

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF NORTHERN EUROPE

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BAPTISM GUIDE



APPEARS WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS GRACE

† MACARIE

BISHOP OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX
DIOCESE OF NORTHERN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”. (II Cor. 5:17). Those who are baptized are the children of God, as the Lord Himself has given them the right to be: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Baptism delivers us from all evil (all the afflictions and injury of sin, restoring the divine order in all its beauty). It also changes the chief orientation from oneself to God — to pleasing God and increasing one’s good deeds. Remarkable are the words of the Apostle: That henceforth we should not serve sin, as well as his other words: Sin shall not have dominion over you (Rom. 6:14). This gives us to understand that the power which, in our disordered, fallen nature, draws us towards sin, is not entirely exterminated in Baptism, but is placed in a condition in which it does not enslave us any more, it has no longer dominion over us, and we do not serve it. But it is still in us, it lives and acts, but not as a lord and master. The primacy from the moment we receive the Baptism belongs to the grace of God and to the soul that consciously gives itself over to it.

Saint Theophan the Recluse

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BAPTISM GUIDE

If the only meaning of baptism were remission of sins, why would we baptize newborn children who have not yet tasted of sin? But the mystery of baptism is not limited to this; it is a promise of greater and more perfect gifts. In it are the promises of future delights; it is the type of the future resurrection, a communion with the Master's passion, a participation in His resurrection, a mantle of salvation, a tunic of gladness, a garment of light, or rather it is light itself.

Saint Theodoret of Cyrus

SECTION A: BEFORE THE BAPTISM

❖ *Scheduling*

The first thing you have to do is to establish **the date for baptism** and contact the church office at least two months before the event. There are some special periods during the year when Baptism can NOT be performed. Please contact your local priest for further information.

❖ *The blessing of the Newborn*

In the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, a child is formally **named** on the eighth day after birth, just as our Lord received his name, Jesus, on the eighth day (cf. Luke. 2:21). **The prayers of the eighth day** are traditionally offered by the priest in the home.

Then, the Presentation of Christ to the Temple in Jerusalem is one of the major liturgical feasts of the Orthodox Church and this event recorded in Luke 2:22-38 forms the basis for the tradition of the **40-day blessing of the mother and the children**. This is also their first visit to the church.

❖ *Catechism classes*

In our Diocese, the parents and godparents (and especially if the candidate is a mature person), are required to join a **catechism class** prior to the baptism and chrismation. The parish

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BAPTISM GUIDE

priest can conduct this preparation both at the church or via internet (Skype, Messenger, etc). During a couple of meetings you will discuss several issues regarding the Orthodox Way of life, for example: “The Orthodox Creed and Faith”, “an appropriate personal Prayer Rule”, “Scripture reading”, “Confession”, “Fasting”, “Alms Giving”, or “Attending the Services” .

Parents and Godparents are also expected to go through the Mystery of Confession in good time before the Baptism as a part of the above mentioned preparation.

❖ *Requirements and Responsibilities*

Choosing a Godparent

“The Godparent accepts the sacred responsibility of guiding the child into the understanding and practice of the teachings of the Orthodox Church. The task of steering a child along the narrow path, and bringing them up according to the law of God is **perhaps the greatest of all things in life**” says Saint Theophan the Recluse.

The faith of the Godparent and their involvement within the sacramental life of the Church is crucial. The person who confesses Jesus Christ as His Lord cannot ignore and violate in word and deed this faith. Such a person has to be a mature person (at least 16 years), an active and serious Orthodox Christian. If married, the **Godparent must be married in an Orthodox service.**

Parents may not be Godparents of their own children (also,

Before the Baptism

some spiritual relations may prohibit one from becoming a Godparent to a person) since **sponsorship creates a spiritual relationship** considered by the Church to be extremely important. Discuss these aspects with your parish priest.

Parents

Parents are expected to raise their child in the Orthodox Church as **Baptism demands a personal response** on the part of the baptized child **when it grows up**. When growing up, the child has to accept what God did for him or her in baptism, making a **personal** response to God, committing ones life to Him. A parent's participation in the life of the church will be the best example to the child.

❖ *Items required for Baptism*

Infant baptism

1. Birth Certificate
2. A little Cross with chain
3. One large baptism candle (decorated)
4. Large linen sheet
5. Bottle of olive oil
6. Large size towel
7. White bandage (aprox. 5 m)
8. Baptism swaddling blanket
9. Change of new clothes to wear after the baptism (preferably white)

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BAPTISM GUIDE

Adult baptism

1. Birth Certificate or ID
2. Cross with chain
3. One large baptism candle (decorated)
4. White long robe (top & bottom)
5. Extra large linen sheet
6. Bottle of olive oil
7. Extra Large white beach-towel and 3 regular white towels
8. White bandage (aprox. 1 m)
9. Bathing suit to wear underneath
10. Slippers
11. Change of new clothes to wear after the baptism
(preferably white)

You can read below about every items significance.

SECTION B: THE CEREMONY

● SYMBOLISM & TRADITIONS

As with all sacraments in the Orthodox Church, each action and component is charged with biblical symbolism because the Holy Scripture constitutes the primitive foundation that gives us the true significance of the Sacraments in their original institution.

Before the Baptism

The Sponsors (Godparents). The Early Church faced the problem that the majority of those who wanted to become her members came from pagan families and therefore lacked even an elementary Christian education and knowledge of the new faith thus the person who wanted to receive the Baptism had to be introduced into the Christian faith and way of life by one of the faithful, the Godparent to be. (James 5:20)

The proclamation of Faith. The first part of the rite of Baptism takes place in the narthex and begins with the invocation of the Trinity; contains the prayer for the making of a catechumen; three prayers of exorcism; the renunciation and condemnation of the devil; the acceptance of Christ; the recitation of the Nicene Creed; and the call to baptism.

The Font. The baptismal font represents the “Spiritual Womb and Tomb” in which the child receives a second birth devoid of sins. (John 3:5)

The Oil. The child is anointed with olive oil before the immersion. This custom had its beginning among ancient Greek wrestlers, who anointed their bodies with oil so opponents could not maintain a grip. In baptism, the child is anointed for the future victorious struggle against sin and the powers of darkness.

Immersion and emersion. The descent into the baptismal font symbolizes burial with Christ, and the emergence symbolizes resurrection with Him for adoption. The triple immersion are related to the Holy Trinity and the three days Jesus Christ spent in the tomb. (Romans 6:5)

The Clothing. After baptism, one is dressed in new white clothes as a sign that one has taken off the clothing of sin and have been clad in the pure garments of innocence. (Galatians 3:27)

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BAPTISM GUIDE

The Candle. In the New Testament Jesus referred to himself as the "light of the world." (John 8:12). The candle is a symbol of the perseverance of the baptized soul until Christ's return (Matthew 25: 1-13).

The Cross is as a sign that the new member of the Church has taken up his or her cross as our Lord says (Matthew 10:38, 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23).

The Chrismation. In the Orthodox Church, Chrismation (also called sometimes Confirmation) is administered immediately following Baptism the newly baptized is anointed with a special fragranced oil called „holy chrism” or „myrrh” and receives “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 8: 1, Cor 6: 2, Cor 1:21–22). If baptism is our personal participation in Easter—the death and resurrection of Christ, then chrismation is our personal participation in Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us and the seal of the covenant between us and our Lord.

The Procession to the Kingdom. The newly baptised is lead in procession, three times around the baptismal font as a symbol of the new life into the Kingdom of God, that will have Jesus Christ as its core.

The Tonsure. After the newly illuminated has been sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, he/she then „makes a first offering to the Lord” (Numbers 6:18) as a Christian steward.

The Eucharist. The new life in Christ, given in baptism, is renewed again and again in the Eucharist or (Holy Communion) which in the Orthodox Church is also called „a provision for eternal life” (John 6:53). Now as a new member of the Body of Christ, the person receives the first Holy Communion.

SECTION C: AFTER THE BAPTISM

A PROCESS OF UNENDING GROWTH

The new life, initiated by baptism and sustained by the Eucharist, becomes the way to follow as one walks through this world. This means that salvation is not instant. It begins on the day of our baptism and chrismation when we renounce the devil, receive Christ, and accept the gift of the Holy Spirit. From that moment we begin a process of slow spiritual growth. The sacraments of the Church provide us with the grace we need to become gods by grace, deified, “partakers of divine nature” as St. Peter says. Our salvation begins at baptism and continues throughout life. It is a process of unending spiritual growth. “Keep working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation,” writes St. Paul (Phil. 2:12).

