



# THE MEANING OF THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Jesus teaches that to enter His Kingdom, we must be baptized by “water and the Holy Spirit” (John 3:5) Our entrance into the Kingdom is an entrance into the life of the Church, as this is where the Kingdom of God is made real in the world. This entrance begins with the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments) of Baptism and Chrismation. In these Holy Mysteries, we receive the grace of God through the baptismal water and the holy “chrism”, which is a seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The following is an explanation of the major elements in the Orthodox Mystery of initiation.

## **Making a Catechumen**

In the Ancient Church, the first step in membership was to become a student, or “catechumen” of the Church in preparation for baptism. During this time, one would be taught the basic truths of the Faith. As the catechumens are no longer a formal order in the Church, this service is now usually celebrated as the beginning of the Baptism service. As baptism is a Mystery of entry into the Church, these opening prayers are done at the back of the church building, as part of a formal (and literal) entrance into the church.

- **The Exorcism Prayers:** The priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to expel Satan and all his angels from the presence of the candidate for baptism. He prays that the spirits of evil may not lay hold of him/her by temptation or any other torment. The priest blows on the candidate cross-wise three times to symbolize the exorcising power of the Holy Spirit—the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” also mean “breath.”
- **The Renunciation of Satan:** The candidate and sponsors turn to face the west, the entrance of the church. West is symbolic of darkness, since the sun sets the west. Through this movement the devil, the “lord of darkness”, is confronted and rejected, along with “and all his works, all his worship, all his angels, and all his pomp.”

- **The Acceptance of Christ:** Turning back to face the east, towards the Altar, symbolizing the Light of Christ, the candidate and sponsors accept Jesus “as King and as God.” They affirm this acceptance by repeating the words of the Nicene Creed, which outlines the Church’s basic beliefs about God, Church, and salvation.

## **The Mysteries of Holy Baptism, of Chrismation, Eucharist**

- **The Baptismal Candles:** One of the terms used in Orthodoxy when referring to baptism is “Holy Illumination,” since it is through baptism that Christ, the Light of the World, enters in our hearts. The baptismal candles are lit after the baptism to symbolize the newly acquired light of Christ which baptized Christians carry with them throughout their lives. They are now “newly illumined.”
- **The Oil of Gladness:** After the opening proclamation and litany, the candidate is anointed with oil. In ancient times oil was used as a salve to cover wounds, protecting them so that they could heal faster. The anointing with the “Oil of Gladness” is a symbol of baptism as an act which heals our broken relationship with God.
- **The Baptism:** The candidate is immersed in the baptismal font in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Entering the font, which symbolizes the tomb and the womb- death to the old person life to the new, s/he joins Christ in His burial; coming up out of it s/he takes part in Christ’s resurrection from the tomb. The candidate is “born again,” literally “born from above”, into a new life in Christ Jesus.
- **A Garment of Righteousness:** After the baptism, the candidate is dressed in white, symbolizing their new life as a servant of Christ. Baptismal hymn: “Grant me a brilliant new garment you who clothe yourself with light as a robe...”

- **The Chrismation (Confirmation):** The Orthodox Church maintains the ancient practice of confirming the newly baptized Christian immediately after his/her baptism. Just as baptism is a personal “Pascha” (Easter) for each of us, making us partakers in Christ’s personal Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit descends upon us, confirming us as full members of the Church. The act of confirmation is done through an anointing with a special oil mixed with spices (Exodus 30:31-34) for consecration (dedicating to God) called “Chrism,” from the Greek word meaning “gift” -as in, the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- **The Baptismal Procession:** The priest leads the newly baptized and his/her sponsors around the font, beginning their life long walk with Christ, singing “all who have been baptized in Christ...”
- **Giving of the Cross:** Giving of the cross symbolizes that we now belong to Christ and have taken up our cross and follow Him.
- **Eucharist:** The physical acceptance and unification of Christ. This is an act which must be repeated throughout an Orthodox Christian’s life in order to remain “in communion” with the Church (body of Christ).

#### **The Scripture Readings:**

- Romans 6:3-11 – All of those who are baptized in Christ share in His death and resurrection.
- Matthew 28:16-20 – Jesus instructs His disciples to preach the Gospel to all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

#### **The Post-Baptismal Rites**

In the ancient Christian baptismal rites, the baptism itself would end at this point, and all of the rites following would be celebrated one week later. During this week, the newly-baptized would receive further teachings about the Faith.

- **The Washing of The Oil:** The priest washes the holy oil and Chrism off the candidate. This washing is understood as part of the newly-baptized Christian’s final preparation for entering into the world as a disciple and witness of Jesus Christ.
- **The Tonsure:** As Christians we are called to offer our entire life to the Lord. As a symbolic first-offering, the candidate’s hair is cut. Hair, in the Biblical story of Samson is equated with strength; thus the hair offered stands for all the person’s strength and potentials given over to God.

## **THE NICENE CREED**

*I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages;*

*Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father, through Whom all things were made.*

*Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.*

*He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures.*

*He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; And He will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His kingdom shall have no end.*

*And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.*

*In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.*

*I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*

*I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen.*

**St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church**

5108 Kuykendall Road Charlotte, North Carolina 28270

704-708-4669 — [www.stnektarios.org](http://www.stnektarios.org) — Email: [office@stnektarios.org](mailto:office@stnektarios.org)