

Baptism & Chrismation

Baptisms bring great happiness to the Orthodox family. The special church service with the naked infant immersed in the baptismal font and anointed with holy oil is often followed by a joyful celebration of feasting and dancing. Family and friends celebrate the “rebirth” of the young child and the birth of the new relationship with the godparent.

The Sacrament of Baptism

The sacraments of baptism and chrismation were instituted by Christ himself when he commanded 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.” (Matt. 28:19) For centuries these sacraments have initiated the individual into the Greek Orthodox Church. Baptism cleanses the soul of the original sin transmitted to the human race by Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God. Chrismation transmits the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Through these two sacraments, the individual takes the first steps towards *théosis* (becoming like God). Symbolically, Christ’s baptism, death, and Resurrection, plus the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles at Pentecost, are reenacted.

Baptism begins in the church narthex where the unbaptized originally congregated. The godparent speaks on behalf of the child and forcefully rejects Satan, including blowing three times in the air.

Turning toward the altar, the godparent professes a belief in Christ and recites the Nicene Creed, a summary of the basic beliefs of the Greek Orthodox Christian. Then using the child’s baptismal name for the first time, the priest asks God to make the candidate worthy of baptism by cleansing away old sins and filling the child with the Holy Spirit.

The priest, child, and godparent proceed to the front of the church to the large baptismal font that represents the “womb” in which the child receives a second birth as a child of God. The godparent promises to raise the child as a good Christian.

The priest blesses the water in the baptismal font, adding a small amount of olive oil that the godparent has brought to the church. The fruit of the olive tree has been a symbol of peace and reconciliation between God and humans since a dove brought an olive branch to Noah at the end of the great flood described in the Old Testament.

The child is undressed, symbolizing the removal of old sin. The priest makes a sign of the cross with oil on various parts of the infant, and the godparent rubs oil over the child’s body. The oil serves as a silent prayer to God: “O, God, let there be peace always between this child and you.” The priest immerses the child three times into the font, symbolizing the three days Christ spent in the tomb. He declares, “The servant of God [name] is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of

the Holy Spirit. Amen.” This dramatic event is a reenactment of Christ’s baptism, death, and Resurrection. Like Christ, the child is resurrected and reborn. The priest places the child in the open arms of the godparent, who holds a new white sheet as a symbol of the soul’s purity.

The Sacrament of Chrismation

Immediately following the baptism, the priest administers a second sacrament, chrismation. Like the early apostles, the child receives the gift of the Holy Spirit during chrismation, a gift of grace from God to help the child lead a Christian life. The priest anoints the child with miron, a special oil blessed by the Ecumenical Patriarch, and says, “The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Three locks are tonsured from the child’s hair in the form of a cross. This gift to God shows gratitude and obedience.

The priest blesses a piece of the child’s new clothing, then puts it on the child with these words, “The servant of God [name] is clothed with the garment of righteousness.” Relatives or friends then dress the child, and the priest puts a necklace with a cross on the child’s neck, saying, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)

The priest lights the decorated baptismal candle with these words: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) The priest, the godparent holding the infant, and a few selected children walk around the font symbolizing a dance of joy for the new Christian who has been added to the church.

Following the dance and a reading of scriptures, the priest administers a third sacrament, communion, to the child. The child’s parents approach the front of the church where the godparent hands the infant to them with these traditional words, “I present to you your son/daughter baptized and confirmed, dedicated to God.” The parents kiss the hand of the godparent and receive their child.

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