

SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM IN THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The church practices infant Baptism as an expression of God's great love for us. It shows we are wanted and loved by God from the moment of our birth. The Sacrament of Baptism is done in two segments which are comprised of several symbolic parts. These are The Prayers at the Reception of a Catechumen and Baptism. The Sacrament of Baptism actually consists of two Sacraments; Baptism and Chrismation (Confirmation).

THE PRAYERS AT THE RECEPTION OF A CATECHUMEN

Exorcism

The first part begins in the entrance way of the Church to show that the infant is not yet a member of the Church. The purpose is to bring the infant to Christ to become a member of His body.

Renunciation of the Devil

The priest calls upon the Godparent to renounce the devil and all his works on behalf of the infant. No one can be Christ's until they have first faced Evil, and then become ready to fight it. The Godparent facing west proclaims the renunciation. This follows the Old Testament belief that the sun sets upon the gates of Hades.

Acceptance of Christ

The priest faces the east where the light of the sun rises and asks the Godparent to accept Christ who is the Light of the World on behalf of the infant.

Confession of Faith

The priest makes the sign of the cross over the infant as a sign of Christian victory. The cross is sealed in sets of three representing the Holy Trinity. The Godparent then recite the Nicene Creed on behalf of the infant.

Giving the Christian Name

The infant is then given a Christian name by which she shall be distinguished and accepted in the eyes of God. This name is chosen from recognized Saints of the Orthodox faith.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The baptismal font is symbolic of the Divine Womb where we receive our second birth as children of God. As quoted in John 1:12-13, "But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh of the will of man, but of God."

Anointment by Holy Oil

As the olive branch carried by the dove represented the deliverance from the Flood to Noah, so too, the oil symbolizes our deliverance from Death. The Priest anoints The child with the oil of gladness making the sign of the cross on his breast saying, "for the healing of soul and body;" on his ears "for the hearing of faith;" on the feet "for the following the footsteps of the Lord;" on the hands proclaiming, "Your hands have made me and fashioned me;" and on the back saying, "he who would come after Me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." This dedicates him to the service of Christ.

The Godparent then anoints The child's body symbolizing the ancient Greek athletes who anointed themselves in preparation before a race. Through this we express the willingness of the one to be baptized to remain steadfast, as in a running race, in living a life in Christ.

Immersion into Blessed Water

The Priest immerses The child into the baptismal font three times symbolizing the Holy Trinity as well as the three days Jesus spent in the tomb. As she is immersed, the Priest recites, "The servant of God, [name of the child] is baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The raising of the child out of the water symbolizes the infant's resurrection with Christ, freed from the power of death.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY CHRISMATION

The child is immediately anointed with Holy Chrism which is composed of forty different aromatic spices symbolizing the many gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37). As the priest anoints the child, he intones, "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Putting on of Christ

The child is then clothed in new white clothes to signify her new life in Christ. The Priest says, "The servant of God is clothed with a garment of righteousness..." These clothes express the purity of the soul and recall the shining robe in which Christ appeared in the Transfiguration.

A lighted candle is given as a reminder during the infant's life that Christ is the Light of the World. "I am the Light of the World. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Then the Priest, Godparent, parents, and the child process around the font three times singing the hymn, "All those who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ forevermore, Alleluia."

Epistle and Gospel Readings

The reader recites the Epistle reading (Romans 6:3-11) in which Saint Paul explains the meaning of Baptism. Then the priest offers the Gospel reading (Matthew 28:16-20) in which Christ commands us to "Go forth and baptize all people in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

The Tonsure

The child's hair is cut crosswise symbolizing the new Christian's willingness to come to Christ as a servant and to do His will.

Presentation of the Newly Illumined Child to the Parents

The Godparent solemnly deliver The child into the arms of her parents. With their child baptized, sealed and illuminated, they exchange the kiss of peace as a symbol of the spiritual relationship that has now been established.

Witness Ribbons (Martyrika)

As you depart, you will receive a memento of your participation. A ribbon with a cross is given to be worn throughout the day, indicating that you were a witness to The child's entrance into the Christian life and her union with Jesus Christ. Thank you for sharing this special day with us!