

sitting at the very time that a multitude of angels stand before the face of the Lord in fear and trepidation; sitting shows that we are somehow praying unwillingly, carelessly, in a lazy manner.”

In the early works of the Holy Fathers a reverent attitude during services was shown to be an important and sacred duty.

To stand before God and His holy saints during the church services is the acceptable posture for the faithful.

The Apostle Paul says: “Watch ye, *stand* fast in the faith” (I Cor. 16:13); “*Stand*, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth (Ephes. 6:14); “Stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved” (Philippian 4:1).

If the spirit of the one serving and praying strives toward the Highest, will it not also lift up the body which is subject to it? Standing during church services shows us to be humble servants, ready, attentive and willing to serve God.

Not unlike the Old Testament sacrifice: the faithful, standing and becoming fatigued during services, themselves symbolically become offerings to God, as the Apostle says: “Present you bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

So can I sit?

Naturally, hour-long standing is not required of everybody. How much one stands and for how long really is more of a personal choice. There are seats in the back of most churches for the children, the sick and the elderly. Each person knows his or her own abilities, physical and mental capacities, as well as one’s own health, and decides accordingly.



But standing does remain the rule and the standard position of the believers praying in Russian Orthodox churches is upright. As Orthodox mothers tell their children, “Just like burning candles.”

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Why we stand during Church services



One of the first things people notice about Russian Orthodox churches is that they have no pews. Even in cathedrals and monasteries, where services can go for some hours, most of the time the congregation will be found standing.

Why? Is it a form of masochism? No. Asceticism? Maybe a little.

Unlike the services in most Christian denominations, Orthodox Church services are considered active, focused “service.” The whole service is prayer to God and historically, Christians have always prayed standing (and sometimes kneeling).

Worship involves the whole person: our minds, bodies and spirit. So how we respond physically to God is part of how we worship. At the most basic level, standing is a due sign of respect because in church we are in the house of the King.

Saint Isaac the Syrian, a famous teacher of the seventh century said:

“Reckon every prayer, wherein the body does not does not exert itself, and the heart does not experience repentance, to not yet be a fully ripened fruit, for such a prayer has no soul.”

Pews and chairs are a modern addition to Christian churches. The use of seating came about in Protestant worship, because the core element in their services is the sermon. Accordingly, people sit for much of the service because they are listening, passively receiving instruction and advice.

However, for Orthodox Christians, the sermon is not an integral part of every service. Instead, services concentrate on active preparation and participation in

prayers and the Holy Sacraments (such as the Eucharist).

Such active service requires concentration, energy, and a degree of exertion. And it’s traditionally thought that it is easier to be focused and alert if your body is standing upright, straight.

Standing in Old Testament Times

Standing during prayer and church services is a representation of spiritual service in the Heavenly Church. Whom the God-inspired prophets Isaiah, Micah Daniel and St. John the Theologian saw “*standing* in the heavens next to the throne of God” (Isaiah 6:2; I Kings 22:19; Daniel 7:10; Apocalypse 7:11).

In the description of the blessing of Solomon's temple it is said: “The Levites and all the singers, being arrayed in white linen and having cymbals and psalteries and harps *stood* at the east end of the altar” (II Chronicles 5:12); “All the congregation of Israel *stood*” (II Chronicles 6:2).

In order to protect his homeland from the Ammonites and the children of Moab, Josaphat “*stood* in the congregation of Judah in Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord before the new court. And all Judah *stood* before

the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (II Chronicles 20:5, 13).

Nehemiah, speaking of the services of the Jews after the Babylonian captivity, says: “And the Levites *stood* according to their rank and cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God, and the Levites caused the people to understand the law; and the people *stood* in their place” (Nehemiah 9:4,5; 8:7).

Standing in the Teaching of Christ and the New Testament Church

The correctness of such practice is evident in the New Testament, where we find the words of Christ: “When ye *stand* praying” (Mark 9:25), and in apostolic tradition, where it is often proclaimed “Let us stand well.”

All Christians, according to the apostolic teachings, had to stand during the reading of the Gospel and the “Liturgy of the Faithful.”

Tertullian, in the year 190 A.D., mentions the practice of standing during services:

“Some, in preparation for prayer, throw off their cloaks, and some think it their duty not to stand, but to sit, and we are not to imitate these. It is especially improper to pray while