CHRISTENED

: NEWBORN IN CHRIST:

[Image of a person Christening a baby in a baptismal font]
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NEWBORN IN CHRIST

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

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WHAT IS BAPTISM?

In the Gospels we read the story of a man named Nicodemus. Even though he was a religious leader among the Jews, Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was someone special, that God was somehow powerfully with Him. In a very enlightening dialogue Jesus tells Nicodemus:

"I solemnly assure you, no one can see the reign of God unless he is begotten from above." (John 3:3)

Still on a very natural plane, Nicodemus can only see this in terms of being physically reborn, so he asks rather naively if we are to re-enter our mother's womb to be born again!

Capitalizing on this misunderstanding (and obviously heightened interest!) Jesus then replies:

"I solemnly assure you, no one can see the reign of God... without being begotten of water and the Spirit." (John 3:5)

Jesus tells us that, to enter into God's reign or kingdom, we must indeed be born again! This rebirth in Christ is our Baptism, the first of the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments), admitting us to the fullness of this life in Christ, for it initiates or introduces us into the new life in Christ. It is truly a birth: our beginning in a new way of life.

"BAPTISM" MEANS TO BE PLUNGED OR IMMERSED INTO THE DIVINE LIFE OF THE RISEN CHRIST.

BAPTISM IS LIKE A NEW BIRTH BECAUSE IN IT WE ENTER A NEW WAY OF LIFE: UNION WITH GOD.

WHY MUST WE BE BAPTIZED?

Jesus says:

"I SOLEMNLY ASSURE YOU: NO ONE CAN SEE THE REIGN OF GOD UNLESS HE IS BEGOTTEN FROM ABOVE ... NO ONE CAN ENTER INTO GOD'S KINGDOM WITHOUT BEING BEGOTTEN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT." JOHN 3:3,5
WHY MUST WE BE BORN AGAIN?

Everything in this world is touched by sin. Man has turned in on himself and pretended to be free from God. He is broken—his allegiance is divided.

St. Gregory Nyssa says: “Sin takes its start in us when we are born; it grows with us and keeps us company till life’s end.”

So—

We need to be healed, to be made whole again.

Born again in baptism, we are restored to our original dignity and raised to new life in God.

In our physical birth we were born a child of this world. We are truly human and very much part of this world, a world touched by sin. Since men and women have never lived according to the manner intended by God, there has been a real distortion of this world, a twisting of its purpose.

Instead of living in a real relationship of harmony with God, human beings have always chosen to go their own way, to “do their own thing.” Mankind has turned in on itself and pretended to be free from God. And here we find the roots of sin, the sin that has affected our world and infected our spirit. This sin has distorted the original meaning and purpose of our world and broken off our communication with God. Our world is a broken world, one whose allegiance has been split, whose integrity has been fragmented.

We experience the effects of this very strongly today in the secular spirit which pervades our society. Secularism is the way of thinking which alleges that our world is completely sufficient unto itself, that we need no recourse to anything or anyone beyond the scope of this life.

Secularists feel that anything which smacks of a world beyond is “old-fashioned” or out of style. To speak of a God who is beyond the limits of this world, they say, is to seek escape from the responsibilities of the here-and-now. Secularism is more than an allegiance split or an integrity fragmented: it is the option already made that this world is all there is.

Into this world we have been born. Our flesh is part of this sinful and broken world and we are infected with its spirit from our birth. There is no way we can escape being touched by it. The Psalmist says: “Indeed in iniquities I was born and in sins my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 50:5)
Since we are born into this world of divided allegiances, we need to have our integrity restored, to be healed and made whole once again, to be made holy. And Baptism is the new birth that restores us to our original dignity; even more, it lifts us to a new level of life that surpasses the original creation.

In Baptism we are re-born in water and the Spirit, that is to say, these are the manner and meaning of our re-birth.

**...IN WATER**

Water is one of the most common elements of our life. From even the most microscopic and simple-structured organism up to the human being, everything that lives needs water to sustain its life. We can go long periods without food, but without water everything dies very quickly. Water is basic to the support of all life. Thus the symbolic value of water as a sign of life, as something that gives life and new birth is quite obvious.

The first verses of Genesis speak of water as one of the most basic elements in creation. From it, under the impulse of the Spirit, the rest of our world emerged. So too in Baptism, the Spirit working in the waters produces life. In this respect St. John Chrysostom comments, "What the womb is to the embryo, water is to the believer," for it is in the life-giving water of Baptism that we believers find the source of new life.

This symbolism of re-birth in the water is further enhanced by the design of the baptismal fonts, which in many places were formed in the shape of a womb. In the waters of Baptism we are truly reborn. But water also has another aspect: it can become very destructive. Have you ever seen a raging river or menacing flood waters rising and threatening everything and everyone in their path? Swollen rivers and streams can produce rapidly moving water that wipes out everything along the way. From the simple erosion of the soil from a trickle of water, gradually whole fields and farms can be wiped out. Entire cities have been ruined by the raging water.
which destroys. Even normally beautiful blue lakes and refreshing pools of water can be very threatening to one who does not swim. For water can literally swallow us up and destroy us.

This second aspect of water – the destructive element – also plays an important role in Baptism. In the waters of Baptism, sin and the darkness it brings are literally swept away. Born into this broken or sinful world, we are in effect touched and soiled by it. The purifying waters wash this away, cleanse us and remove all that defiles the true image of our Creator in us.

Thus water is a paradoxical sign - both life-giving and destructive at the same time. As such it is the sign par excellence of our Baptism, for it indicates both the destruction of sin and also the appearance of the new life that is given to us.

...AND OF THE SPIRIT

In the New Testament water has yet a deeper meaning. Jesus speaks of running water as a sign of the Spirit giving life to us.

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me. Let him drink who believes in me. Scripture has it, ‘From within him rivers of living water shall flow.’” (John 7:37-39)

The image of living water – running water, such as a deep running mountain spring – evokes ideas of freshness and vigor. Very different from the still and often stagnant waters that do not move, the bubbling water of brooks, joyfully dancing over and around the rocks, is a fitting symbol for the life-giving and invigorating Spirit of God.

In Baptism we are physically plunged into water, but our contact is actually with Christ, the source of that living water which is the Holy Spirit. We are born of Him and made to “share in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). We are no longer merely part and parcel of this broken world: we are God’s temple, where the Spirit of God dwells.

But what does it actually meant to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, to be a partaker of the divine nature? Again, we may look to Jesus to give us an answer. Christ is both God and man, and His divinity does not make Him any less human. His human qualities are all the more authentic because He is perfectly united with the Father.

When we are christened, we are given new life in Christ. Like Him – although in a radically different way – we are united with God. To the degree that we allow this seed of God-life to grow in us, we become deified, as the Fathers said. We radiate the light of God within us and show ourselves to be made anew according to the image and likeness of God.
This participation in the life of God – this *deification* – is actually the goal of all human existence. This goal – realized by nature in Christ – is grace. If we respond to this offer it becomes possible for us to say with St. Paul, “The life I now have is not my own; Christ is living in me” (Galatians 2:20).

...INTO THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

“All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with him.” (Galatians 3:27)

In Baptism we truly put on Christ – we are christened, as our common expression has it. And we are in fact “putting on Christ” through our mystical participation in His death and resurrection. Again St. Paul says:

“ARE YOU NOT AWARE THAT WE WHO WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS WERE BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? THROUGH BAPTISM INTO HIS DEATH WE WERE BURIED WITH HIM SO THAT—JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER—WE TOO MIGHT LIVE A NEW LIFE.” ROMANS 6:3-4

And here we see the primary understanding of our Baptism. It is a mystical (that is, sacramental) sharing in the death/resurrection of Christ. For His death-resurrection is His Passover from life on earth to eternal life. In it our human nature that He assumed is uplifted so as to be seated in Him at the right hand of the Father on high.

In a discussion with two of His disciples, James and John, Jesus even identifies His own suffering, death and resurrection as His Baptism:

“Can you drink the same cup that I shall drink or be baptized with the same bath of pain as I?” (Mark 10:38)

This great mystery – that God becomes man in Christ so that human beings might become God – reached its completion in the saving death and resurrection of Christ. In this event, all that is of the earth is joined to what is heavenly. Christ has become the One to rejoin God and man, to indeed bring about the re-creation, the
renewal of all mankind. Now that He has completed all that the Father has planned, He is lifted up to glory to be in the bosom of the Father.

Indeed, not only Christ but all of us are invited to share in the same unity with the Father. Through Baptism (a word which means "to dip" or "immerse") we are buried in the waters of death and destruction and raised up through the waters of life. As St John Chrysostom says in his *Homily XXV on John*:

"Our head is plunged in the water as though in a tomb. The old man is buried and completely drowned. When we emerge from this water, the new man is risen from the dead."

*St. John Chrysostom*
It is in the actual unfolding of the baptismal ritual that we can best see the meaning of this great Mystery. For the prayers and the actions give eloquent expression to what is taking place: God communicates Himself to us, which is the basic meaning of any sacrament. And in the rites of initiation (which in the Churches of the East always include Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist) we have the gradual initiation of a person into the life in Christ and also into life in the Church. Thus every Baptism is a celebration of the whole Church and the participation of the community is an important element in these sacraments.

We have already seen that Christian initiation means that we are taken up into the God-life. And all that is possible only because God first came to us and chose us. One of the great writers of the Byzantine Church expressed it this way:

"Union with Christ, then, belongs to those who have undergone all that the Savior has undergone and have experienced and become all that He has. Now He was united to blood and flesh pure from all sin. By nature He Himself is God from the very beginning, and that which He afterwards assumed, human nature, He has deified. Finally He died for the sake of the flesh and rose again.

Anyone who seeks to be united with Him must therefore share with Him in the flesh, partake of deification, and share in His death and resurrection. So we are baptized in order that we may die that death and rise again in the resurrection. We are chrismated in order that we may become partakers of the royal anointing of His deification. By feeding on the most sacred bread and drinking the most divine cup we share in the very Flesh and Blood which the Savior assumed." (Nicholas Cabasilas, The Life in Christ)
Baptism unites us to Christ in a deeply personal and individual way. Christ calls us by name, as it were, and takes us with Him to the cross and the tomb so that we can become one with Him in the most profound experience of His ministry. But Christian life is not only intensely personal, it is also lived in the community. And so inseparably joined to Baptism are the communal mysteries of Chrismation and the Eucharist, which join God's anointed people and unite us ever deeper to one another in the one Body, the Church, whose Head is Christ and in which we receive the divine life – the life of the Trinity.

The sacramental ritual of Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist, then, leads us into this full life in the Kingdom of God. We will now look at the manner in which this takes place and thus see, through a different dimension, the meaning of this initiation. The service itself is somewhat like a procession: we begin at the entrance to the church, then proceed to the baptismal font; finally we are taken to the Holy of Holies, thus completing our journey into the Kingdom.

A CHRISTIAN IS...
A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY

The person about to be baptized, together with the sponsors, is met by the priest at the entrance of the church. The initial prayers are filled with the theme of coming under the saving protection of God who overshadows us with His wings. The gestures of the priest underscore this theme of preservation. He first makes the sign of the cross over the candidate. The sign of the cross is perhaps our most common gesture as Christians and our most powerful, for if we but use it, we drive out the deceit of the demons (St. Athanasius). The priest also lays his hand
upon the head of the person to be baptized, further indicating that Christ now takes possession of this person. This is the reception of the catechumen: the person is welcomed into the Church and received by the community. For when we are received into Christ we are accepted personally, by name, but never privately. Our Baptism into Christ gives us membership in His Body, the Church.

In the prayers of exorcism which follow, the priest breathes upon the candidate. The warm breath of life, highly symbolic of God’s life-giving power, chases away everything ungodly and fills the person with the sign of life. With these initial gestures – the sign of the cross, laying on of hands, and breathing – and the prayers of exorcism that follow, we are taken from the world of darkness and evil and brought into the Church, the sign of the new world to come. We are lifted up, as it were, from the level of the original creation to the new creation where Christ is all in all.

... A BELIEVER IN THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

This movement or transfer of allegiance is most clearly seen in the dialogue between the priest and the one to be baptized (or the sponsors). For the candidate is then asked to turn and face the West (the symbol of darkness) and is asked repeatedly to renounce Satan and his power. After having done this, the candidate then turns toward the East (the place of light and the throne of God) and is asked three times to commit himself to Christ.

It is this double movement – the renunciation of Satan and the acceptance of Christ – that forms the nucleus of our baptismal commitment. It is not only the negative aspect of turning away from evil, for this is never enough. Remember the Gospel story about the demon that departs from a man and goes in search of a resting place. Finding none, it decides to return to the man and finds its dwelling place swept clean and empty. They it goes off and brings back seven spirits more evil than itself so that the condition of the man is worse (Matthew 12:43-45).
Thus it is not enough to turn our backs on evil. We must make a positive statement. We must turn towards Christ. And turning towards Him means believing in Him, that He is the only Son of the Father. He has sent His Holy Spirit to be our strength and guide on our journey.

With all this in mind, the candidate for Baptism then professes faith in Christ by reciting the Nicene Creed. It is this creed – the symbol of our faith – that verbalizes the content of our faith. It is this statement of faith that serves as a sign of unity among true believers, for it unites us with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, with the faith of our fathers.

Besides turning away from evil and towards Christ, there is one further dimension to our entrance into the Church. Our faith is not just a private affair of the heart; it is not simply to accept the Lord and believe in Him in my own way. We are then asked one further response: to worship Him. Our faith must be expressed in some manner, and our worship is this very expression of our faith.

This is certainly an important consideration today since religion and faith are considered by so many as a “private affair.” Religion for many people is like an insurance card, neatly and safely tucked away in our wallets, only to be brought out and used in case of emergency! But right here in the opening of the baptismal service we see clearly that we are not only asked to believe, but to express this belief in worship. Our worship, our participation in the holy services of our Church, becomes the real expression of our faith and also a way of deepening this faith.

With this commitment to serve Christ now made, we are ready to enter into the church for the Baptism itself.
Everyone goes to the baptismal font for the blessing of the water. The special petitions of the great litany and the prayer of blessing bring several important themes before us.

In the blessing we pray that this water may become the water of regeneration or re-birth. "He saved us through the baptism of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Indeed this baptismal water is the sign of new life that not only remits our sins, but makes us born anew.

Reflecting on this complete renewal that we pray for through the waters of Baptism, St. John Chrysostom uses the following example. The baptismal water does not simply wipe away our sins; it totally renews us. We are like a vessel that has been tarnished and defaced. To wash it only cleans the surface; it still leaves the traces of the mars and stains. But when the vessel is thrown into the purifying fires of the furnace, it is melted down, the impurities skimmed off, and it is re-cast in even a better manner that the first. So also God takes our broken and disfigured nature and re-molds it through the purifying waters of Baptism. We are re-created into a new level of life; yes, one that surpasses the beauty of the original creation in paradise.

Now the oil, "the weapon of righteousness" that strengthens us for battle, is blessed. In the prayer of blessing we are reminded that the new believer is anointed as an athlete or warrior, as one who must struggle. He is anointed for strength, to fight the good fight. With many it is not fashionable to see the Christian life as a struggle, a battle; we need to hear St. Paul's words once again:

"Draw your strength from the Lord and His mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above." (Ephesians 6:10, 12)
St. John Chrysostom continues the same theme when he says that we are anointed as soldiers who are preparing for the spiritual battle, as athletes for Christ. This anointing fortifies us as athletes are strengthened before the contest, and keeps us free from the powers of the Evil One.

With this oil, the candidate is now anointed. The whole body – head, breast, shoulders, ears, hands and feet are traced with the sign of the cross. With the cross they are thus marked for service to Christ and bound in fidelity to Him, thus being made ready for Baptism. For the sign of the cross shines brightly upon them, blinding the devil and making the candidate safe from his power.

...BURIED IN CHRIST

The candidate has turned away from Satan and turned towards Christ; he has bowed low in worship and professed faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Finally, he has been marked with the sign of the cross; now he is ready for the Baptism.

According to the ancient traditions of the Church, the ideal for Baptism is certainly immersion in living (that is, running) water. Being immersed is the concrete image of our entering into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ which is, as we say, the meaning of our Baptism. We are literally “swallowed up” by the waters as if in a grave, and then we are raised up to the newness of life. The images of washing and cleansing, birth and regeneration, life-giving and saving waters, all converge here in the simple act of entering the baptismal water.
If full immersion is not possible, it is still permitted to pour water over the head of the candidate. But from all that went before, we see that this will obviously strip the rite of its symbolic value. In the current renewal in the worship of the Church, the original symbol of immersion is highly stressed since this symbol corresponds so closely with the meaning of the action.

The immersion is done three times in honor of the Holy Trinity into whose life we are baptized. And with this action the name of the Holy Trinity is solemnly invoked, and but one time: "The servant of God (name) is baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Thus triple immersion is accomplished while the words are said only once, in such a way as to remind us of the unity of the Trinity, for it is truly the Trinity who touches and saves us. The priest is in truth the minister who serves, but it is God who touches the person and gives him new birth and life.

"When you are baptized it is not by the priest that you are baptized, but it is God who touches your head with His invisible power." (St. John Chrysostom)

The vision of God-who-acts is common in all the sacraments in the Eastern Churches. The priest never replaces Christ; rather, Christ is in our midst as the one true priest and the minister is present to serve Him, to minister to Him, to share in His unique priesthood.
CLOTHED WITH THE ROBE OF LIGHT

After the Baptism, the newly-baptized person is given a new robe to wear. This new garment is the baptismal robe, the sign of the new life that he has entered. Usually it is white, symbolic of the purification and innocence that is now his. And it is proper to wear this garment only now, after the Baptism, after the new life it signifies has begun.

“What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds, and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his Creator.” (Colossians 3:9-10)

The garment is also compared to the wedding garment (remember the Gospel image of the wedding garment, symbol of the quality of our life). In his address to those about to be baptized, St. John Chrysostom begins by speaking of Baptism as a spiritual marriage, that is, a spiritual relationship with God:

“But you have been invited to a spiritual wedding and a royal banquet. Consider, then, what sort of wedding garment you should buy. On the other hand, there is no need for you to buy it, because He who has anointed you cannot offer your poverty as an excuse.

“Guard, then, the garment that you have received; if you ruin it, you will not be able to borrow or buy another. There is no place where this kind of garment is for sale.” (Second Instruction).
Earlier we saw that Christ joined Himself to our nature, and thus deified it, or made it truly god-like, and that He finally died and rose again to lead us back to the Father. And now we, in the opposite order, die and rise with Him through Baptism, which is our entrance into the divine life. Then through Holy Chrismation we are truly deified, that is, we are made god-like through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is as if our Passover in the death and resurrection of Baptism has brought us into the Kingdom of God. Now the gift of the Holy Spirit brings this entrance to completion, to fullness, for we are indeed deified and made “fellow citizens” with the Holy Trinity.

When Jesus emerged from the waters of His own baptism, the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove and rested upon Him. Jesus understood this as a kind of anointing or confirmation of His ministry. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” he quoted, “because he has anointed me.” (Luke 4:18) In this way He associated His experience with that of the Old Testament prophets, priests and kings who were anointed with oil for their ministry.

In the same way, as we emerge from the waters of Baptism, we are anointed with the Holy Chrism for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Just as in Baptism we share in Christ’s death and resurrection, so too in Chrismation we share in His anointing with the Holy Spirit. We share fully in the Christ-life. For this reason our Christian initiation is often referred to as our Christening. We are now “other Christs,” other anointed ones.
... A MINISTERING MEMBER OF CHRIST

When the Old Testament prophets, priests and kings were anointed, it was to prepare them for their mission. So too, when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, He began His saving ministry among God’s People. Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, was the beginning of its ministry as well. Now every Christian is an anointed one: gifted with the Spirit for the sake of a mission:

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people claimed by God for His own to proclaim the triumphs of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

To be a Christian, then, is to be a proclaimer. To be anointed head, eyes, nostrils, lips, ears, breast, hands and feet – that is, my whole body – is to be dedicated in my whole person. We are truly the temple of the presence of God, called to be images of His love and compassion. This is a mission of witness to the world, to be a living icon or reflection of God's image. We are sanctified so as to be Christ-bearers, and our whole life should offer a glimpse, a transparency into the new world of God’s kingdom. This is certainly a far cry from a private, individualistic religion: a closet Christianity which can so often lead to a self-justifying snobbery or, perhaps worse, a pious indifferentism.

It is for this life in the Church, in the community, that the Spirit is given to us. His presence is manifested differently in each one, but always for the sake of that public role which is ours as members in Christ’s witnessing Body, the Church. “To each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 17:7) The gift of the Spirit in Chrismation, then, is an indispensable part of Christian initiation, as the public stance of the proclaimer is an indispensable element of Christian life.

To be anointed with the Holy Spirit is to be made holy by the grace of Christ. It is to realize that God, who created me as good, has re-created me in the bath of Baptism, and that this is the source of my dignity as a person. We are “saints,” holy ones – not because we are better than anyone else – but because God has set us apart. He has shared His divine life with us.

Finally to be anointed with the Holy Chrism is to be made one with the Church. Our Baptism makes us children of the Father, His adopted sons and daughters. We are involved with the life of the Trinity. And since we are all children of the same Father, we are brothers and sisters to each other; that is, we belong to the Church. Our Chrismation reinforces this dimension of belonging to the Church. For, although the Chrismation is done by the priest, the chrism is sanctified by the patriarch or bishop. And all the people of his eparchy or area are anointed with the chrism that comes from him, thus signifying our union with the larger dimension of the Church.
After all these rites of Baptism and Chrismation are completed, the newly-baptized together with the sponsors are led in procession three times around the baptismal font. The procession which signifies the walking in the newness of life, the procession into the Kingdom, is accompanied by the following hymn which, in a few words, describes all we want to say here:

**All of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ Alleluya!**

... **A SHARER IN THE EUCHARIST**

If Baptism is our mystical participation in the death and resurrection of Christ and Chrismation is our deification, our participation in the divine life, then only one thing is lacking for complete union. Christ became a sharer in our flesh and blood through His incarnation. Now we are invited to return to share in His flesh and blood, to become one with Him.

To complete the initiation of the Christian who has been initiated through the bath of regeneration and sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the nourishment of the Bread of Life is given as a share in the full life of Christ. To eat His body and drink His blood is to become completely changed and transformed by Christ. It is to share in the one true life.

*"If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you."* (John 6:53)

There is only one true life, and that is life in Christ. To be truly alive is to live in Christ; and this is the life of the Christian. Life without Christ, on the other hand, is not really "life," but an empty form or shell. It is simply a shadow of real existence.

The Eucharist, which is the greatest of the mysteries, is our regular nourishment. It is the bread that comes down from heaven for the life of the world. This full communion with Christ is open to all baptized Christians. Baptism, the initiation into the death and resurrection of Christ, is our key...
to the Eucharist; it admits us to full participation in the life of Christ. For this reason all the
baptized – even young children and infants – are given the right to the Eucharist at the time of
their Baptism. United to Christ at Baptism, we gather at His holy table as His friends, fellow-
heirs of God’s Kingdom, to render thanks for the gift we have received.

Here it is good to note that it is most fitting to celebrate Baptism and Chrismation at the time of
the Divine Liturgy. This gives the opportunity for the church congregation to be present to
receive this new Christian into the company of the saints – for, as we have seen, Baptism is no
private affair nor is faith a private virtue! But even more importantly, to follow the Baptism with
the celebration of the Eucharist gives the fulfillment to this Christian initiation. For Baptism
always points to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is the completion or consummation of the
baptismal union.

It is an unhappy circumstance that this wholesome and unitive vision of Christian initiation has in
some places been lost and these sacraments have been separated, isolated into fragmented
moments. But the unanimous witness of the Eastern Churches (up to a relatively recent time)
has given the impetus to our Church to restore the ancient practice.

Even when the Baptism is served apart from the Divine Liturgy, some central elements of the
Liturgy (Epistle, Gospel, Lord’s Prayer and Eucharist) would form part of the Baptismal rite.

Jesus said:
“If you do not eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink of his blood, you have no life in you.”
John 6:53
Our sharing in the life of God does not end with the last Amen of the service. That is in reality only the beginning, the beginning of a new life. The sacraments introduce us into the Christian life which, as all life, must be nourished so that it may grow. Life never stands still; it is growing or else it is dying.

In other words, we are beginning a new life: one whose direction is towards the kingdom of God. This Kingdom is already present through Baptism and the new life received in it; but it must also grow in each one of us until we reach the full measure of our life in Christ.

*And if you and we belong to Christ, guaranteed as His and anointed, it is all God's doing! It is God who has set His seal upon us and has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts as a pledge of what is to come.*  
1 Corinthians 1:21
THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Our initiation into this life in Christ gives us a definite orientation. We are on a path that leads to the fullness of life. There are two important elements on that path that find expression in our Christian initiation.

In Matthew 28:19-20, the passage read at a Baptism, the Lord tells His disciples, "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 things that I have commanded you..." Once we are baptized we have to be taught. As he or she grows, a child must be instructed, first of all at home, and then by the Church, if the Lord’s precept is to be followed.

The early Church followed this command in a more immediate way. The first week of a new adult Christian’s life was spent learning about the Holy Mysteries in which they could now participate. This week was climaxed on the Eighth Day with a special blessing that the new Christian may grow in this new life through sharing in these Holy Mysteries.

In the Prayer of the Eighth Day, which completes the initiation celebration, the priest prays that the newly baptized “...may be made perfect through the awesome mysteries of Christ so that, after living according to Your precepts and guarding intact Your seal, he may receive the happiness of Your chosen ones in Your Kingdom.”

When children are baptized apart from the community Liturgy it is especially appropriate that they be brought to church on the next Sunday to participate in the Liturgy and be presented to the community as its newest member. The child may be tonsured at that time, entering on another aspect of the path to life. A Christian in called to a life of self-giving in imitation of Christ. When the child gives his or her first offering of hair in this way, we are all reminded of our call to give of ourselves as Christ has given Himself to us.
SOME THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Our Church confers the Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation (Confirmation, the baptism in the Holy Spirit) in one ceremony. The child is then welcomed into the worshipping community and receives Holy Communion for the first time. You should speak to the priest well in advance of the day you would like to select for the Baptism because Baptisms are not permitted on certain days. You should also be aware of the following:

- **Preparation** – Most parishes require parents to meet with the priest or deacon to reflect on the mystery and to discuss the specifics of the ceremony.

- **Sponsors (Godparents)** – You must have at least one sponsor of the same sex as the child. This person must be practicing their faith to be a role model for your child. Church law requires that the sponsor be at least 14 years old. Other (honorary) sponsors are usually welcome. Consult with your priest before asking anyone.

- **Baptismal Garments** – You will need to obtain a white baptismal garment (preferably a robe) which the priest will bless and confer as part of the ceremony. The child should be brought to church wearing ordinary clothing.

- **A Baptismal Cross and Chain** – These will be blessed and put on the child with the baptismal garments.

- **Baptismal Candle** – Some parishes provide a candle for the ceremony. Others encourage parents to obtain a specially decorated candle for the occasion.

- **Other Items Needed** – Bring a small bottle of olive oil for the priest to bless and use in anointing the child. You may wish to take the remaining blessed oil home for use in your family prayers. Also bring a large towel to dry the baby after the baptism. Some people like to bring an empty bottle so that they can take home some of the blessed water as well.

- **Recording the Ceremony** - Anyone taping or photographing the ceremony should be familiar with and respectful of our church etiquette. If you are hiring a professional photographer, be sure that he or she respects our Church and its practices.

- **Donations** – The offering made at the time of a Baptism should be made in the form of a check to the church. Ask the priest for the current practices in your parish.

- **Prayer on the Eighth Day** – It is customary to bring the child back to church on the Sunday following the Baptism wearing the baptismal garments. A special prayer will be offered for the child following the Liturgy.

- **Baptismal Certificate** – The baptism is recorded in the parish baptismal register. The priest may give you a copy after the baptism; note that when a baptismal certificate is required for church or school purposes, you will need to obtain a new copy from the parish.

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WHEN YOU ARE BAPTIZED, IT IS NOT BY THE PRIEST THAT YOU ARE BAPTIZED, BUT IT IS GOD WHO TOUCHES YOUR HEAD WITH HIS INVISIBLE POWER.

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
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