

ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL BAPTISMAL INFORMATION FORM

Please print and mail in this form to the church office at least one week before the Sacrament takes place.

First, Middle, Last Name of person being baptized as it appears on birth certificate: _____

Sex: ___ Male ___ Female

Father's Name: _____

Mother's MAIDEN name (first and last): _____

Birthplace of person being baptized (City, State): _____

Date of birth: _____

Date of Baptism: _____

About Sponsors or Godparents: It is not only a great honor to a sponsor at an Orthodox Baptism, it is also a great responsibility and not to be taken lightly. It is a lifetime commitment which is reflected in the fact that godchildren always refer to their godparent by their title rather than their name or familial relationship. Ideally, sponsors should be active members of a Orthodox Church community but all must provide verification of their financial commitment at least if they are not members of St. George Cathedral. Their local priest will provide us with a document stating their eligibility to act as a sponsor. This should be done prior to the baptism and sent directly to us at St. George. Also, if married, the sponsors must have been married in the Orthodox Church. Non-Orthodox Christians may assist with the baptism but not act officially as a sponsor.

Sponsor's Name: _____

Parish of Affiliation: _____

Note: While a child may have a non-traditional name legally, an Orthodox Christian Saints' name must be given to the child at Baptism. This name is the name we use whenever we receive Holy Communion or any of the Sacraments of the Church. If you need assistance in choosing a name, please do not hesitate to call the Church for advice. We would be happy to assist you and guide you in choosing a meaningful name so that your child may identify with a particular Saint in the Orthodox Church.

Child's Baptismal Name: _____

Parents' Full Address: _____

Parent's Wedding Date: _____ Place of Church Membership: _____

Wedding performed by (Priest or Civil Authority): _____

Father's Faith: _____ Mother's Faith: _____

Orthodox Christians from other parishes wanting a baptism at St. George Cathedral must have letters from their parish indicating their good standing. Sponsors are also required to have a letter from their local parish.

Parents' Parish Membership (name of church): _____

Please note that a copy of your child's legal birth certificate is now mandated by the Metropolis of Boston (our diocese) for official registry of your child's Baptism in their books. The certificate can and should be mailed ahead of time with this letter to St. George. Thank you in advance for your cooperation. We look forward to being with you on this very special day.

BAPTISMS

Duties of the Sponsor:

1. The sponsor/godparent must be a baptized Orthodox Christian in good standing canonically with his/her parish. If married, he/she must have been married in the Orthodox Church.
2. If the sponsor/godparent is from another parish he/she must obtain a letter from the parish priest stating that he/she is a member in good standing and is canonically able to serve as a sponsor in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.
3. Canonically speaking, there should be only one sponsor/godparent but two are permitted when they are married to each other. Most importantly however, the Sponsor shall be able to understand and appreciate the awesome responsibility of being a Sponsor in the Church. Sponsors/godparents are responsible along with the parents for raising the child as an Orthodox Christian, teaching them the faith by word and deed.
4. It is preferable, though not mandatory, that the sponsor/godparent *not* be a member of the family. The Church suggests this in order that one may expand his spiritual family to include others who are well-respected and pious members of the community.
5. Non-Orthodox Christians are allowed to participate in the Sacrament but cannot be considered godparents by the Church by virtue of the fact that they are not Orthodox.

What the Sponsor/Godparent Brings to the Service:

The expected articles that a Godparent usually provides for the Baptism include:

- ◆ A cross and chain to be worn around the child's neck
- ◆ One full bottle of olive oil
- ◆ Two (2) small hand towels
- ◆ One bath towel
- ◆ An extra-large white sheet
- ◆ A bar of white (Ivory) soap
- ◆ Three (3) white candles (one large, two smaller)

The new white clothing for the child can be provided by the godparent but isn't absolutely necessary. *A one-piece undershirt is also necessary for the priest to place on the child.* If questions remain, it is best to consult with your priest.

Fee Schedule for Baptisms:

\$150.00 - For Baptisms in the Cathedral.

\$ 75.00 - For Baptisms in the Chapel at the Cultural Center

**Note:* The use of the Chapel is recommended for all Baptisms where the congregation numbers 75 persons or less. The Chapel provides an intimate setting which enhances the involvement of all participants during the Sacrament.

Also, please know that our fees are not for the Sacrament itself but for our costs associated with the ceremony.

Stewardship Pledge:

At this time, the Church has a minimum pledge of \$400 per year for those not already members. This may be paid over the course of the year but *at least half* must be paid before the Baptism. We recommend, however, that you consider offering 1% or 2% of your gross income as a stewardship pledge. This, also, may be paid over the course of the year. Stewardship is based on the Biblical principle of offering back to God based on the blessings you have received from Him. To discuss this, please contact Fr. Chris at the Church.

For more information on stewardship and to make your pledge for the year, you may find information and forms by going onto our web site: www.stgeorgecath.org. Click on *Membership* under the St. George banner.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to call us at the office, 737-1496, or e-mail Fr. Chris directly at: frstamas@verizon.net

We thank you for your attention to these instructions and look forward to your Baptism at St. George.

The next two pages may be printed back to back and distributed to those who attend.

The Sacrament (Mystery) of Holy Baptism

The Sacrament of Baptism, as we know it, was instituted by Christ Himself when He commanded His Apostles to "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*" (Matt. 28:19) For centuries, this Sacrament along with Chrismation has initiated people into the Church. In fact, the Service of Baptism in the Orthodox Church is the oldest service still performed as it was in the fourth century. The Sacrament of Chrismation, which also has Scriptural roots, has been used to convey the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. In other words, through Baptism the person puts away their old nature and puts on the new nature which is then "sealed" by the oil of Chrismation. Through these two Sacraments, we take our first steps in our spiritual lives, a journey which we believe will lead us toward eternal life with God.

Baptism begins in the church narthex or rear of the church where the unbaptized originally congregated. The godparent, who acts as a sponsor and spiritual parent for the rest of the new Christian's life, is the representative of the entire community of believers. The godparent speaks on behalf of the child and forcefully rejects Satan by symbolically spitting at the Devil on the floor. These questions were originally addressed to the candidate but, as infant Baptism developed as the norm, the sponsor acts and responds for the infant. This taking of an oath on behalf of another person highlights the responsibility that the godparent now has to assist in nurturing the child as an Orthodox Christian. It also highlights the fact that God loves us so much that He reaches out to us and accepts us long before we accept Him. We believe that the grace of God bestowed on us during Baptism is not dependent on our intellectual capacity to receive or understand it. It is simply a gift.

Turning toward the altar, the godparent professes belief and union with Christ and recites the Nicene Creed, an ancient summary of the basic beliefs of the Orthodox Christian. Then, using the child's baptismal name for the first time, the priest asks God to make the candidate worthy of Baptism by washing away the old nature and renewing the child with its new nature which is in the image of the Holy Spirit.

The priest, child and godparent proceed to the front of the church to the large baptismal font that represents the divine womb from which the child will be reborn as a child of God. The water in the font is used for its three main purposes: for the drowning of the old nature, for the washing and purification of the soul, and for the life that it brings to all of creation.

The priest blesses the water in the baptismal font, asking the Holy Spirit to come and dwell in it. Later, he adds a small amount of olive oil, which the godparent has brought to the Church. The fruit of the olive tree has been a symbol of peace and reconciliation between God and humans ever since Noah sent a dove to find dry land and it returned with an olive branch. For the candidate being baptized, being still of the old human nature, this oil is the symbol of his or her personal peace with God.

The child is undressed, symbolizing the removal of the old nature. The priest makes the sign of the cross with oil on various parts of the infant as he recites verses from Scriptures that apply to each member of the body. The godparent then anoints the child from head to toe praying that there will always be peace between God and His child. The priest then immerses the child three times into the font, symbolizing the three days Christ spent in the tomb. As he does this, he declares "*The servant of God is baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*" This dramatic event is a reenactment of Christ's Baptism, Death and Resurrection. Like Christ, the child is resurrected to a new life. The priest then places the child in the arms of the godparent who catches the child in a white sheet, symbolizing the purity of the child's soul.

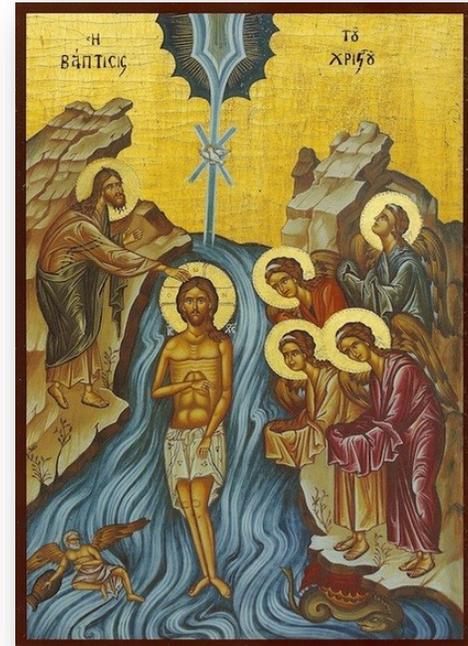
Immediately after the Baptism, the priest administers a second Sacrament, Chrismation. Like the Apostles at Pentecost, the child receives the gift of the Holy Spirit during Chrismation, a gift of grace from God to help the child to live faithfully through life's struggles and difficulties. For the child, this is a personal Pentecost. That event is so important for us that we recreate it for every person who is brought into the Faith of the Orthodox. Following the anointing with the Holy Chrism, the priest tonsures the child in the shape of a cross. This cutting of the hair is a symbolic form of sacrifice from the child who has nothing else to offer. It is also a symbolic form of obedience to God's will. Lastly, the priest blesses the child's new clothes by saying, "*The servant of God is clothed with the garment of righteousness in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*" (Isaiah 61:10).

The child is dressed in new white clothing as the ceremony continues to again symbolize purity of soul. After the child has been dressed, the priest lights the decorated baptismal candle as he says, "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 5:16)

The priest, the godparent holding the child, and often a few selected children then process around the baptismal font three times as the priest censes and chants the hymn "*As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia.*" (Gal. 3:27) This procession was originally a procession into the Church itself when the Baptistry was in another building. Today, we repeat it with the prayer that God the Holy Spirit will always be in the center of our lives just as the water blessed by the Spirit of God is in the center of the procession.

Following the procession, the epistle reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans is read. This letter is the basis for our theology or understanding of the importance of Baptism. By being baptized as Christ was, we participate in His Death and Resurrection as well, St. Paul tells us. The Gospel reading then follows and recalls Christ's Great Commission to baptize all nations in the name of the Holy Trinity.

After a short prayer, the child, being a full-fledged member of the Orthodox Church, is given Holy Communion for the first time. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is the greatest expression we have of our unity in the Orthodox Faith. It is the Sacrament of Sacraments and the fulfillment of the Christian life — acquiring God within us. As the service ends, the parents then approach the godparent who offers their child back.



The Service of Holy Baptism in the Orthodox Christian Church

This program book is offered to you with the hope that you will better appreciate and participate in the Sacrament being performed today. Thank you for joining us.