

Baptism in the Orthodox Church

Baptism begins in the narthex (entrance) where the unbaptized would assemble 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(s) 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 spitting 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 Nicene Creed, the Orthodox confession of faith.

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 priest, child and Godparent(s) then proceed to the front of the church to the large baptismal font.

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 just before he adds a small amount of blessed olive oil the priest blesses the oil asking 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*".

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 Godparent 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. Oil is also a symbol of peace and reconciliation between God and humans, as a dove brought an olive branch to Noah after the great flood.

The Triple Immersion

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).

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 (Catholic sacrament of Confirmation) is administered immediately following baptism as in the Early Church. This is not just oil but a mixture of oil and other elements and is called Myron. Similar to the previous anointing with oil, the priest anoints the newly baptized with Holy Chrism on the

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brow, eyes, nostril, lips, ears, breast, hands and feet with the words: *"The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit"*.

The Cutting of the Hair (Tonsuring)

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 offering from the child, who, having nothing to give God in return, offers part of its hair promising with the offering to be a diligent follower of God's commandments. In the Old Testament, hair was seen as a symbol of strength. (Samson Judges 16:17) The child, therefore, promises to serve God with all its strength.

New Clothes

The new clothes, typically white, signify a new life in the Body of Christ that we receive after baptism.

The Candles

Baptism Is the sacrament of entrance into the Light of Christ. *"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". Then they would process into the church to receive Holy Communion. To remember this procession into the Church, today, the priest, being accompanied by the Godparent, holding the newly baptized child, process around the baptismal font before the infant is given the Sacrament of Communion. 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".

Holy Communion (Eucharist)

Following the sacraments of baptism and chrismation, the newly baptized receives the third sacrament; the Body and Blood of Christ or Holy Communion. As the Orthodox Church sees Holy Communion as essential for eternal life the child, as a full member of the Church, receives this greatest of Mysteries. From this time forward, the child and

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Godparents are invited to be 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 child 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.”