

16. Preparing for Baptisms and Chrismations

Baptism is a Holy Mystery, or Sacrament of the Church, through which the Holy Spirit breathes life into the Church's members. Through triple immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we die with Christ, and are resurrected with Christ. According to Scripture, baptism is "for the forgiveness of sins." (Acts. 2:38) It does not stand alone, however, apart from the whole life of the Church. Rather, it is initiation into full membership in the Body of Christ. While it is often the culmination of a journey through which we have found the Church (at least in the case of adult baptisms), it is at the same time the very beginning of a new journey. In Baptism we are purified; nevertheless our spiritual life as members of the Church is an ongoing purification that begins with baptism but must continue until the process of purification is complete.

Baptism also does not stand alone in that it is immediately followed by another Holy Mystery — Chrismation. Chrismation is the "seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." This gift of the Holy Spirit has been closely associated with Baptism throughout the history of the Church, as is evident from the book of Acts. Chrismation is our illumination; that is, the Holy Spirit illumines our hearts and opens our minds that we might receive "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Cor. 4:6) As with the purification of Baptism, however, in practice we must continue presenting ourselves before God throughout our lives that our illumination by Him might continue. These two wondrous Mysteries have their culmination in a third Mystery — that of the Divine Eucharist. For more about the Eucharist, please see the section on the Divine Liturgy.

Adults wishing to receive Holy Baptism and Chrismation in the Orthodox Church go through a period of preparation, called the Catechumenate, that lasts normally for about one year (in the Antiochian Archdiocese). For more about this, please see the "Guide for Inquirers and Catechumens."

Parents wishing to have their infants (or older children) baptized, should keep the following points in mind. The baptism should be scheduled with the priest, if possible, well in advance. The ideal day for baptism is Saturday, and can usually be done either in the morning or afternoon. If necessary, a baptism can be done on any day of the week. It is permissible to baptize infants during fasts, though some people consider fasting periods less ideal because any reception following the baptism is less festive.

Prior to the baptism, parents need to choose godparents, or at least one Orthodox godparent, who must be present for the baptism. Please also see "A Guide to Choosing Godparents." Items needed for the baptism (provided by parents or godparents) include: (1) a baptismal gown, (2) a baptismal cross, (3) candle(s), and (4) white towels (a white sheet is also often used). A bib for communion is recommended, or can be borrowed from the church. Olive oil can be donated but is not required. As with all Holy Sacraments there is no cost or charge associated with the Baptism. It is assumed that the family of the child contributes to the Church already through their tithe/pledge. After the baptism, the child should not be bathed immediately (wait 24 hours), and should be brought to the next Liturgy for communion, and as often as possible after that.