

Sacramental Guidelines: Baptism

Baptism is the sacrament by which one gains entry into the Church and is united to Christ. In the waters of baptism, we die to our old fallen nature and rise to new life in Christ. St. Paul states,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in the 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 (Romans 6:3-4, RSV).

Orthodox Christians are the original and genuine “born again Christians” (re: John 3:3-7). Our mother is the Church and the baptismal font is the womb. In the waters of baptism, by the grace and operation of the Holy Spirit, we are born again and we are renewed and regenerated (re: Titus 3:5). Exiting out of the waters of baptism, we are also clothed with Christ. As St. Paul states, “...as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27, RSV) Baptism is the sacrament in which we are cleansed of sin, regenerated, born again, and clothed with Christ. St. Cyril of Jerusalem said that baptism is also the sacrament in which we receive our adoption as the sons and daughters of God.¹

The sacrament of baptism has a certain expectation – that the one who is baptized will be an active member of the Church. For an adult, this is easy. Adults are baptized after a year-long period of catechism where they are taught the Orthodox Christian faith and demonstrate their willingness to follow Christ. In the case of infant baptism, that responsibility – that pledge – is fulfilled by the child’s parents and Orthodox Christian godparent(s). Baptism is not a talisman for good luck or against evil, it is not merely an ethnic custom, it is not an excuse for a party, and it is not done just so mom and dad can appease the baby’s grandparents. To seek an Orthodox Christian baptism for a child with no parental intention to commend the child, each other, and their whole lives unto Christ our God within the confines of the Orthodox Christian faith is intolerable.

If someone wants their child(ren) baptized and are not members of All Saints of North America Antiochian Orthodox Church, they may do so by following these recommended guidelines:

1. Meet with the parish priest in person and make known your desire to baptize and raise your child(ren) in the Orthodox Christian faith.
2. Begin attending All Saints of North America on a regular basis (i.e. Sundays and feast days).
3. Regular participation in the sacraments of the Church (Communion, Confession, etc.).
4. If you like our parish family, the next step is to become a member by making a stewardship commitment to the Church.
5. After a period of 6 months (maybe more, maybe less) after your initial meeting with the priest, once you have demonstrated your commitment to the Orthodox faith, then your child(ren) can be baptized.
6. Any variation on these guidelines will be considered after the priest has discussed the issue with the parents and with the local bishop.

Once the criteria for baptism have been met, we obediently follow the baptismal guidelines put forth by our Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. They are as follows:

1. Receiving instruction in the Orthodox Christian faith for catechumens over the age of seven (7) is mandatory
2. Written consent from the legal guardian is necessary for those candidates who are minors and anyone under custodianship (Infants are excluded).
3. The sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion are very important to every Orthodox Christian and the Godparents must receive them prior to the celebration of and participation in the Sacrament of Baptism.
4. The seriousness of this sacrament requires that at least one (1) Godparent must be an Orthodox Christian. The priest may accept only one (1) non-Orthodox Christian as a witness only as long as he/she is proved to be a validly baptized Christian person.
5. The parish facility is the best and standard place to perform the sacrament of Holy Baptism. It is the sacred space and the community center where all needed and correct instruments are accessible, the large font for a total immersion of the candidate is available and all other tools are present, etc. Nevertheless, in cases of extreme urgency, the sacrament of Holy Baptism

may be administered outside of the parish facility with permission of the auxiliary bishop.

6. In the case of an adult, baptism is normally done by Aspersions – the pouring of the blessed baptismal water over the head of the candidate. This is an ancient and valid practice in the Orthodox Church attested to in important ancient documents such as The Didache which states, “...pour water over the head three times in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.”²
7. Guest clergy are welcome to celebrate only at the invitation of the parish priest.
8. The week following Baptism, the godparents must bring the child to the Divine Liturgy to receive Holy Communion in front of the entire parish for the first time. In some traditions, this is done for three consecutive weeks after the baptism; the newly-baptized and their godparent(s) receive communion first in front of the whole congregation.
9. The new ties among the Godparents, parents, and the candidate(s) resulting from the celebration of Holy Baptism make marriages between godchildren and the children of Godparents forbidden, and so the rules of consanguinity are generally observed for godchild/godparent relations.
10. Emergency baptisms may require the discretion of the pastor to be completed upon recovery.
11. The reception of converts may be found in the Service Book of Chrismation published by the Archdiocese. All Candidates baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity need not be re-baptized. The only Trinity that the Orthodox Christian Church recognizes is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Modern day terminologies like “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier,” etc. are not accepted and persons baptized as such must be re-baptized in order to be received into the Orthodox Christian Church.

¹ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, F.L. Cross, ed., (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), pg.61-62.

² *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*. Edited and revised by Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), pg. 259.