

EXPLANATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

On Baptism – The ultimate goal of Baptism is the restoration of true life that has been lost in sin. St. Paul describes this restored life in the following manner: “All those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ!” Salvation is a process that begins with fleeing from sin and being baptized, it continues through a life of repentance and culminates with the partaking of eternal life in God’s Kingdom.

Infant baptism is biblical and the ancient tradition of the Church. The requisite of being an “age of reason” prior to baptism began during the Protestant Reformation; no such tradition existed in the early Church. The fruit of being grafted into the body of Christ by baptism, granted understanding and knowledge of God. This is why St. Peter said in his sermon at Pentecost:

“Repent and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those at a distance, as many as the Lord our God shall call forth.” [Acts 2:38,39]

What sin does a child have? It is the ancestral sin that all humanity inherits being born with a fallen nature, subject to sin and death. “Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and thus death passed to all men, on account of which all have sinned – [Rom. 5:12].”

Baptism constitutes a second birth in Christ for everyone. The Orthodox Church believes in one Baptism for the remission of sins; thus we begin our journey through life being saved and perfected in Christ.

THE SERVICE OF PREPARATION

The enrollment of the child in the “Book of Life” – The child to be baptized is held in the narthex by the Godparent and is accompanied by the parents. The priest lays his hands upon the candidate and says the following: “In your name, O God of truth...I lay my hand on your servant (name) who has been found worthy to seek salvation in your Holy Name and protection under the shelter of your wings. Banish from him the old error, fill him with faith and hope in you...so that he might know that you are the only true God...Grant him the ability to live in accordance

with your commandments.”

The Exorcisms – The priest then reads three exorcisms, which cast out from the candidate any demonic influences. The rite of the exorcism culminates with the Godparent renouncing Satan on behalf of the child. The child and the Godparents turn away from the altar and face west to renounce Satan.

The Confession of Faith – Following the exorcisms, they all face east for the acceptance of Christ. The Creed of the Orthodox faith is recited by the Godparents. The prayer of acceptance follows: “O Lord and Master, our God, call your servant Nicholas to your Holy illumination. Take away from him the old ways and renew him unto eternal life...so that he may cease to be a child of the flesh and become a child of your Kingdom.

THE SERVICE OF BAPTISM

The Blessing of the Water – The water is first prepared to become a vessel of regeneration. The Holy Spirit is invoked to descend upon the font full of water and to sanctify it.

The Blessing of the Oil and Anointing – Once the water is prepared, the Godparents offer a small bottle of pure olive oil over which a prayer of banishment of evil is read to make it “an anointing of incorruption, a weapon of justice, a renewal of soul and body, a defense against every influence of the Devil...”. The candidate is brought by the sponsor to be anointed on the forehead, nose, ears, back, hands and feet. Then the entire body is anointed by the Godparent.

The Baptism – The candidate is brought to the font in fulfillment of our petition for the child: “That it may become a partner and partaker in the death and resurrection of Christ our God, let us pray to the Lord.” The font in the words of St. John Chrysostom, now becomes “a womb and a tomb”. There can be no new life without the death of our fallen nature. The priest immerses the child three times saying: “The servant of God, Nicholas is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

THE MYSTERY OF CHRISM

The newly baptized is now ready to receive the anointing of the gift of the Holy Spirit, a personal Pentecost. Chrism is olive oil which has been mixed with forty aromatic substances, signifying the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as love, joy,

peace, etc. (Galatian 5:22) The Chrism used today was sanctified by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople. The newly baptized once anointed is sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and fully adopted by God.

THE TONSURE

Following the baptism and chrismation, the priest tonsures the child by cutting some of his hair crosswise to signify three things: that Christ will be the head of the child from now on; the first offering of the child back to God; and an outward sign forsaking worldly appearance and love of the body.

THE VESTING

The priest brings a white garment and places it upon the child saying: “The servant of God, Nicholas, is vested with a garment of righteousness in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. The child is then fully dressed while the Priest reads several prayers for the well-being of the child and the family.

When the child returns, candles are lit and a joyful procession takes place around the font three times as everyone sings... “As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, alleluia.”

THE READINGS

The readings follow from the epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (6:3-11) where the Apostle makes the comparison between the immersion and emersion and burial and resurrection of Christ; and from the Gospel according to St. Matthew (28:16-20) where the Divine institution of Baptism was established by our Lord.

HOLY COMMUNION

Finally, as baptism has led to chrismation, chrismation leads to communion. The child receives his spiritual food and drinks from the ‘living water’, the Bread of life. The final act is the placing of the cross upon the child and his presentation to the parents and the community. From our Holy Father Nicholas the Wonderworker, The Life of the Child’s Patron Saint:

Saint Nicholas lived during the reign of Saint Constantine the Great and reposed in 330. As a young man, he desired to espouse the solitary life. He made a pilgrimage to the holy city Jerusalem, where he found a place to withdraw to devote himself to

prayer. It was made known to him, however, that this was not the will of God for him, but that he should return to his homeland to be a cause of salvation for many. He returned to Myra and was ordained bishop. He became known for his abundant mercy, providing for the poor and needy, and delivering those who had been unjustly accused. No less was he known for his zeal for the truth. He is the patron of all travelers, and of sea-farers in particular; he is one of the best known and best loved Saints of all time.