

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM



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CHURCH**

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Welcome to St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

You have been invited to attend a baptism in the Eastern Orthodox Church. We hope this booklet will help you interpret the meaning of this important sacrament.

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" (Matthew 28:19). For centuries, these sacraments have initiated the individuals in the Greek Orthodox Church.

Explanation of the Ceremony

The many gestures involved in the performance of the Sacrament of Baptism in the Eastern Orthodox Church are not mere forms devoid of meaning. Christianity is life. Each action in the Sacrament of Baptism expresses what Christ is actually doing for us through this Sacrament. Baptism begins in the church narthex (entrance or back section of the church) where the unbaptized would congregate in the ancient church.

Exorcisms

The first act of the baptismal service begins in the Narthex (entrance of the church). This shows that the infant is not yet a member of the Church. The priest calls upon the Godparent (sponsor) to renounce the devil and all his works for the child. The renouncing of Satan is done facing the west, because the west is where the sun disappears, and was regarded by the ancient Greeks as the place of the gates of Hades. The Godparent speaks on behalf of the child and forcefully rejects Satan, including blowing three times in the air and symbolically spitting three times on the floor. The priest then faces east where the light of the sun rises and asks the Godparent to accept for the child Him, who is the Light of the World.

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 will recite the confession of faith, the Nicene Creed.

The Naming

The infant will be given a Christian name, which distinguishes him/her from all other children of God. 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 Baptismal Font

The priest, child and Godparent proceed to the front of the church to the large baptismal font. The Baptismal Font, in the language of the Church Fathers, is the Divine Womb whence we receive the second birth as children of God. "But we all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God, who were born not of blood, not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God". (John 1:12-13).

The Water

Water is used in cleansing. In baptism, it expresses the fact that through this sacrament, Christ cleanses us from sin. The priest blesses the water in the baptismal font, adding a small amount of olive oil. 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 great flood described in the Old Testament.

The Naked Infant

The infant is baptized in the naked state to denote that just as we came out of our mother's womb naked, so we emerge naked out of the womb of God – the baptismal font.

The Anointing with oil

Olive oil is blessed and then applied by the priest to the various parts of the child's body: hands, feet, ears and mouth in order to dedicate them to the service of Christ. The sponsor will then anoint the entire body of the infant with olive oil.

The Triple Immersion

The immersion in water symbolizes death, since a person cannot live long under water, we share in Christ's death. The baptized person rises out of the font promising to surrender their life to Christ the Savior. The triple immersion symbolizes the three days spent by Christ in the tomb as well as the Holy Trinity, since the baptismal formula used in the Orthodox Church is "The servant of God is baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit". The person who has been baptized comes out of the baptismal font without sin, a new person, "dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

The Sacrament of Chrismation

In the Orthodox Church, the Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) is administered immediately following baptism as in the early church. It is considered as the fulfillment of baptism. The priest will anoint the newly baptized in the brow, eyes, nostril, lips, ears, breast, hands and feet with the words: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit". The "whole man" is now a temple of God.

The Cutting of the Hair – Tonsure

After Chrismating the infant, the priest cuts locks of hair from the child's head, in the shape of the cross. This is an expression of gratitude from the child, who, having received an abundance of blessings through the sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation and having nothing to give God in return, offers part of its hair, which is symbolic of strength.

New Clothes

The new clothes signify the entirely new life that we receive after we are baptized.

The Candles

Baptism remains the sacrament of entrance into the Light. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father, who is in heaven". (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". This is the origin of the present procession of the priest being accompanied by the sponsor, who is holding the newly baptized infant, around the baptismal font, just before the infant is given the Sacrament of Communion. In the ancient church, the procession came from the Baptisterion back into the main church. 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 I am with you always, to the close of the age. Amen".

The Eucharist

Immediately following baptism, the newly baptized receives the precious Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, As a full member of the church, the greatest benefit of being Orthodox is participation in the sacramental life, the greatest manifestation of which is to receive Holy Communion.

From this time forward, the child is invited to be a frequent participant in the Holy Eucharist.

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."

A Note to the Parents of the Newly-Baptized Child

In baptizing your child, you have made a pledge of behalf of your child, to raise that child in the Orthodox faith. Our entrance into the Kingdom of heaven will be preceded by a judgment by God on our lives, and this pledge you have made will be part of that judgment. If you are not planning to be a regular part of our Church Community, and if you are not planning to bring your child to church on a regular basis, you need to seriously evaluate why you are having your child baptized, why you are making a baptismal pledge on behalf of your child. Those who are members of our church are expected to participate regularly in the life of the Church, most especially in worship and in the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is also helpful to the spiritual development of your child to go to Sunday school, when they are of age to do so. And finally it is of critical importance that the Church be part of your home life as well. Pray with your child, even from infancy. Read the Bible to your child, even from infancy. And bring your child to church, from infancy. You won't ask your child when they are five if they want to learn the alphabet. You will begin teaching them from the earliest days of their life. You will project your love of learning onto your child, and one day, your child will decide on his or her own that they want to learn. Learning will then become personal to them. But they will never learn anything if you don't first instill that love for learning in them. Likewise, with our faith, you must project your faith onto your child from the earliest days of their life. So that one day the faith can become personal to them as well. If you never project faith on them, then it is less likely they will discover the faith on their own.

IMPORTANT REQUIREMENTS

The parents and godparents of the child being baptized must be Stewards (members in good standing) of the Greek Orthodox Church.

The godparent, who anoints the child with oil must be an Orthodox Christian.

In the event that the parents are not members of any Orthodox Church, the required church fee of \$500, is used towards their one-year Stewardship to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church of Tampa, FL.

If the parents of the child are not married, or if the parent baptizing the child is single, the other parent will have to sign a form approving the baptism of the child.

Godparents from another community must also be spiritually and financially in good standing with the Church and **must provide a Certificate of Good Standing, signed by the priest of their parish at least one month prior to the baptism.** If the intended Godparents claim to be members of St. John the Baptist but have not submitted a pledge form for the current year and the prior year, the \$500 fee will be applied.

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE BAPTISM

For a child being baptized:

1. Complete and bring to church office "Information needed for Baptism Certificate" Form, at least one week before the Baptism
2. One large white sheet
3. One white bath towel
4. Three hand-towels (not wash-cloths)
5. Complete change of clothing
6. White undershirt (for infant); white underwear others
7. Swimsuit for older child
8. Small bottle of olive oil (please ask church in advance, we may have a surplus)
9. One white bar of soap (please ask church in advance, we may have a surplus)
10. Three white candles (may be purchased from church)
11. White ribbons for candles
12. Baptismal cross with chain
13. Choose an Orthodox Christian name for child

For an adult being baptized:

- ◆ items 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 above
- ◆ One white (or light-colored) bath robe
- ◆ New white shirt (for men) or light colored dress (for women)
- ◆ Dark swimsuit (one piece for women)

Explanation of Fees

For the Parents:

First Time Steward at St. John

Church Use Fee.....	\$500.00
Priest - Make check payable to Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis	\$200.00
Chanter – Make check payable to name of chanter or to church.....	\$125.00
Total:	\$825.00

Members of Good Standing at another Orthodox Church

Church Use Fee -Make check payable to St. John the Baptist.....	\$100.00
Priest – Make check payable to Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis.....	\$200.00
Chanter – Make check payable to name of chanter or to church	\$125.00
Total:	\$425.00

***Stewards of St. John the Baptist Church**

Church Use Fee.....	\$0.00
Priest.....	\$0.00
(If you elect to offer an honorarium, please make check payable to Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis)	
Chanter – Make check payable to name of chanter or to church.....	\$125.00
Total:	\$125.00

For the Godparents:

Godparents must provide **a letter of Good Standing** by the priest of their parish, otherwise they will need to pay the **First Time Steward fee of \$500.00.**

* If you claim to be a Steward of St. John the Baptist but have not submitted a pledge form for the current and prior year, **you will have to pay the First Time Steward Fee of \$500.00.**

PRAYER FROM THE BAPTISM SERVICE

Blessed is a God whose will is that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, now and ever and unto the ages of ages, Amen.

O Lord and Master, our God, call your servant to your holy illumination and make your servant worthy of this great gift of your holy Baptism. Take away from your servant the old ways and renew your servant unto eternal life, and fill your servant with the power of your Holy Spirit unto union with your Christ; so that your servant may cease to be a child of the flesh and may become a child of your kingdom. Through the good will and grace of your only begotten Son, with whom you are blessed, together with your all holy good and life giving Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.

THE ICON OF EPIPHANY

Christ, in the center, is standing in the river Jordan. St. John the Forerunner or Baptist-The figure on the left; since he lived as an ascetic in the desert, his hair and beard are disheveled, his shirt is of brown animal skin and his cloak is green.

The Angels – standing in an attitude of worship to the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit – shown in the form of a dove above the figure of Christ.

God the Father – “The essence of God” is shown coming from the heavens around the dove, for God the Father, is not seen. His voice is heard at the baptism, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). The Baptism marks the first time that the Holy Trinity is revealed.