



# St. Stephen the Protomartyr ORTHODOX CHURCH

## Introducing the Eastern Orthodox Baptism and Chrismation Service

*“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” – Galatians 3:27*

Baptism is the initiation into the Orthodox Christian faith. It is a time when one does not only watch the ongoing but is accepted as a member of this family of God. However, Baptism is not the end of it all. Following that comes Chrismation, the “sacrament of sealing of the gift of the Holy Spirit,” which strengthens the newly-baptized for his Christian mission. These sacraments of initiation are ancient, strong, and effective in producing positive change.

Orthodox Baptism and Chrismation are integral to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and understanding their meaning is essential.

### **The Threefold Immersion: Dying and Rising with Christ**

Baptism in the Orthodox Church is not a mere rite of water sprinkling. It is a submersion in water, not just once but three times. Why? This is because the Lord was in the tomb for three days, and through this sacrament, we are invited to participate in his death, burial, and resurrection.

The priest immerses the catechumen (the one being baptized) into the baptismal water, saying:

“[The baptized’s name], the servant of God, is baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

This is not a re-staging. It is a sacramental involvement in the victory over sin and death. The old man passes away, and a new one is created. The newly baptized receive white garments, for at that moment, the soul is without blemish, having been liberated from sin.

### **Who Can Be Baptized?**

In the Orthodox Christian Church, both children and adults are baptized. For infants, the godparents stand in for them, rejecting Satan while affirming their faith in Christ. For adults, there is a period of instruction known as catechism before baptism.

### **Chrismation: The Seal of the Holy Spirit**

Baptism cleanses. Chrismation empowers.

After the baptism, the priest uses holy chrism to make the sign of the cross on the baptized person's head, eyes, ears, heart, hands, and feet. Each anointing is followed by the words:

“The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

This is similar to confirmation in other Christian denominations; however, in Orthodoxy, it occurs alongside Baptism. The reason is that, in Christian theology, Baptism and Chrismation are always regarded as two acts that cannot be separated. Similarly, as the Apostles received the Holy Spirit during the feast of Pentecost, every Orthodox Christian receives the same through the Sacrament of Chrismation.

### **What is Holy Chrism?**

It is not just any oil you would find on the market today; it holds a special significance in the annals of Christianity. It is a fragrant oil created by blending olive oil with fifty-seven different spices. Only the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople can prepare it, and it is distributed to all Orthodox churches worldwide. Preparing holy chrism requires time and care; in some instances, it may take several days to finish the process. The anointing of chrism is when the Holy Spirit enters the soul and becomes a part of it. This is why Chrismation is sometimes referred to as the “Orthodox Confirmation,” but in fact, it is much more. It is a personal Pentecost for every Orthodox Christian.

### **First Communion: The Immediate Union with Christ**

In most Christian denominations, there is a divide between Baptism and Holy Communion. Not so in the Orthodox faith. As soon as a person is Chrismated, they receive the Holy Eucharist; even infants are allowed to partake in this sacrament.

Baptism and Chrismation allow individuals to become active members of the Orthodox Church. The Eucharist is not a reward for “understanding” but rather nourishment for the soul. For this reason, the Orthodox Church, as mentioned earlier, mandates the reception of all three initiation sacraments at once:

*Baptism – Spiritual rebirth*

*Chrismation – Receiving the Holy Spirit*

*Holy Communion – Full participation in Christ*

### **What Happens After? Living the Orthodox Christian Life**

Baptism and Chrismation are not the end—they are the beginning. Although the person is now a baptized member of the Orthodox Church, faith is a way of life that must be practiced every day.

Here are three aspects by which one can grow spiritually after Baptism and Chrismation:

**Prayer & Worship** – It is essential to attend Divine Liturgy and pray daily whenever possible. For example, one might use a prayer rope to repeat the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.”

**Scripture & Saints** – The Orthodox faith is a rich and profound tradition, abundant in knowledge and wisdom. It provides a robust framework for believers, guiding them through the teachings and practices that have been passed down through generations. One of the most inspiring aspects of this faith is the Lives of the Saints. These individuals exemplified the virtues of the Orthodox Christian life, and their stories serve as powerful reminders of the strength of faith in action. By studying the lives of their saints and the Holy Scriptures, followers of the Orthodox faith can find encouragement and motivation to embody these ideals in their own lives. The examples set by the Saints and contained in Scripture bring the faith to life, illustrating how one can live a life of purpose, compassion, and devotion. In this way, the Orthodox faith offers knowledge and invites believers to actively participate in a legacy of holiness and righteousness that continues to resonate today.

**Fasting and Confession** – Eating is one of the fundamental necessities of life, providing not just sustenance but also comfort and social connection. However, fasting introduces a practice of self-denial that holds significant importance in the spiritual lives of believers. By voluntarily refraining from food or certain pleasures, individuals can cultivate self-discipline and redirect their focus towards spiritual growth and reflection. Fasting seasons, such as Lent, are specifically set aside to encourage this reflection.

Alongside fasting, participating in the sacrament of Confession serves as a vital component in one’s spiritual journey. It offers individuals an opportunity to seek forgiveness from the community, reflect on their actions, and renew their commitment to a life that aligns with Christian values. Together, fasting and Confession prepare the soul, enhancing one’s readiness for the profound journey of faith that every Christian undergoes. Through these practices, believers can strengthen their spirituality, embrace humility, and deepen their relationship with God.

### **Final Thoughts: More Than a Ceremony**

Baptism and Chrismation are not merely rituals; they represent profound, life-altering moments celebrated within the Orthodox Christian tradition, serving as pivotal entrances into the Kingdom of God. Through the act of Baptism, a person is cleansed of sin, offering a fresh start and a renewed connection with divine grace. This sacred rite signifies the washing away of past transgressions and the beginning of a transformative journey toward salvation.

Following Baptism, Chrismation is bestowed, during which the faithful receive the Holy Spirit. This anointing with holy chrism signifies the empowerment of the individual by the Spirit, equipping them to live a life aligned with Christ's teachings. Together, these sacraments not only initiate a new life in faith but also forge a deeper relationship with God and the community of believers, guiding individuals along the path of righteousness and spiritual growth. Through Baptism and Chrismation, Orthodox Christians embrace their identity as members of the Church and commit to a lifelong journey of faith and devotion.