

# BAPTISM IN THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

In the Orthodox Church, baptism is not just a service, but a sacrament (a 'mystery'). It therefore follows that the act of baptism is the channel for the conveyance of the grace of God upon a person, where God 'washes away' sin, infuses the baptised with his grace and forgiveness, and (through the Sacrament of Confirmation) imparts the 'gifts of the Spirit' needed before anyone can grow into Christian perfection. As such, you should approach baptism with awe and respect, and give glory to God for the great gift he offers.

Baptism is not a separate act to be seen apart from other aspects of life in the Church; it is the 'beginning' of the Christian journey and a necessary start to a 'life lived in Christ'. From the very beginning of the Church, baptism was regarded as a sacred act of God where he blesses us because out of his love for us and his concern for our sinful state.

Remember, you have no rights before God. God freely gives baptism and all the sacraments of the Church because He loves us: we do not deserve his gifts. With this in mind, I would like to share information to aid in any preparation towards baptism.

The godparent is there to assist in the spiritual growth and development of a Christian person. By agreeing to be a godparent, a person takes on a very serious and important role in the life of another. The godparent should be selected carefully and prayerfully and should be willing to be a Christian Orthodox example and a guide to his or her godchild. It is for this reason that the Holy Orthodox Church places great expectations on godparents. An ineffective godparent can damage the spiritual growth of a new Christian.

It is a rule (or 'canon') of our Orthodox Church that there can be only one godparent at a baptism. This person may be male or female and must be twelve years of age or older. In the case of the baptism of an older child or an adult, it is good sense for the godparent to be approximately the same age or older than his or her godchild.

The godparent must be an Orthodox Christian who is in 'good standing' with the canonical Orthodox Church. For example, a person who has been excommunicated or who is a member of a non-canonical ('false') church or congregation that claims to be 'orthodox' cannot be a godparent in our Church. The prospective godparent may be asked to provide a copy of his or her baptism certificate. If you are unsure of a person's suitability as a godparent, check with the priest before you arrange the service.

It must be noted that an Orthodox Christian is forbidden by canon law to be a godparent at a non-Orthodox or non-canonical baptism service.

The godparent will be required (at the baptism of a baby or a young child) to fulfil the obligations of the baptismal service by responding to the questions that are to be

found in the service booklet (these responses may be read from the service book; they do not have to be said from memory). At the baptism of an older child or an adult, the candidate will make the responses for himself or herself and the godparent will provide a supporting role during the service. The godparent will sign the baptism certificate and the baptism register of the Church.

It cannot be stressed enough that the choice of a suitable godparent can be critical to the Christian growth and development of the newly Baptised in the Holy Orthodox Church.

Certain forms and procedures are needed before any baptism can take place in the Church. A person or family wishing to arrange a baptism service must prepare practical things and prayerfully seek the Grace of God. Baptism is not to be treated lightly or as unimportant, it is God at work in the life of a person.

Even if a person has more than one legal name, the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia permits only one baptismal name at a service of baptism. The name given to a person at baptism signifies his or her spiritual identity. As such, it is usual for this baptismal name to be of a saint of the Orthodox Church, an acceptable biblical name, a name from the ministry of Christ, or a name from the history and life of the Church. The baptismal name may be different to a person's legal name.

If you are unsure about a name, please check with the priest before you choose a particular baptismal name. To find out about the date of the 'Name Day' for a particular name, please ask the priest.

In the Greek Orthodox Church, baptism is made in the name of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The actual baptism must be by triple immersion, or at least a triple covering with water. The whole body must be covered with the baptismal waters. Sprinkling with water is not acceptable except in cases of emergency baptism; a newborn child in danger of death would be such an emergency situation.

At least one month's notice should be given to the parish priest of the Church where the baptism will take place; a check well beforehand will ensure the availability of day and time for the service. In the case of the baptism of a teenager or an adult, a time of preparation for the candidate is required before the baptism service can take place.

Some fees will be due on the day of baptism. Fees for the baptismal certificate, personnel and the parish have been standardised across the Archdiocese. Fees can be paid before the service, or left with the priest immediately after the baptismal service. If you would like to enquire about these fees, please speak to the priest. Any other donations you would like to the Church will be gratefully received. If the service is physically away from the parish area, it is expected that a donation to cover travelling expenses will be offered.

The priest will require certain details for the parish records and for the issuing of a baptism certificate. The certificate should be kept safe as it is the evidence that the baptism has taken place and it is necessary for it to be shown before an Orthodox

Christian can marry in the Church.

A summary of baptismal requirements include:

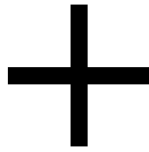
- The choosing of a suitable godparent;
- The selection of a baptised name (only *one* baptismal name- it may be different to the legal name;
- The provision of certain items necessary for the service of baptism:
  - *A cross and chain*  
to be placed around the neck of the newly baptised (although a plain cross is preferable, it does not matter what style or colour these are. The material from which these are made is also optional);
  - *A small bottle of olive oil*  
to be blessed and rubbed over the candidate before baptism;
  - *A cake of soap*  
for washing the hands of the priest and godparent after the baptism;
  - *A small white hand towel*  
kept by the Church after the service;
  - *A large white towel*  
used to hold and dry the newly baptised. It is prudent to have also a small bed sheet on top of the large towel to help soak up the oil;
  - *One or two large white candles*  
There is no requirement to have these decorated with ribbon and material, but family members may wish to do so. It is a good custom to keep at least one of these candles and to light for a short time each year in celebration of the Name Day of the baptised person;
  - *A complete change of clothes*  
for the newly baptised to be dressed in immediately after baptism. (These should be white or light coloured);
- The payment of fees;
- Understanding of the meaning, responsibility and intended results of baptism
- A prayerful and faithful preparation for the service.

When an adult or an older child is baptised in the Orthodox Church, the procedure will be a little different than it would be for a baby. The words of the service are the same, but the related actions will be adjusted accordingly. As well as the necessary items listed above, an adult or older child baptismal candidate will need:

- *A white terry towelling bath robe;*
- *A pair of scuffs or thongs*  
the hard floors can be slippery with wet and oily feet;
- *A swimming costume*  
The older child or adult baptismal candidate *WILL NOT* be naked during the baptism Service. He or she should wear a swimming costume and have some underwear to change into after drying. A white baptismal gown may be worn over the swimming costume at the time of baptism. Privacy will be provided for the candidate to undress and dress. There is no need to rush; the priest and the congregation will gladly wait.

It is not the money spent on purchasing necessary baptismal items that makes them important, but the meaning you give to them. It is sad that many people concentrate too much on the food and drink after a baptism or on the spending of a great deal of money to purchase the items needed for the service. We should instead be focusing on the wonder and beauty of the gift of God's Spirit given at baptism, and on sins forgiven; remember, this is a sacrament (a 'mystery') of the Church.

When bathing and washing the post-baptismal clothes, it is necessary to first rinse into a container of clean water and then to pour the water out on the ground where no one will walk or pour it into a natural body of water – the ocean, a river, or a lake.



The 'Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia' has a website that provides guidance and information on baptism in the Church and on the Orthodox Christian faith

Please ask the priest if you have any other questions.

***May God Bless you!***

*"With fear of God, faith and love draw near"*

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age"*  
(Matthew 28.19-20)

*"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 6:4)

*"I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."*  
(Mark 1:8)