

HOLY BAPTISM

Thoughts on the Holy Mystery

A Summary of the Baptism Service

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Holy Baptism

An Entry into the Church

Baptism is the entry into the Holy Church. It was commanded by our Savior, and has always been understood to be the entry of a believer into the **Christian Life** in the Holy Church: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:** and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (St. Matthew 28:19-20).

Baptism is not only the entry for the believer into the church; it also washes him clean of all sins prior to his holy baptism, no matter how grievous and frequent they were. Here he must remember the admonition the Lord gave to the paralytic, whom He healed of not only his physical infirmity, but of his sins also: “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (St. John 5:14). We believe this because baptism is a complete rebirth, where the old man, with his sinful inclinations, dies, and is reborn in the Spirit. Our Lord said: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5). Therefore, baptism is necessary for our salvation.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Chrismation is the imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit unto the newly-baptized believer. Christians are “temples of the Holy Spirit”, and this sacrament bestows the Holy Spirit upon them. The Christian must always remember St. Paul’s admonition: “know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19).

After a person is baptized and chrismated, all his sins are remitted, and he is illumined with the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to

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enable him to embark upon the life in Christ within the ark of the Holy Church. This is also the case for infants, who are also empowered to live a Christian life. The grace of baptism, especially if it is nurtured by strong faith and piety in the household, will operate invisibly in such little ones, and strengthen them so that when they acquire reasoning powers, they will choose the Christian way of life.

Baptisms are public events.

Baptisms should be public, before the entire local parish, so that all the Christians can pray for the ones to be illumined, and may listen again to the vows that are made, remembering their own vows. It is good for every Christian to examine himself during this time, to see whether he be “in Christ” or not, that is, whether he has kept the vows of his baptism.

I believe in one baptism

“I believe in one baptism” is said by every Christian every day when he recites the Symbol of Faith (the Creed). Since there is only one church, there is only one baptism. Nothing outside the church, even if it resembles Christian baptism, is true baptism. This is why those desiring to become Orthodox Christians who come from another belief, even one that has a baptismal rite, should be baptized. Certain innovators have begun to accept people into Orthodoxy by chrismation only, and espouse an ecumenical rhetoric which accepts their baptismal rite outside the church as fully Christian in every way. They have made up a service for this, as there is no separate service for chrismation - it is part of the baptismal rite. Any chrismation service written in our modern days and intended for those who desire to enter Holy Orthodoxy is an innovation, and was unknown by the Holy Fathers of the Church.

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Chrismation and special circumstances

Chrismation, since it is the imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit, may be repeated under extreme conditions. We believe that the Holy Spirit flees from an Orthodox Christian when he falls into apostasy, or idol worship. When he repents and comes back to the Holy Church, he is often, according to the discretion of the bishop, accepted back by chrismation, which again imparts the gift of the Holy Spirit back to him. There is a special service in our Trebnic (“Book of Needs”, which the priest uses for special services such as marriage, burial, baptism, various blessings, etc.) for the chrismation of formerly apostate Orthodox. This service is certainly not the one used by certain Orthodox when they chrismate people they incorrectly say “are already baptized”, as it is a very compunctionate service, and assumes that the person being chrismated is an apostate Orthodox, desiring to repent and enter back into the life in the church.

A Proper Form and Belief

The Proper Form

There is a *proper form and belief concerning baptism*. As regards the form, we have received from the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers and the entire mind of the church that we always baptize by immersing three times in water, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no other acceptable form, and in particular, sprinkling is absolutely forbidden, and is uncanonical. The only time a person may be sprinkled is in case of extreme emergency, such as when they are bedridden with a fatal disease.

The Proper Belief

The proper belief concerning baptism is that it is the entry of the believer into the only, one, true, Holy and Apostolic church, and it

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is also a promise on the part of the believer that he will be obedient to the teaching of the church, and try to live as a Christian. Only after baptism and chrismation may a person be truly called a Christian, since Christianity is not only belief, but also is the organic joining of the believer to the body of Christ, and baptism effects this joining. One must desire to live the Christian life after baptism; otherwise, his baptism will not be a blessing for him, but will be a dreadful reminder to him that he did not obey Christ, when he is judged in the Great Judgment at the end of the age. It will be a terrible spectacle when many baptized Orthodox who did not bother to live the life in Christ, for “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:” (St. Matthew 25:41), and when asked of them why, He will reply: “Verily I say unto you, I know you not.” (St. Matthew 25:12)

Baptism is a Beginning

Baptism is a beginning, and an entry into the church. It is necessary for salvation. Equally necessary is obedience to Christ after Holy Baptism, and living life according to the Holy Spirit-inspired teaching of the Holy Church. Without this obedience, and effort on the part of a believer, he will not be saved, regardless of his baptism. The Christian is running a race, which is the whole of his life, and he that “endureth to the end shall be saved. (St. Matthew 10:22).

The Arena of Life

From the day of our baptism, we embark on a life or death struggle in the “arena”, as some of the Fathers have called the world in which we live. Our only goal must be the salvation of our souls, as this is the purpose of our life on the earth. The Holy Church teaches us everything we need to know, and here we find the Most

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Holy Trinity, and work out the salvation of our souls, with “fear and trembling”.

In any struggle, there are victories and setbacks, moments of great joy, and times of overwhelming sadness. So it is with the Christian life. We must pray, and keep the fasts, and attend the Holy Services, considering them to be more important than our jobs, and as necessary as the air we breathe. We must try to learn God’s Holy Commandments, and follow them. When we fall down, we always have repentance, and Holy Confession. We have the Holy Mysteries, Jesus Christ’s very Body and Blood to nourish us, as we struggle to acquire the mind of Christ and be worthy of the baptismal garment we have been given. May God preserve us and help us in this holy endeavor, by the prayers of His most pure mother, and all the Saints!

Short Bibliography

For more about baptism and chrismation, see:

- The Holy Scriptures, especially the Gospels ([John 3](#)), Acts and Romans, Chapter 6
- The Didache
- *The Law of God*, Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy, Pp. 471-474
- *Our Orthodox Faith*, Athanasios S. Frangopoulos, Pp. 206-211

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Preparation for Baptism in the Church

Preparation for Baptism in the Church

In the middle of the Church or another place, set up:

- Baptismal Font with lukewarm water
 - If indoors, under the Font, place a plastic sheet, and towels
- To the right of the Font, set on a table with a cloth cover:
 - Two Candle Sticks
 - The Holy Gospel Book
 - Holy Chrism
 - Anointing Oil (the "oil of gladness") in a bottle (to be blessed during the service)
 - Anointing brush (for the chrismation)
 - Sponge in a bowl of water.
 - Baptismal Candle(s)
 - Baptismal cross(es)
 - Tonsuring scissors on a small plate
- Close at hand should be:
 - Towels
 - Baptismal Garment
 - Soap (for the priest to wash his hands)

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Order of the Service

Naming of the child (if an infant)

- This is normally done on the eighth day after birth. If necessary, it may be done immediately before the exorcism service.

Making of a catechumen and exorcisms

- The person(s) who desire illumination and the sponsors stand at the entrance to the church, facing east.
- Prayer for those who wish to be illumined.
- Four exorcism prayers.
- Questioning of those who wish to be illumined, with the renouncing of Satan and the reciting of the Symbol of Faith (three times)
- Prayer for the professed catechumens.

Baptism and Chrismation Service

- Censing of the font occurs immediately before the service.
- Blessing - “Blessed is the Kingdom...”
- Great Litany with prayers for the blessing of the water and the person(s) who desire illumination.
- Prayers and blessing of the baptismal water.
- Prayers and blessing of the oil of anointing (oil of gladness).
- Anointing with the oil of gladness.
 - Face
 - Breast

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Order of the Service

- Upper back
- Hands
- Feet
- Baptism
- Robing of the newly-baptized in the baptismal garment (during the singing of Psalm 31)
- Prayer for the newly baptized.
- Chrismation of the newly-baptized. “The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit...”
 - Anointing of the:
 - brow
 - eyes
 - nostrils
 - lips
 - ears
 - hands
 - feet
- Procession of the newly-illuminated and sponsors around the font (3 times) while “As many have been baptized” is sung.
- Prokeimenon
- Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Romans (6:3-11)
- Alleluia (sung 3 times)
- Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew (28:16-20)
- Ectenia
- Ablution (washing of the newly-illuminated)
- Tonsure
- Fervent Ectenia

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Order of the Service

Churching of the newly-illuminated child

Sermon

Greeting of the newly-illuminated.

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Miscellaneous Holy Scriptures Pertaining to Baptism

Miscellaneous Holy Scriptures Pertaining to Baptism

(John 3:5) Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

(Acts 8:36-38) And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? {37} And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. {38} And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

(Acts 22:16) And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

(Rom 6:3-4) Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? {4} Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

(1 Cor 12:13) For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

(Gal 3:27) For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

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Miscellaneous Holy Scriptures Pertaining to Baptism

(Eph 4:4-6) There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; {5} One Lord, one faith, one baptism, {6} One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

(Titus 3:4-7) But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, {5} Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; {6} Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; {7} That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

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From the Scriptures and the Fathers

From the Scriptures and the Fathers

How to Baptize

We are commanded to baptize by threefold immersion in water, in the name of the Holy Trinity. The Scriptures and the writings of the church affirm this.

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 things whatsoever I have commanded you. (*Matt. 28:19–20*)

In regard to Baptism—baptize thus: After the foregoing instructions, baptize in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. If you have no living water, then baptize in other water; and if you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, pour three times on the head, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Before the Baptism, let the one baptizing and the one to be baptized fast, as also any others who are able. Command the one who is to be baptized to fast beforehand for one or two days.

(The Didache, The Teaching Of The Twelve Apostles)

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins

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From the Scriptures and the Fathers

that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all. And how those who have sinned and repent shall escape their sins, is declared by Esaias the prophet, as I wrote above; he thus speaks: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from your souls; learn to do well; judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow: and come and let us reason together, saith the Lord. And though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white like wool; and though they be as crimson, I will make them white as snow. But if ye refuse and rebel, the sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (St Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chapter LXI)

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From the Scriptures and the Fathers

Baptism is Necessary in order to live a Holy Life

Without the power of the Spirit which our Lord gave us in Baptism for the fulfilling of His commandments, the which is confirmed in us each day by the taking of His Body and Blood, we cannot be purified from the passions, and we cannot vanquish demons, and we cannot perform the works of spiritual excellence.

(Paradise of the Fathers)

In Baptism are completed the articles of our covenant with God; burial and death, resurrection and life; and these take place all at once. For when we plunge our heads down in the water, the old man is buried in a tomb below, and wholly sunk for ever; then, as we raise them again, the new man rises in his place. As it is easy for us to dip and to lift our heads again, so it is easy for God to bury the old man, and to show forth the new. And this is done thrice, that you may learn that the power of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit fulfils all this. To show that what we say is no conjecture, hear Paul saying, "We were buried with Him by Baptism into death"; and again, "Our old man was crucified with Him"; and again, "We have been planted together in the likeness of His death." And not only is Baptism called a "cross," but the Cross is called Baptism. "With the Baptism," says Christ, "that I am baptized with, shall ye be baptized"; and "I have a Baptism to be baptized with, which ye know not." For as we easily dip and lift our heads again, so He also easily died and rose again when He willed; or rather, much more easily, though He tarried the three days for the dispensation of a certain mystery.

St John Chrysostom, Homilies on St. John

Baptism does not take away our free will or freedom of choice, but gives us the freedom no longer to be tyrannized by the devil unless

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From the Scriptures and the Fathers

we choose to be. After baptism it is in our power either to persist willingly in the practice of the commandments of Christ, into whom we were baptized, and to advance in the path of His ordinances, or to deviate from this straight way and to fall again into the hands of our enemy, the devil.

St Symeon the New Theologian

Whoever after baptism deliberately submits to the will of the devil and carries out his wishes, estranges himself - to adapt David's words - from the holy womb of baptism (cf. Ps. 58:3). None of us can be estranged or alienated from the nature with which we are created. We are created good by God - for God creates nothing evil - and we remain unchanging in our nature and essence as created. But we do what we choose and want, whether good or bad, of our own free will. Just as a knife does not change its nature, but remains iron whether used for good or for evil, so we, as has been said, act and do what we want without departing from our own nature.¹

The gift which we have received from Jesus Christ in holy baptism is not destroyed, but is only buried as a treasure in the ground. And both common sense and gratitude demand that we should take good care to unearth this treasure and bring it to light. This can be done in two ways. The gift of baptism is revealed first of all by a painstaking fulfillment of the commandments; the more we carry these out, the more clearly the gift shines upon us in its true splendor and brilliance. Secondly, it comes to light and is revealed through the continual invocation of the Lord Jesus, or by unceasing remembrance of God, which is one and the same thing.²

¹ Ibid.

² St. Gregory of Sinai in *The Art of Prayer*.

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From the Scriptures and the Fathers

Are we only dying with the Master and are we only sharing in His sadness? Most of all, let me say that sharing the Master's death is no sadness. Only wait a little and you shall see yourself sharing in His benefits. 'For if we have died with Him,' says St. Paul, 'we believe that we shall also live together with Him.' For in baptism there are both burial and resurrection together at the same time. He who is baptized puts off the old man, takes the new and rises up, 'just as Christ has arisen through the glory of the Father.' Do you see how, again, St. Paul calls baptism a resurrection?³

Do not despair of whatever sins you may have committed since baptism and find yourself in true repentance, but await God's mercy. However many and however great and burdensome your sins may be, with God there is greater mercy. Just as His majesty is, so likewise is His mercy. Only guard yourself from sinning henceforth, and walk according to the aforementioned points.⁴

Holy Communion causes great progress in the life according to Christ. For what the external accidents of bread and wine effect in the body, the same is effected in the immaterial soul mystically and invisibly by the Body of Christ. And just as bread sustains and nourishes the body, so the Body of Christ sustains and nourishes our soul; and again, just as we are regenerated through Holy Baptism and receive the being of grace, in place of the being of sin which we had, so, as we are nourished by Holy Communion we grow in the grace of God and make progress.⁵

Not only is it wonderful that He forgives us our sins, but also that He neither uncovers them nor does He make them stand forth clearly revealed. Nor does He force us to come forward and

³ St. John Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions

⁴ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Journey to Heaven.

⁵ St. Macarios of Corinth, Modern Orthodox Saints, V. 2

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From the Scriptures and the Fathers

publicly proclaim our misdeeds, but He bids us to make our defense to Him alone and to confess our sins to Him. And yet, if any judge of a worldly tribunal were to tell some captured highwayman or grave robber to confess his crime and be excused from paying the penalty, this prisoner would with all alacrity admit the truth and scorn the disgrace in his desire to go free. But this is not the case in baptism. God forgives our sins and does not force us to make a parade of them in the presence of others. He seeks one thing only: that he who benefits by the forgiveness make learn the greatness of the gift.⁶

In the sacred Mysteries, then, we depict His burial and proclaim His death. By them we are begotten and formed and wondrously united to the Savior, for they are the means by which, as St. Paul says, "in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Baptism confers being and in short, existence according to Christ. It receives us when we are dead and corrupted and first leads us into life. The anointing with chrism perfects him who has received [new] birth by infusing in to him the energy that befits such a life. The Holy Eucharist preserves and continues this life and health, since the Bread of life enables us to preserve that which has been acquired and to continue in life. It is therefore by this Bread that we live and by the chrism that we are moved, once we have received being from the baptismal washing. In this way we live in God.⁷

⁶ St. John Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions.

⁷ St. Nicholas Cabasilas, The Life in Christ.

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