



V E S P E R S

For Lord, I have cried, *we chant the following Stichera for the Blessing of the Animals:*

First Tone. Thou art the joy

When, in the beginning, the Lord our God created; * He filled the seas, the heavens, and the earth with living creatures. * The sea creatures were good, the winged birds were good, * and the beasts of the earth were good. * Through them man was shown to be in the image of God, * the King and Queen of all creation.

The first-formed man was placed in the garden of paradise, * and the animals were led to him to receive their names. * In naming them mankind revealed their deep essence * and formed a lasting connection, * ordering the world as a co-worker with God * and the King and Queen of all creation.

The Devil used a serpent to deceive our first parents, * but a beast also gave itself as a garment for us. * Through an animal we fell into corruption, * but another covers our shame; * a type of the Master's death to make us again * the King and Queen of all creation.

For the Aposticha, the following Stichera:

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First Tone.

All creation proclaims the glory of God, but through sin is it also subject to futility. Consider the humble house cat which figures both the all-conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah and the prowling adversary who seeks to devour and destroy. Take shelter, O my soul, in the first and resist the second, beseeching the Lord for deliverance.

Verse: All things hast Thou subjected under his feet, sheep, and all oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, the things that pass through the paths of the sea.

The works of His hands pour forth praise, yet through sin are they fallen into corruption. Consider the domesticated dog which calls to mind both the faithful companion that desires only to eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table, as well as that hungry pack that seeks to encircle and consume. Imitate, O my soul, the first and flee from the second, entreating the Lord for salvation.

Verse: The mountains skipped like rams, and the hills like lambs of flocks.

All creation longs for the revelation of the sons of God, for with and through them will it be delivered from bondage to corruption and set free to worship the Lord in spirit and truth. In anticipation of that eternal moment, the animals urge us on toward the prize: the dove brings a twig of olive revealing that the flood waters of our sins have receded, the ox

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and the ass stand watch over the manger of our hearts where Christ is born, and the fish carries in its mouth a coin from our growing treasury in heaven. Let us heed their offerings and press on toward the goal of our high calling.