

Great Lent:

The Divine Incarnation, Holy Baptism, and the

Holy Mysteries



Lost sheep on the
shoulders of Christ
the Incarnate Son of
God.

“But when he disobeyed You, the true God who had created him, and was led astray by the deception of the serpent becoming subject to death through his own transgressions, You, O God, in Your righteous judgment, expelled him **from paradise into this world**, returning him to the earth from which he was taken, yet providing for him the **salvation of regeneration in Your Christ**. For You did not forever reject Your creature whom You made, O Good One . . . And when the fullness of time had come, **You spoke to us through Your Son Himself** . . . He lived in this world, and gave us precepts of salvation. Releasing us from the delusions of idolatry, He guided us to the sure knowledge of You, the true God and Father . . . ”

- Anaphora of St. Basil the Great

God did not abandon His creature in His own Image, but sent His Only Begotten Son, who - as one of the Holy Trinity - assumed human nature (the lost sheep). He who is Life joined human nature to Himself in His own Person, overcoming the separation of the eternal God and humanity.

He who is the Image of the Father appeared in the Flesh, showing us the Light of the Father in the Holy Spirit - thereby God the Holy Trinity is revealed, and each lost sheep is called to the Father through Christ.



“He gave Himself as ransom to death in which we were held captive, sold under sin. Descending into Hades through the cross, that He might fill all things with Himself, **He loosed the bonds of death. He rose on the third day**, having opened a path for all flesh to the resurrection from the dead, since it was not possible that the Author of life would be dominated by corruption . . . **Ascending into heaven**, He sat at the right hand of Your majesty on high and **He will come to render to each according to His works.**”

- Anaphora of St. Basil the Great

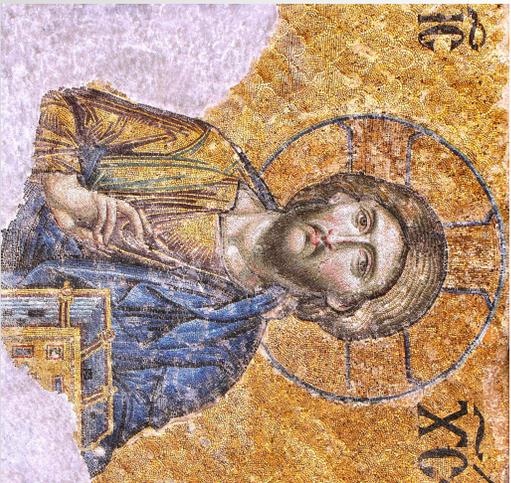
“Thou, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into salvation.”

- St. Gregory the Theologian

Through His death, Christ took upon Himself the punishment of sin (though as the sinless Son of God). As Immortal God, He rose from the dead, and opened the path of resurrection and eternal life in His own Person (to whom we are united in Holy Baptism and the Holy Mysteries).

He will return in glory to render to each according to His works (Romans 2:6), and will confess those before His Father and the angels who confessed Him in this life (Matthew 16:27).





“[They] were baptized by him [St. John the Baptizer], **confessing their sins.**” -Matthew 3:6

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again [ἄνωθεν - ‘again’ / ‘from above’], he cannot see the Kingdom of God . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”

- **John 3:3, 5**

“As many as are persuaded and believe that what we [Christians] teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly . . . are brought by us where there is water, and are **regenerated** in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, ‘**Except you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.**’”

- **St. Justin Martyr (151 A.D.)**

Holy Baptism is the mystery of the re-creation of a human being in Christ - the forgiveness of sins, the robe of incorruption, the entrance into God’s Kingdom.



In Holy Baptism, one is mystically and truly united to Christ in His Body, the Church. This is only performed once in one's lifetime.

“ . . . In one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins . . . ”

- **150 Holy Fathers of the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.)**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, **all things have become new.**”

- **II Corinthians 5:17**

“We may not receive Baptism twice or thrice.”

- **St. Cyril of Jerusalem (300s A.D.)**

In Holy Baptism, one repents of their sins (normally through confession) and is baptized into the Church, the Body of Christ. This is only performed once in one's lifetime.

Those baptized in other groups (non-Orthodox) are either received by Holy Baptism, or their previous baptisms (Trinitarian-triple immersion // at discretion of bishop) are completed through Holy Chrismation, thereby receiving them into the Holy Orthodox Church.



“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

- Colossians 1:13-14

“**Receive with earnestness the exorcisms** . . . when the exorcists inspire terror by the Spirit of God, and set the soul, as it were, on fire in the crucible of the body, the hostile demon **flees away**, and there abide **salvation** and the **hope of eternal life**, and the soul henceforth is cleansed from its sins and has salvation.”

- St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Prior to Holy Baptism, humans (even if often seen as relatively ‘good people’) abide under the influence of sin and evil. At Holy Baptism, a person renounces satan, and the priest blows upon the person and commands the evil spirit to leave. The baptismal candidate renounces all evil works, evil spirits, pride, and the devil himself - and (facing west) physically breathes/spits in his face. He then faces east (toward paradise/the return of Christ/the Kingdom of God) and promises his/her life to the Lord.

In Holy Baptism, a person is transferred from the dominion of darkness to the Light of the Kingdom of God, receiving from God a holy angel as invisible guardian on the path to eternal life.



“Baptizing them in the Name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit.**”

- **Matthew 28:19**

“If any bishop or presbyter does not perform the one initiation with **three immersions**, but with giving one immersion only, into the death of the Lord, let him be deposed. For the Lord said not, Baptize into my death, but, Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

- **Canon 50 of the Holy Apostles**

Orthodox Baptism is performed in the Apostolic manner - by triple immersion and emersion.

“**The servant of God _____ is baptized in the Name of the Father** [first immersion/emersion]. **Amen.** And of the **Son** [second immersion/emersion]. **Amen.** And of the **Holy Spirit** [third immersion/emersion]. **Amen.**”





“Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

- Matthew 28:19

Upon arising from the waters the third time, the person receives a candle (for the Light of Christ), a white garment (symbolizing the complete and heavenly purity bestowed in the Mystery of Holy Baptism), and a cross to wear. It is traditional for the baptismal cross to be worn at all times.

The priest leads the person and their sponsor(s) three times (for the Holy Trinity) around the baptismal font in a counterclockwise fashion (for eternity - against the temporal order of the world).





“You have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

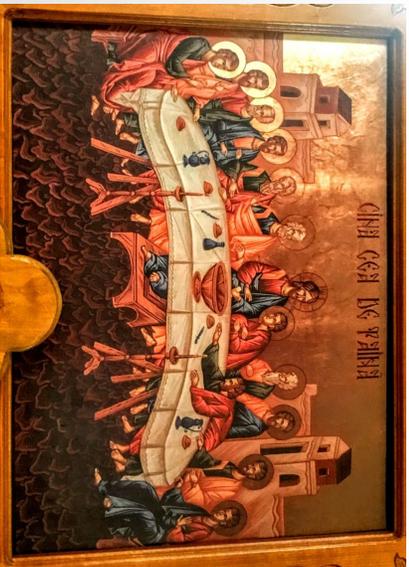
- **Romans 8:15**

“But beware of supposing this to be plain ointment. For as the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Ghost, is mere bread no longer, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no more simple ointment, nor (so to say) common, after invocation, but it is Christ's gift of grace, and, by the advent of the Holy Ghost, is made fit to impart His Divine Nature. Which ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and your other senses ; and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.”

- **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

The priest anoints the new Christian with Holy Chrism for the receiving of the Holy Spirit given to the Church at Pentecost.

A small amount of their hair is cut, symbolizing obedience to God as His servant.



“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you.** Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For **My Flesh is food indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed.**”

- John 6:53-56

“**The Flesh of the Lord giveth life . . .** that Flesh giveth life because it is that of the Word who giveth life to all.”

- St. Cyril of Alexandria

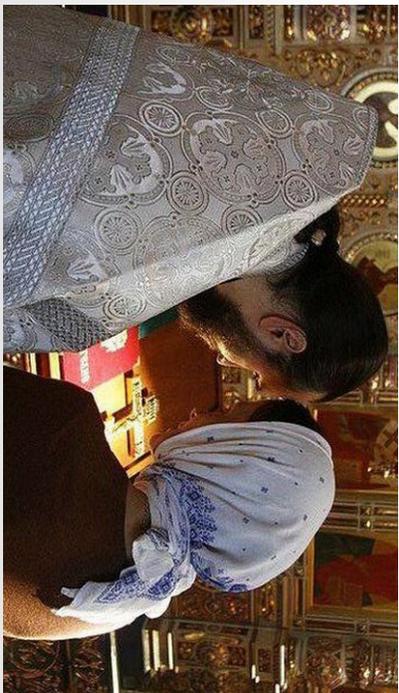
“Breaking one and the same bread, which is the **medicine of immortality,** and the antidote to prevent us from dying, but [which causes] that we should live for ever in Jesus Christ.”

- St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 107 A.D.)



One should normally pray the Prayers of Preparation before receiving Holy Communion.

After receiving Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation, the new believer receives Holy Communion, which is the mystical and true Body and Blood of Christ.



“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

- I John 1:9



“If the Lord only cleansed sins in baptism, few indeed would be saved. But in His mercy He has given us a second cleansing, also called a second baptism: the baptism by tears.”

- Fr. Daniel Sysoev



The path of repentance is always open to us. The purity bestowed in our baptism can be renewed through Holy Confession, but baptism can never be repeated.



“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

- **John 20:23**

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

- **1 John 1:9**

Christ gave power by the Holy Spirit to the Apostles to remit sins upon earth, thereby manifesting His Priestly ministry. This authority is passed on by laying on of hands in ordination from Christ to the bishops/priests in every generation.



“There is more mercy in God than there are sins in us. **Confess your sins at once**, whatever they may be.”

- St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

“[The power of absolution in Holy Confession] penetrates to the soul and reaches up to heaven.”

- St. John Chrysostom

In Holy Confession, we open our hearts and confess all of our sins to the best of our awareness and remembrance. The confessor will offer counsel or guidance, place his stole (*epitrachelion*) over the head of the one confessing, and read the prayer of forgiveness for the absolution of sins and reconciliation with God and His Church.

Holy Confession (along with prayer and forgiveness) is a key part of preparation for Holy Communion.

Many Orthodox worldwide confess each time they commune, though generally one should confess (if not monthly) at least during the major fasting periods of the year, and especially the season of Holy Lent.

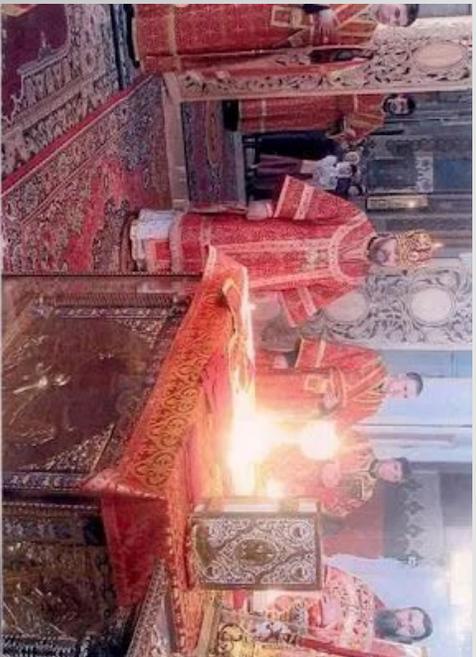


“No one takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God.”

- Hebrews 5:4

The Holy Priesthood originates not in human election, but the Lord’s consecration of His Apostles who ordained their successors - each bishop is consecrated by two or three others (holding the true faith) in a line going back to Christ. By the Divine Grace, the priesthood realizes the work of Christ the Great High Priest upon earth - as an icon of Christ, and celebrating the Holy Mysteries.

There are three major orders of Holy Priesthood: Deacon, Priest (Presbyter), and Bishop (*cheirotonia* - full ordination); there are two minor orders: Reader and Subdeacon (*cheirothesia* - minor ordination or setting apart).





“He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’
.. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

- **Matthew 19:4-6**

The Orthodox Faith considers marriage to be one of two primary blessed paths of life: monasticism and marriage.

Monasticism is a radical dedication to God in the ‘angelic way’ of consecrated celibacy modeled by Christ, His Mother, St. John the Baptist, and St. John the beloved disciple, etc. The Church accords a special honor to this path.

Christian Marriage also has immense dignity and honor, as blessed by God in the Mystery. The family in some sense forms a unit of the Church.

Each has its own joys and challenges. Both paths are images of the Kingdom and lead to God if lived with faith.



“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

- James 5:14-16

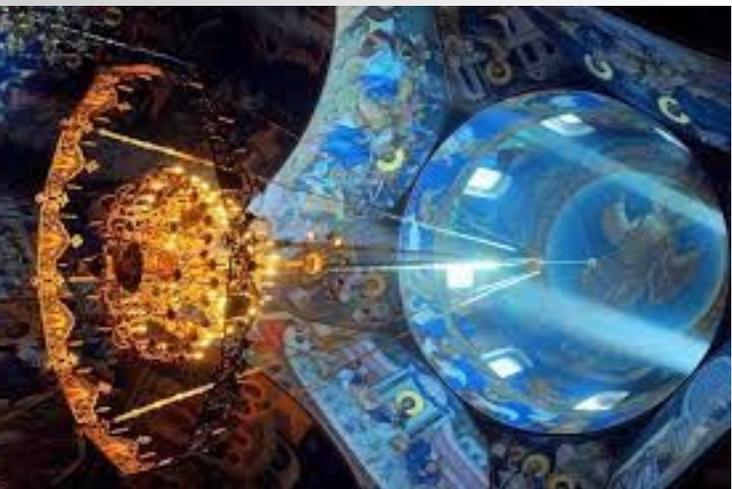
The Mystery of Holy Unction, a believer is anointed with blessed oil, often with the Gospel Book held over their head during the prayers.

The faithful may receive bodily healing, if God so wills.

The Lord is faithful to offer His Divine Grace and forgiveness of sins through the Mystery, effecting spiritual healing.

The Lord gives His Grace through the Mystery to endure the sufferings of illness with patience and love.





“All present things are but a shadow of the future. The present light is a shadow of the future ineffable light. Earthly bliss is a faint shadow of future unspeakable, eternal bliss; fire a faint shadow of the fire of Gehenna, which will burn sinners unto ages of ages; pure earthly joy a shadow of unspeakable future joys . . . ‘Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father,’ according to the Saviour’s sure promise.”

- St. John of Kronstadt

While all of creation is in some sense ‘sacramental’ (revealing God’s presence / a means to communion with God), the Holy Mysteries of the Church are truly higher realities of the Kingdom of God, the Light of which Kingdom will be seen fully by the righteous in the age to come.

Questions / Discussion