

# Holy Chrismation

In the Sacrament of Baptism man is called out of spiritual darkness into the light of Christ and is initiated into the economy of salvation by the Son of God. This initiation is effected, however, in the Sacrament of Chrismation. Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter preached to the people on Pentecost, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Since that time the Divine Gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon each person who rises from the baptismal font. And everything the Holy Spirit touches receives the seal of an invaluable treasure, a ray of eternal light, the reflection of Divine action.

The Sacrament of Chrismation awakens in the soul that inner, spiritual thirst which does not let one grow satisfied solely with the earthly and material, but always summons us to the Heavenly, to the eternal and the perfect. It makes the baptized person the possessor of the Spirit bearing beauty and a partaker of sanctity, of the Unwaning Light and Divine Life. It is for this reason that in Chrismation the new member of the Church not only receives the Spirit within, but is outwardly encompassed by Him, being robed henceforth as if in special spiritual garments.

The Prayer at Anointing with the Holy Chrism contains an assertion that the one who has been graced to receive the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit receives aid to remain indomitable, unchanging, unharmed, untouched, unoppressed, safe from the designs of the Evil One, to abide in the Faith and to await the heavenly rewards of life and the eternal promises of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Such a lofty gift of the Holy Spirit, bestowed in Chrismation, obliges the person being anointed to remember constantly the words of St. Paul: Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you (1 Cor. 3:16)?

The prayer to God for the bestowing of the Holy Spirit, which precedes the anointing, and the anointing itself of certain parts of the body crosswise with the Chrism, accompanied by the words, The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, Amen, have always comprised the basis for the Office of this Sacrament. It concludes the grace-giving process of the new member's joining the Church, making him an equal among the faithful and rendering him worthy, henceforth, to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Originally the Apostles conferred the Holy Spirit on those who gladly received the Word of the Gospel (Acts 2:41) and were baptized through prayer and the laying-on of hands. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John were sent to the Samaritans who had received the word of God and they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.... Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15, 17). The need to administer the Sacrament of the spirit through the laying-on of hands required the personal participation of the Apostles, but later they blessed the Bishops and Presbyter whom they consecrated to conduct the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon believers through anointing them with the Holy Chrism, and permitted Bishops alone to consecrate the Chrism. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, Holy Chrism...is a gift of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, which is validated by the presence of His Divinity.... And when the body is anointed in a visible fashion, the soul is consecrated with the Holy and Life-Giving Spirit.

The Chrism here used consists of olive oil, to which has been added white grape wine and a number of aromatic substances symbolizing the various grace-bestowing gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred through Chrismation. The Holy Chrism, which has been prepared at the beginning of Holy Week, is formally consecrated, usually by the Primate of the Church, on Holy Thursday and then distributed to the Bishops who, in turn, distribute it, as needed, to the Priests, for use in the Sacraments.

In the Office of the Sacrament of Chrismation, the anointing is performed with the recitation of the words, The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, during which the Priest anoints crosswise with the Holy Chrism the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, breast, hands and feet of the Newly-illuminated. After the anointing, the Priest then leads the Newly-illuminated and sponsor (s) three times around the font to the singing of As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia! This circular procession is seen as a symbol of joy.

Then follows the reading of the Epistle and Gospel which (along with the preceding hymn) refer to Baptism, since, from antiquity, the two Sacraments have been linked into one rite. After this, the Chrism is washed off and the white baptismal garments removed. [In ancient times this was customarily done on the 8th Day after, i.e., St. Thomas Sunday.] The hair is then cut in a crosswise manner The Tonsure as a sign of humility and readiness for sacrificial service to the Lord an initiation into the Army of Christ.

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## Chrismation

In the sacrament of Chrismation, we receive “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” (See Rom 8, 1 Cor 6, 2 Cor 1.21–22). If baptism is our personal participation in Easter—the death and resurrection of Christ, then chrismation is our personal participation in Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us.

The sacrament of chrismation, also called confirmation, is always done in the Orthodox Church together with baptism. Just as Easter has no meaning for the world without Pentecost, so baptism has no meaning for the Christian without chrismation. In this understanding and practice, the Orthodox Church differs from the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches where the two sacraments are often separated and given other interpretations than those found in traditional Orthodoxy.

Chrismation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is performed in the Orthodox Church by anointing all parts of the person’s body with the special oil called holy chrism. This oil, also called myrrh is prepared by the bishops of the Church on Holy Thursday. It is used in chrismation to show that the gift of the Spirit was originally given to men through the apostles of Christ, whose formal successors in the world are the bishops of the Church (see Acts 8.14; 19.1–7).

In chrismation a person is given the “power from on high” (Acts 1–2), the gift of the Spirit of God, in order to live the new life received in baptism. He is anointed, just as Christ the Messiah is the Anointed One of God. He becomes—as the fathers of the Church dared to put it—a “christ” together with Jesus. Thus, through chrismation we become a “christ,” a son of God, a

person upon whom the Holy Spirit dwells, a person in whom the Holy Spirit lives and acts—as long as we want him and cooperate with his powerful and holy inspiration.

Thus, it is only after our chrismation that the baptismal procession is made and that we hear the epistle and the gospel of our salvation and illumination in Christ.

After the baptism and chrismation, the person newly-received into God's family is tonsured. The tonsure, which is the cutting of hair from the head in the sign of the cross, is the sign that the person completely offers himself to God—hair being the symbol of strength (Jud 16.17). Thus, until the fifteenth century the clergy of the Orthodox Church—the “professional Christians,” so to speak—wore the tonsure all their lives to show that their strength was in God.

### **The Rite of Churching**

Together with being baptized and chrismated, the new-born child is also “churched.” The rite of churching imitates the offering of male children to the temple according to the law of the Old Testament, particularly the offering of Christ on the fortieth day after his birth (Lk 2.22). Because of this fact, baptism in the Orthodox tradition came to be prescribed for the fortieth day or thereabouts. In the New Testament Church both male and female children are formally presented to God in the Church with special prayers at this time.

Also at this time, once more in imitation of Old Testament practice, the mother of the new-born child is also “churched.” Here we have the specific example of the purification ritual of Jesus' mother Mary (Lk 2.22). In the Orthodox tradition the churching of the mother is her re-entry into the assembly of God's people after her participation with God in the holy act of birth and after her separation from the Liturgy during her confinement. Thus, the mother is blessed to enter once more into communion with the mystery of Christ's Body and Blood in the Divine Liturgy of the Church from which she has been necessarily absent.

The new mother should be churched before the baptism of her infant so that she can be present at the sacramental entrance of her child into the Kingdom of Christ. The official service book indicates that this should be done.

It is also the Orthodox tradition that the mysteries of baptism and chrismation, called officially “holy illumination,” are fulfilled in the immediate reception by the “newly-enlightened” of Holy Communion in the eucharistic liturgy of the Church. This is the case with infants as well as adults.

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### **The Epistle of Baptism-Chrismation**

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For He who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. The death He died he died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6.3–11)

### **The Gospel of Baptism-Chrismation**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 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 that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Mt 28.16–20)