

Baptism in the Orthodox Church

Baptism begins in the narthex (entrance) where the unbaptized would congregate in the ancient church.

Exorcisms

The exorcism prayers beseech God to remove and protect from the child from all evil forces. The priest calls upon the Godparent to renounce Satan and his angels. The renouncing of Satan is done facing away from the Altar. The Godparent speaks on behalf of the child forcefully rejecting Satan and symbolically spit-ting three times on the floor. The Godparents then face east where Christians expect Christ to appear at His Second Coming. The priest asks the Godparent if they accept Christ as Lord and Savior. One of the final prayers has the priest asking God to "*attach to him/her a shining angel of protection*", a Guardian Angel.

The Sign of The Cross

The priest then makes the sign of the cross on the child's body. This will be repeated throughout the service.

The Creed

The Godparent is then asked to proclaim his/her faith in Christ on behalf of the infant. The Godparent recites the confession of faith, the Nicene Creed.

The Naming

The infant is given a Christian name, either a saint or a significant event in the life of Christ. It is the Church's acceptance of him/her as an individual in his/her own right. The new name expresses also the new life, which is received through baptism.

The Baptismal Font

The priest, child and Godparent proceed to the front of the church to the large baptismal font. In imitation of Christ we descend into the water of baptism. "*Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.*" (John 3:5).

Water

Water is used in cleansing. Jews used water for the rite of purification (John 2:6). And St. John baptized with water (Luke 3:16). In the baptismal service we ask God that "*this water may be for him/her a washing of rebirth unto the remission of sins*". The priest blesses the water in the baptismal font and then adds a small amount of blessed olive oil.

The Anointing with Oil

Olive oil is then applied by the priest to the various parts of the child's body: hands, feet, ears, mouth and chest in order to dedicate them to the service of Christ. The sponsor will then anoint the entire body of the infant with olive oil. Olive oil has always had the dual purpose of healing and anointing of rulers. In the baptismal service the priest asks that "*through the descent of the Holy Spirit the oil may become an anointing of Incorruption, a shield of righteousness, and a renewal of soul and body to avert every evil*". Oil is also a symbol of peace and reconciliation between God and humans, as a dove brought an olive branch to Noah at the great flood described in the Old Testament.

The Triple Immersion

The immersion in water symbolizes death to the "*old self which is corrupt and the putting on of the new which is renewed In the Image of the Creator and thus in the likeness of death through baptism they become partners in Christ's resurrection*". The triple immersion symbolizes the Holy Trinity; Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The person who has been baptized comes out of the baptismal font dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

The Sacrament of Chrismation

In the Orthodox Church, the Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) is administered immediately following baptism as in the early church. Similar to the previous anointing with oil, the priest anoints the newly baptized with Holy Chrism on the brow, eyes, nostril, lips, ears, breast, hands and feet with the words: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit". The "whole person" is now a temple of God.

The Cutting of the Hair

After Chrismating the infant, the priest cuts locks of hair from the child's head called tonsuring, in the shape of the cross. This is an expression of gratitude from the child, who, having received an abundance of blessings through the sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation and having nothing to give God in return, offers part of its hair. In the Old Testament, hair is seen as a symbol of strength. The child, therefore, promises to serve God with all its strength.

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New Clothes

The new clothes, typically white, signify the entirely new life that we receive after we are baptized.

The Candles

Baptism remains the sacrament of entrance into the Light. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father, Who is in heavens". (Matthew 5:16).

The Procession

In early times, Baptism and Chrismation were not administered in the Church, but in a separate building called the "baptisterion". This is the origin of the present procession of the priest being accompanied by the sponsor, who is holding the newly baptized infant, around the baptismal font, just before the infant is given the Sacrament of Communion. In ancient church, the procession came from the Baptisterion back into the main church. Both then and now, the hymn sung during the procession is: "All those who have been baptized into Christ, have accepted Christ, Alleluia."

The Epistle Reading

(Romans 6:3 -11)

Do you not know that all of us, who have been baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized in to His death? We were therefore buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For, if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him, so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For, he who has died is freed from sin. For we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. For we know

that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once and for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel Reading

(Matthew 28:16-20)

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. Amen".

The Eucharist

Immediately following baptism, the newly baptized receives the precious Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, As a full member of the church, the greatest benefit of being Orthodox is participation in the sacramental life, the greatest manifestation of which is to receive Holy Communion, From this time forward, the child and Godparents are invited to be a frequent participants in the Holy Eucharist.

Receipt of the Cross

Just prior to the newly baptized and chrismated infant being returned to the parents, the priest or the sponsor will place a cross on the baby while saying the words of our Lord to His disciples and which now apply to the new Orthodox Christian;

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

The Conclusion

As the service concludes, the Godparents hand the infant to the child's parents with the words: "Receive your child, baptized and chrismated, an Orthodox Christian."