

The Bells

A striking component of Orthodox worship is the ringing of bells. Every daily cycle of public divine services starts with the ringing of bells and no one who has witnessed the procession around the church at Holy Pascha can forget the almost continuous ringing of all the church bells. In Pre-Revolutionary Moscow, for example, travelers invariably commented on the stirring clamor of the more than 1600 bells of the city ringing simultaneously at the Pascha of Our Lord. Usually a separate structure, the Bell Tower, was constructed to contain the bells, but more often in modern times a belfry is erected over the entrance to the church building, within which the bells are placed.

The purpose of ringing the bells is to call the faithful to services, to inform those absent from divine services of the various important liturgical moments of the services, as well as calling the worshippers to concentrated attention at these same moments. It is also used to signal the arrival of the Archpastor at the church or monastery. There are four basic types of bell-ringing in the Russian Church: The Announcement (Blagovest announcing); the Peal (Trezvon three bells); Chain-ringing (Perezvon across (or linked) bells); and the Toll (Perebor broken (or interrupted)).

The Announcement (Blagovest').

This is a slow rhythmic, unhurried striking of one bell, which is usually rung for the announcing of the beginning of services: Before the All-Night Vigil (also accompanied by the Trezvon); before each group of services of the daily cycle (9th Hour Vespers Compline; Nocturns Matins 1st Hour; 3rd Hour 6th Hour Liturgy or Typical Psalms); and before Great Compline). The Announcement is also employed at other important moments of the services. For example, there are Twelve strikes for the twelve parts of the Creed and also before It is truly meet... of the Divine Liturgy; before the Molieben (if there be) following the Liturgy.

During Great Lent on weekdays, the Announcement Bell is rung at the 3rd, 6th, and 9th Hours, as well as at Great Compline three strikes for the 3rd Hour, six for the 6th Hour, nine for the 9th Hour, and twelve for Great Compline. During Passion Week, the Announcement Bell is rung at the beginning of each Passion Gospel (Holy Friday Matins), according to the number of the Gospel one strike for the first, two for the second, etc. (At the conclusion of the reading of the Passion Gospels, the Trezvon is rung.) At the Royal Hours of Holy Friday, the Bell is rung three strikes for the 3rd Hour, six for the 6th and nine for the 9th.

Before the Divine Liturgy, the Announcement Bell is rung until the Hours begin (usually accompanied by twelve recitations of Psalm 51 for twelve strikes of the Bell or the recitation of Psalm 119), usually about one-half hour before the Liturgy.

The Peal (Trezvon).

This is the ringing of bells in three modes, three times repeating a musical measure with a definite harmony of many selected bells. The Peal is used at the beginning of major services: Combined with the Announcement, the Peal is rung at the beginning of the All-Night Vigil, at Matins, before the Six Psalms, the Gospel, and at the end of the Vigil. At the Liturgy the Peal is rung after the 6th Hour and before the actual start of the Liturgy and after the conclusion of the Liturgy. If there be a Molieben on the church or monastery Feast Day, the Peal is rung before and after it. It is also rung at the end of the reading of the Twelve Passion Gospels of Holy Friday Matins, as well as after the Gospel reading during the Liturgy of the first day of Holy Pascha.

Chain-Ringing (Perezvon).

This is a successive ringing of all the bells from the largest (lowest pitch) to the smallest (highest pitch), with the striking of each bell a number of times before the next bell is struck, and repeating this method several times. It is used before the Blessing of Waters, before the carrying-out of the Holy Cross on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Sept. 14) and the Third Sunday of Great Lent, as well as at the Hours before the Consecration of a Bishop. It is also rung, together with a short ringing of the Peal at the immersing of the Holy Cross during the Great Blessing of Waters and after the carrying-out of the Holy Cross to the center of the church.

This mode of ringing is also used during the Vespers of Holy Friday when the Plaschanitsa is taken from the Altar to the center of the church, and also at the Great Doxology of the Matins of Holy Saturday when the Plaschanitsa is carried out around the church. (When the procession re-enters the church, the Peal follows.) Chain-Ringing is also used at the burial of Priests and Bishops.

The Toll (Perebor).

This is the slow tolling of each bell, beginning with the largest to the smallest and ending with a striking of all the bells at once. It is used at the carrying-out of the deceased from the church for burial and is known as the funeral toll. There is no Peal after the Toll.

At the Hierarchical Liturgy, the Announcement is rung at the appointed time; then the Peal is rung at the arrival of the Bishop. The Announcement then continues to ring up to the time of the vesting of the Bishop. The Peal is rung again at the 6th Hour.

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