

# FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

## - *Explanation of the Baptismal Service* -

Like all things Orthodox, the Baptismal Service is a process whereby the meaning and impact of Holy Baptism are *understood in the doing of it*. Each stage of the process brings us into communion with the necessary truths of salvation in Christ Jesus. From beginning to end, the entirety of the service gives the authentic *experience* of life with God in His eternal Kingdom.

### 1. Pre-baptismal Prayers (Reorientation)

- *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again." (John 3:5-7)*
- *[Jesus said to the Apostle Paul,] "I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:17-18)*

Indispensable actions precede the actual Baptism in water: a) Reception into the Catechumenate; b) Exorcisms; c) Renunciation of Satan; and d) Uniting to Christ.

Even the newborn infant still without personal sin *was conceived in transgressions, and in sins my mother bore me* (Ps. 50[51]:7), and *were by nature children of wrath, just as the others* (Eph. 2:3). The sad truth of this world plunged into death and sin is that people *from the womb* (Ps. 57[58]:4) come under the influence and succumb to the control of the

devil, described by Christ as *the ruler (or, prince) of this world* (John 14:30; 16:11).



The Pre-baptismal Prayers acknowledge this situation in the literal turning of the person from Satan to God, from sin to holiness, and from death to life. The catechumen (lit., *one receiving instruction*) is enrolled; the limit of demonic influence is set by the Name of God – the word *exorcism* means “to charge on oath (by the name of the Lord)”; and the person physically turns from facing west to east (the direction of the Rising of Christ; Mal. 3:20; Lk. 1:78) when renouncing the powers of evil and uniting oneself to God the Holy Trinity.

This *reorientation* is both a gift of God’s grace and an exercise of free-will. God must turn us breaking the power of evil which holds us captive, but the increasing benefits come with our cooperation in God’s plan. Therefore, the candidate is asked three times: “Do you renounce Satan...” Thrice is the answer: “I do renounce him!” Three times the candidate is asked: “Do you unite yourself to Christ?” Thrice is the answer: “I do unite myself to Christ.” The Apostle Peter exhorted the crowd, “*Be saved from this perverse generation.*” *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized* (Acts 2:40-41).

Sponsors, or Godparents, answer for infants and young children because *the promise is to you and to your children* (Acts 2:39). Sponsors witness the grace of God performing the Baptism, and they will testify to the ongoing grace of God by their own active Orthodox faith, holy lives, and prayers both for and with the newly-baptized child of God whether that person is young or old. Together in the Church, all the baptized pursue *the goal for*

*the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). Your life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).*

## **2. Baptism with Water (Purification)**

- *Therefore we were buried with [Christ] through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:4)*
- *Having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Heb. 10:21-23)*

Baptism with water contains three activities: a) the Blessing of the Baptismal Water; b) the Pre-baptismal Anointing (oil of gladness); and c) the Triple-Immersion.

Baptism, like every *mystery* (or, *sacrament*) of the Church, is neither magic nor a quaint religious ceremony. Baptism is a revelation of the Kingdom of God in the *purification* of our earthly, material existence, ultimately in the transformation of the human person him- or herself as Christ is in us and we are in Christ (Col. 1:27).

Thus the baptismal water is blessed to show God's use of it in the recreating of the person baptized (2 Pet. 3:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). The font is the bath wherein our sins are washed away (Eph. 5:26-27). The font is the womb wherein the person *is born of water and the Spirit* (John 3:5). *You will draw water with gladness from the wells of salvation. In that day, you will say, "Praise the Lord; call upon His name. Declare His glorious things among the Gentiles and make mention that His name is exalted"* (Isa. 12:3-4). The prayers for blessing the baptismal water are identical to those blessing water at the Feast of Theophany (Jan. 6) for use in the Church and at

home. The water of the baptismal font is directly connected with the water of the Jordan in which our Lord Himself was baptized thus sanctifying them and us by driving out all hostile powers of evil (Matt. 3:13-17; Ps. 113[114, 115]).

The candidate is prepared for the ordeal by anointing with oil. *You loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions* (Ps. 44[45]:8). *You [O Lord my God]...brighten [man's] face with oil* (Ps. 103[104]:15). From ancient times, it was common to anoint oneself with oil for action such as a vigorous contest like a wrestling match, or battle. Significantly, the word for *olive oil* (Gk., *elaios*) is closely related to that for *mercy* (Gk., *eleos*), so that in a Christian context anointing with oil is a prayer for the mercy of God (cf. Ps. 140[141]:5).



Finally, the person is *baptized*, that is, immersed and washed in water. The immersion is triple – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, our one God in three Persons (Matt. 28:19). We go under the water because *we were buried with [Christ] through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life* (Rom. 6:4). The newly baptized is clothed in a white garment and Cross. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27).

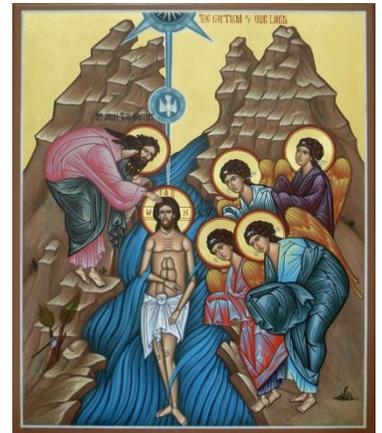
### 3. Chrismation (Confirmation)

- *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 2:38)
- *Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.* (2 Cor. 1:21-22)

- *But you have an anointing (Gk., chrism) from the Holy One, and you know all things...But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*  
(1 John 2:20, 27)

Chrismation immediately follows the Baptism with water. Chrismation is literally the anointing with holy myrrh, the blessed olive oil compounded with spices and prayer to be the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The *Chrism of holy myrrh* is prepared by the hierarchs of the Church and distributed to each local church from the common source as a symbol of the absolute unity we have in the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” (Creed). *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13); there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).*

The *chrism* is applied to the forehead, the eyes, the nostrils, the lips, the ears, the breast, and hands, and the feet of the newly baptized. It is the *confirmation* in the life of Christ of the whole person together with all their senses and abilities. This confirmation takes place by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son. The Holy Spirit “*will guide you into all truth*” (John 16:13). *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14).*



The title *Christian* is directly related to the name of *Christ* (Gk., “Anointed One”), coming from the same word *chrism* (Gk., “anointing”). Therefore, just as the Lord Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit to be the Christ at His Baptism (Lk. 3:21-22; Acts 10:38), so the followers of Christ are

anointed to be Christians. Christians are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit when they are Chrismated.

#### 4. Ablution and Tonsure (Dedication)

- *But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11)*
- *[God] saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. (Titus 3:5-8)*

Now what? Having been Baptized and Chrismated, is there more? Truly there is, to walk in newness of life unto the end of our days.

The sprinkling and wiping away of chrism with water (lit., *ablution*) is an acknowledgment that these actions have happened, that the person is indeed illumined and sealed with the grace of God. Even though the physical sight and aroma of the chrism fades, the seal of the Holy Spirit remains the same and marks the Christian for growth in the Kingdom of God as a spiritual child of God, not merely a biological child of the world. *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place (2 Cor. 2:14).*

The tonsure is the cutting one's hair as an offering of the strength, or authority, of the person (1 Cor. 11:7-15). Ultimately it is a symbol of the *dedication* of the entire person in the service of Christ. Holy Baptism is both a gift of spiritual rebirth in Christ and the Holy Spirit *and* a vow of the one baptized that he or she will strive to fulfill the will of God their Father. *'When either a man or woman vows an extraordinary vow to sanctify himself as one of purity to the Lord...This is the law of vowing...the one vowing*

*shall shave the head of his vow at the doors of the tabernacle of testimony'* (Num. 6:2, 13, 18). Christians are prepared and dedicated to a life of the good works of God.

## **5. The Churching of the Child (Holy Communion)**

- *And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?"* (Matt. 21:16)
- *"Behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor; and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."* (Heb. 8:8, 10-11)

The newly illumined servant of God is brought into the Temple specifically to receive Holy Communion as a recipient of *the new covenant in [Jesus'] blood* (Lk. 22:20). This is called the "Churching of the Child." Every Baptized and Chrismated person is a full member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-14), a living stone in the spiritual house, the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 2:4-5; Eph. 2:19-22), and a child and heir in the family of our heavenly Father (Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 3:14). In the Orthodox manner, every baptized child of God receives the very Body and Blood of Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Holy Communion is the revelation of the Church, that is, the people of God in Christ.

The Divine Liturgy – the service of Christ which takes place when the faithful are gathered about the Table of the Lord – is the essence of the Christian life and the ultimate fulfillment of the life of the baptized. If a person is a baptized child of God, he or she will always seek out Holy Communion in the Divine Liturgy of the Church (1 Cor. 11:17-26; Heb. 8:1-6).

