying from Isaiah 53:7: *"As a sheep He was led to the slaughter."* And along the left side of the Amnos, saying also from Isaiah 53:7: *"And as a blameless lamb, dumb before his shearer, He opens not His mouth."* And along the top side of the Amnos,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

priest inserts the lance in the bottom of the bread beneath the Amnos. He lifts the Amnos up, and while removing it, he says from Isaiah 53:8: *"For His life is raised up from the earth."*

The priest then places the Amnos 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, Son and Word 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 Amnos 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."*

To the right of the Amnos (on the left of the bread 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, Panagia, to whom we pray to intercede for us to her Divine Son. As the priest places this portion to the right of the Amnos, he says: *"The Queen stood at your right hand, clothed in a garment wrought with gold and arrayed in diverse colors."* (Ps. 44:10).



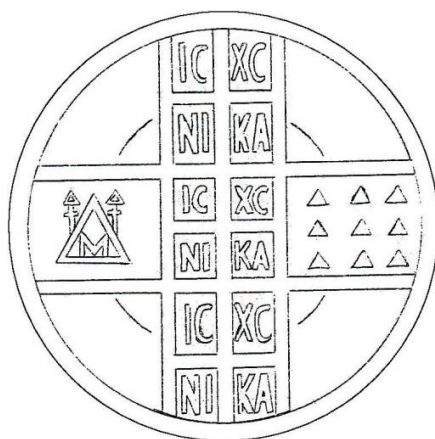
The portion commemorating the Theotokos

From the third prosphoron, the left of the Amnos (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 Amnos, in the same position as they were on the bread. These nine triangles symbolize the nine orders of saints and the angels in heaven, as follows:

1. In honor and remembrance of the supreme Archangels Michael and Gabriel and of all the Heavenly Bodiless Powers.
2. Of the honorable, glorious prophet and forerunner John the Baptist; of the holy glorious prophets Moses and Aaron, Elias, Elisha, David and Jesse; of the three holy Children; of Daniel the prophet; and of all the holy prophets.



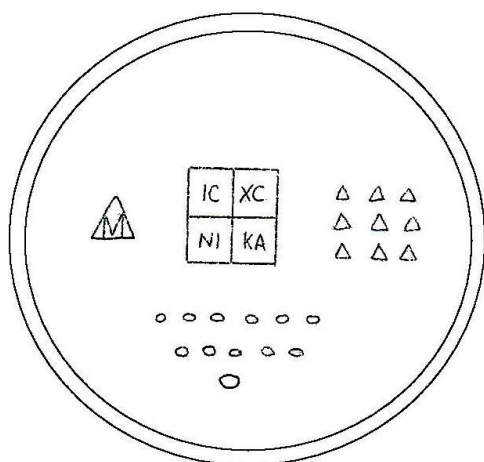
3. Of the holy, glorious and praiseworthy apostles Peter and Paul; of the twelve and the seventy, and of all the holy Apostles and equal to the Apostles.
4. Of our holy fathers among the saints, the great hierarchs and ecumenical teachers: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom; Athanasios and Cyril, John the Merciful Patriarchs of Alexandria; Nicholas of Myra, Spyridon Bishop of Trimithous and Nektarios of Pentapolis and of all the holy Hierarchs.
5. Of the holy, glorious, Apostle, first martyr and archdeacon Stephen; of the holy, glorious great martyrs, George, Dimitrios and the Theodores; of the hieromartyrs Polycarp, Haralambos and Eleftherios; of the holy women martyrs Thekla, Barbara, Anastasia, Katherine, Kyriaki, Fotini, Marina, Paraskevi, Irene; and of all the Hieromartyrs, triumphant Martyrs and Confessors.
6. Of our venerable, God-bearing Fathers, who excelled in asceticism, Anthony the Great, Euthymios, Paisios, Savvas the Sanctified, Theodore the Koinobiarxou, Onouphrios, Athanasios and Petros, of Athos, and of all the venerable people.
7. Of the holy, glorious, and wonder-working Unmercenaries Kosmas and Damianos, Kyros and John, Panteleimon and Ermolaos, and of all the holy doctors and Unmercenaries.
8. Of the holy and righteous ancestors, Joachim and Anna; Joseph the Betrothed and Symeon the Godbearer; (*saint of the day*), whose memory we celebrate today; and of all the saints, whose supplications visit with us, O God, and grant us all requests that lead to salvation and life everlasting.
9. Of our Father among the saints John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, (*Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, the Heavenly Revealer*) whose Divine Liturgy we will celebrate.



The nine portions commemorating the nine orders of angels and 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 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 "Amnos" and to the right of the "Amnos" (left of clergy). To the left of the "Amnos" (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 Office of Oblation, he places upon the Paten the Asteriscos (Star Cover). 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. (*Read the symbolism of each item on the preceding pages.*)

The Office of Oblation is concluded with a prayer by the priest offered to our Lord, asking Him to bless the gifts of bread and wine, accept them in remembrance of those who offer them, and keep the priest pure during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

### Sacred Objects used during the Office of Oblation

The following objects are used during the Office of Oblation:

The **Prothesis (Oblation Table)** is the table used for the Office of Oblation. It is located to the left of the Holy Altar table.



The **Paten (Diskarion)** is the raised plate where the bread is placed. It symbolizes the manger of Bethlehem.



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



The **Spear or Lance (Longche)** is used to cut the bread. It symbolizes the spear that the soldier used to pierce the side of our Lord when our Lord was hanging on the Cross.

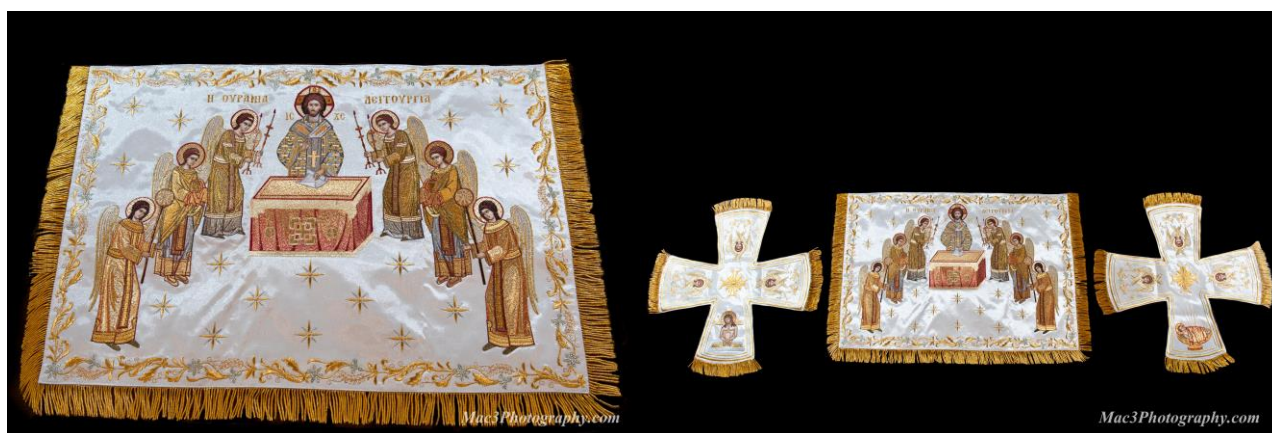




The **Asteriscos** is the star cover that is placed on the Paten. It is made of metal so that it can support and prevent the small veil from coming in contact with the bread. It symbolizes the star of Bethlehem.



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 hell shall not prevail against it"* (Mt. 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

Veil covers (Kalimata) for the Paten and Chalice

The **Holy Spoon (Lavida)** 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 warm water it contains, which the priest pours into the Chalice. The warm water symbolizes the mixture of warm blood and water that flowed from the side of our Lord when the soldier's spear pierced Him.



The **Red Communion Cloth (Maxtron)** is a square cloth used as the Priest administers Holy Communion to the faithful and it covers the Chalice following the giving of Holy Communion





The **Antimension (Corporal)** 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 table, and the Paten and the Chalice are placed on it for the consecration of the gifts into the Holy Communion.



**Sponges (Mousa)** 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 (Corporal). The other sponge is used to wipe the Holy Chalice after it has been washed, and is kept on the Oblation table.



### Explanation of Terms

**Antidoron:** The portions of bread remaining after the Office of Oblation. It is not consecrated. It is given to worshipers after the Divine Liturgy. Antidoron means "instead of the Gift."

**Lamb (Amnos): The Host ICXC NIKA:** The Lord is called Amnos (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.

**Proskomide (Oblation):**The offering of gifts.

**Prosporon (singular) or Prospora (plural):** Holy bread offered for the preparation of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.