

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY SERIES:

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All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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"The Orthodox Church.....has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from
"Encountering the Mystery."
ISBN 978-0-385-51813-0*

Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk

In the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.
Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.
www.thyateira.org.uk

Ecumenical Patriarchate.
Οικουμενικόν Πατριαρχεῖον.
www.ec-patr.org



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Holy Baptism



For as many as have been baptised into
Christ have put on Christ.

Romans 6:3-11
Galatians 3:26-27
Colossians 2-12

A Holy Mystery (sacrament) can never be fully explained yet can be entered into without that full understanding our human reason so often demands. We can experience mystery with all its blessings through the Divine grace by participating in the life of the Church. Intellect alone cannot provide what man needs but through faith and the divinely instituted practices he is aided on the path to salvation.

One thing which may surprise people is hearing that in the Orthodox Church, baptism is by total immersion for children and adults, unless special circumstances permit water poured over the person (not just a sprinkling on the head). It is a triple immersion – in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity.

But before looking at Holy Baptism it would be helpful to consider things before this moment. When a woman becomes aware that she is having a baby, she and her husband rejoice in this great gift with its accompanying responsibilities. During the time of pregnancy the family strengthen and prepare themselves by their worship and with the support of their Christian family.

At the time of birth there are special prayers to be said. Eight days after birth the child is named – see the circumcision and naming of Jesus on the eighth day after his birth (Luke 2:21). Then on the fortieth day the mother and child come for a special and beautiful service when, after prayers for both mother and child, the baby is carried by the priest into the church just as the Righteous Simeon held Jesus in his arms (Luke 2:22-39). Traditionally the mother does not come to church until this fortieth day after her child's birth. Holy baptism, which may take place on any day of the year with just a few exceptions, is arranged to take place as soon as possible after the 40th day service.

When **Baptism** takes place it will be followed in the same service by **Chrismation** (confirmation) and **Holy Communion**, these three sacraments being linked closely together in Orthodoxy today as in the Church of the early centuries. The parents and sponsor(s) (godparents) there-after, together with the Church, have the heavy responsibility of ensuring that what happens on this occasion is not an end but a beginning to be built upon and brought to maturity.

"Jesus said, let the children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 19:14.



An adult coming from another Christian tradition is usually received into Orthodoxy by Chrismation after providing evidence of baptism by water in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, if unbaptised or coming from a religion of unbelief, the candidate would need to be baptised and chrismated. In all cases for adults there will be a period of instruction in the catechumenate (learners).

"What is baptism? Simply put, baptism is our death, burial, and resurrection in union with Jesus Christ. It is a rite of passage, given by Christ to the Church, as an entrance into the kingdom of God and eternal life."

Orthodox Study Bible.

The baptism service begins at the west end of the church with prayers for the rejection of Satan and the acceptance of Christ. During this the sponsor (and candidate if an adult) will make a number of responses and recite the Nicene Creed.

Then assembling before the font there will be prayers for the blessing of the water into which blessed olive oil is poured, and for those to be baptised in it.

The child is undressed and a first anointing takes place after which the one to be baptised is immersed in the water three times – first in the name of the Father, then of the Son, then of the Holy Spirit.

The sponsor receives the child from the priest and the sacrament of Chrismation takes place, the priest anointing parts of the body with the oil of Holy Chrism saying each time: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

A small amount of hair is then cut from the head (a tonsure), he or she is dressed with a new white garment and then brought back to the font for further brief ceremony. Then sponsor and child go round the font three times following the priest, all singing: "For as many as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia."

New Testament readings are Romans 6:3-11 and Matthew 28:16-20 – the Lords' command to baptise the nations in the name of the Holy Trinity. After further brief prayers and the Dismissal the newly baptised receives a small blessed cross to wear round the neck. Holy Communion normally follows immediately or if a weekday it may be on the Sunday after. The newly baptised is then given to the parents with words of instruction that they are to take good care of the child and ensure their growth in the regular sacramental life of the Church particularly in the early period after baptism.