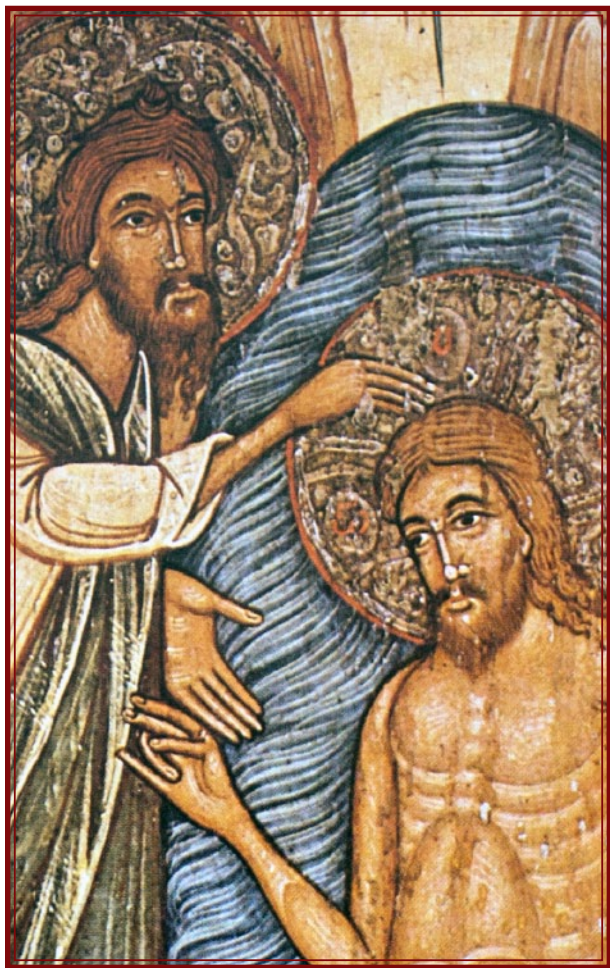


# Preparing for the Holy Mysteries: Baptism and Chrismation



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*“Brethren! 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.*

*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

(Romans 6:3-4, 11)

## **The Christian formation of children**

Every Christian is called upon every day — every minute, to remember that life in this world is fleeting, and consider that it is life in God’s Kingdom which is eternal. Even during the Baptism service we read the words of St. Paul cited above. We understand that we will all be called upon to give an accounting before God for our life — all the good we have done, and all the evil we have done.

Our greatest responsibility before God is the Christian formation of our children.

- Did we teach them about God?
- About the saving Orthodox Faith?
- How to pray?
- How to behave in a Christian manner?

Our Lord Himself said:

*“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”*

(Matthew 18:6)

Such is the responsibility of parents towards their children!

A true Christian upbringing begins before the baptism and does not end with the Baptism itself. A true Christian formation includes prayer, moral behaviour, education in the Faith, and especially the good example of parents.

It sometimes happens that parents require help. For this, God gave us the Church. Remember that the best teachers are always those who never stop learning — attend Church and learn about your Creator together with the children which He gave you. Every Orthodox child should attend Church School, where they will formally learn about their Faith, just as they learn mathematics, language, or other important subjects in their weekday schools. Never be embarrassed to approach the priest when something is needed, or when you have a question. Always remember, that Christian education does not last eight or thirteen or seventeen years — it should continue throughout our whole life here on earth.

## **A Christian name**

Every person who becomes a member of the Christian Church receives a Christian name — the name of a saint. In today’s world, where many children are given non-Christian names. It is very important that parents give their children Christian names. In the event that the person approaching for Holy Baptism does not have a Christian name, it is imperative that one be chosen for them, which will become their baptismal (Church) name.

## **Godparents**

From the earliest times those who wished to become members of the Church had “sponsors”, that is, “Godparents” who would witness to their morality and integrity before the community (if those being baptized were adults), and help with the Christian education of their Godchildren (whether children or adults). According to the teaching and practice of the Orthodox Church, Godparents must be faithful, practicing, active members of the Orthodox Church. We all understand that no one can sponsor someone else for membership into an organization to which they themselves do not belong.

Further, the greatest obligation of the Godparents is the Orthodox Christian upbringing of the Godchild. This cannot be done by someone who does not know or practice the Orthodox Faith. For this reason it is imperative that at least one of the Godparents must be Orthodox (usually the Godfather for a boy, or the Godmother for a girl). The non-Orthodox Godparents however, must be Christians who were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and be good, moral, active and practicing members in their faith community.

Under no circumstances is it permitted for people living openly sinful lives, atheists or agnostics, etc., even if they were baptized in the Orthodox Church, to be Godparents.

## Place and time for the Baptism

The Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation should always be served in the Church. According to tradition, the Baptism should be served before the Divine Liturgy, so that the mother and child might receive Holy Communion together during the Liturgy. In practice, this seldom occurs. In our circumstances the Baptism usually takes place immediately after the Liturgy, and the child is communed after the Baptism and Chrismation.

If it should happen, that for some good reason the Baptism is served at another time (on a Saturday, for instance), the parents and Godparents should bring the child for Holy Communion at the first opportunity and, provided that they approach (with proper preparation) the Holy Mysteries.

Likewise, it is expected that the parents and Godparents will take care that every Orthodox child will receive Holy Communion at every possible opportunity. When they are around seven years of age, parents and Godparents

should see to it that their children/ Godchildren receive formal instruction regarding the Holy Mystery of Confession. From the time that the child understands right and wrong, good and evil, they should take part in Holy Confession as well as Holy Communion as often as possible – not just once a year.

## What is needed for the Baptism?

Parents or Godparents should bring:

- A cross for the newly baptized to wear
- A large, white bath-towel
- Two candles
- A piece of white linen or white robe (the “*kryzhma*”)\*

The “*kryzhma*” symbolizes the radiance and purity of Jesus Christ. The newly baptized is clothed in it immediately after being immersed in the font. This act echoes the words of St. Paul:

*“All those who have been baptized in Christ have been vested in Christ.”*

(Galatians 3:27)



During the Baptism the Godparents verbally renounce Satan and accept Christ, and recite the **Symbol of Faith** on behalf of the child.

## The Symbol of Faith

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages.

Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not created; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us people and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.

And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried.

And the third day He rose from the dead in accordance with the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father; who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

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

I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen.

*\* There is a beautiful Ukrainian custom, whereby a running cloth (рушник) is embroidered from the kryzhma — to be used at the wedding of the child who wore it upon emerging from the Baptismal font.*