

BAPTISM AND CHRISMATION

Rendering one a member of the Orthodox Church. Two Sacraments in one service.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Sacrament of Baptism was instituted by Christ Himself who, after His Resurrection, as a farewell commandment and admonition, just before his Ascension to Heaven, directed these words to His Apostles: “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 keep all things I have commanded you..” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Baptism is the gateway into the Christian Church. It is the saving action of God who, through water and the Spirit, recreates His creation.

It is the initial Sacrament through which he who is immersed in water three times, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, is cleansed from all sin and is regenerated spiritually. As our Lord Himself stated: “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5).

The Baptismal Service today contains several components. This guide might help you follow the proceedings and pray for the child being baptized.

The Renunciation and the Acceptance

The child will be held by the Godparent (Nouno or Nouna in Greek) as he stands in the Narthex of the church (or in certain circumstances at the Soleas) facing east (towards the altar). ‘East’ signifies the abode of God - the true Light.

The Priest, standing in front of them, blows three times onto the child’s head in the form of the Cross to drive away any evil spirits and adverse powers, blessing it each time saying “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen”.

He then places his hands on the child’s head, which symbolizes the taking of possession of the candidate in the name of the Holy Trinity and recites a prayer addressed to God: “In your name, O God of Truth... I lay my hand on your servant who has been found worthy to seek salvation in your Holy Name and protection under the shelter of your wings. Banish from him the error of old, fill him with faith and hope in you... so that he might know that you are the only true God... Grant him the ability to live in accordance with your commandments”.

The Exorcisms

The prayer is followed by three Exorcisms and yet another prayer, the prayer of acceptance, at the end of which the Priest, in summary of all that was said before, asks God to drive out and banish from the child any and every evil and impure spirit which may be hiding and lurking in his heart and make him a reason-endowed sheep in the holy flock of Christ, an honorable member of the Church, a child and heir of the kingdom.

The Godparent, holding the child, will then be asked to face west and renounce Satan and all his works, and all his worship and all his angels, and all his pride in a question and answer form (three times). He will then be asked to bow down on Satan. 'West' signifies a place of natural darkness, where the Devil, who is darkness himself, makes his abode.

The Confession of Faith

Then the Godparent, holding the child, will face east again and affirmatively answer the Priest who will ask him (three times) if he has pledged his allegiance to Christ.

After doing so, the Godparent will recite the Creed, the Symbol of Faith ('To Pistevo' in Greek) which is a summary of the Orthodox Teachings, formulated by several Ecumenical Councils of the Christian Church during the first millennium A.D. when there was unity of Faith throughout Christendom (with very few exceptions).

The Blessing of the Water

Now that the child is ready, they will enter the Church and the Priest will ask the Holy Spirit to come down and bless and consecrate the water in the Font and make it an instrument of salvation, saying "Wherefore, O merciful God, be present also and sanctify this water".

The Blessing of the Oil and Anointing

Once the blessing of the water is complete, the Godparent will offer a small bottle of olive oil over which a prayer for the banishment of evil is read to make it "an anointing of incorruption, a weapon of justice, a renewal of soul and body, a defense against every influence of the Devil and a release from evil to all those who are anointed with it, or partake of it."

Some of this oil is then poured crosswise three times on the water in the Font in order to render the consecration of the water complete.

The child (now undressed) will be anointed with the blessed oil on the forehead, nose, ears, mouth, chest, legs, feet, hands and back. The Godparent will then anoint the child, to prepare him, just as an athlete prepares, to battle the demon who he has just renounced and to slip away from the grip of sin.

The Immersion

Now the neophyte will be immersed three times in the Font which represents the 'Tomb of Jesus', symbolically being 'buried' with Christ, then 'raised' with Christ as the neophyte is removed from the Font and placed in the arms of the Godparent who is waiting for him with a white sheet. The truth of baptism lies in this profound action and is reflected in many of the prayers during the rite. The truth is that the candidate for baptism has chosen to die and be reborn for Christ. This act of faith by an individual is fulfilled by Christ as He pours on his grace, his gifts to the neophyte. The newly baptized is now a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven through his own choice and faith. Christ's love can do nothing other than accept this faith and offer the full inheritance. Baptism is resurrection! It is salvation!

THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISMATION (CONFIRMATION)

Now newly baptised, the child will be Chrismated by the sign of the Cross with Holy Myrrh on the same parts of the body where he was earlier anointed with oil.

Holy Chrismation is the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit which identifies all baptized persons with a seal that sets them apart as inalienable possessions of Christ. That is, the Holy Spirit embraces them and envelopes them like a shield and an armor of faith to enable them to live the faith into which they have just been baptized. This is why Chrismation is also known as the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

The Tonsure

Following the Baptism and Chrism, the Priest will tonsure the child by cutting some of his hair crosswise to signify: that Christ will be the head of the child from now on, that he will reject other allegiances. Hair is the only thing belonging exclusively to the child with which it may offer thanks to God for its entry into the Church.

The Vesting and Procession

The Priest now blesses the child and places a “garment of righteousness” on it. The child will leave to be dressed in fresh, clean or new garments and the Priest will read additional prayers at this time.

The child will return fully dressed and is prayed over with a symbolic washing away of the Myrrh, receiving the blessing of Christ. The Priest then places a cross around the child’s neck as a sign of protection.

The Godparent, holding the newly-illuminated infant, and followed by a child holding the baptismal candle, will then be led three times around the baptismal Font. This is an act of rejoicing with the angles in heaven and with the other Christians present at the addition of one more member to the flock of Christ.

The Procession, conducted in the form of the Cross around the Font, is like a joyful dance as the Priest and Chanter sing “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia”.

The Readings

The Bible Readings follow, from the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans (6: 3-11) where Paul makes the comparison between the immersion and emersion with the Burial and Resurrection of Christ, and from the Gospel according to St. Matthew (28: 16-20) where the Divine Institution of Baptism was established by our Lord. The Priest then reads the Conclusion prayers.

The mother of the baptized child will then be called by the Priest to make the sign of the Cross and venerate the Icon of Christ thanking Him for the great blessing of rendering her child a Member of His Church. She will then be asked to kiss the hand of the Godparent as a sign of respect and gratitude for having assumed the high responsibility of assisting in the spiritual development of the child throughout its life as a member of the Church.

Bathing the Child

Even though the child and its clothing have come into contact with Holy Water and Holy Chrism, the child may be bathed on the same evening. However, the water from its bathing must not be poured down the drain but rather emptied into a place where it will not be desecrated (such as a corner of the garden or in the ocean). The Church does not stipulate a three-day period before the child's bathing.

Holy Communion

For at least the next three Sundays after the Baptism, the Godparent will take the child to Church to receive Holy Communion, its first taste of the Body and Blood of the Lord. Just as a mother physically nourishes the newborn infant with milk, so too the Grace of God offers as spiritual food, Holy Communion to its newest member, just born through baptism.