

Greek Orthodox Church

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Baptism

Children of Orthodox families are normally baptized shortly after birth. Converts to Orthodoxy (even converts from other Christian denominations) are usually formally baptized into the Orthodox Church though exceptions are sometimes made. Those who have left Orthodoxy and adopted a new religion, if they return to their Orthodox roots, are usually received back into the church through the mystery of Chrismation.

Chrismation

Chrismation is the mystery by which a baptized person is granted the gift of the Holy Spirit through anointing with Holy Chrism. It is normally given immediately after baptism as part of the same service, but is also used to receive lapsed members of the Orthodox Church. As baptism is a person's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, so Chrismation is a person's participation in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

A baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christian is a full member of the Church, and may receive the Eucharist regardless of age.

The creation of Chrism may be accomplished by any bishop at any time, but usually is done only once a year, often when a synod of bishops convenes for its annual meeting. (Some autocephalous churches get their chrism from others.)

Anointing with it substitutes for the laying-on of hands described in the New Testament, even when an instrument such as a brush is used.

Holy Communion

The Eucharist is at the center of Orthodox Christianity. In practice, it is the partaking of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the midst of the Divine Liturgy with the rest of the church. The bread and wine are believed to become the genuine Body and Blood of the Christ Jesus through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Communion is given only to baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christians who have prepared by fasting, prayer and confession. The priest will administer the Gifts with a spoon, called a "cochlear", directly into the recipient's mouth from the chalice. From baptism young infants and children are carried to the chalice to receive Holy Communion. Because of the Orthodox understanding of man's fallen nature in general those who wish to commune prepare themselves in a way that reflects man in paradise. First, the individual prepares by having his confession heard and the prayer of repentance read over him by a priest. The person will increase their prayer rule adding the prescribed prayers in preparation for communing. Finally, the person will fast completely from food and drink from the evening of the previous day (usually sunset on Saturday if communing on Sunday).