

The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 102

St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Topic 4: Holy Baptism

(The Faith, Chp.12)

“In Holy Baptism our fallen nature is put to death, and we are raised from the water, purified from sin, to live a new life united with Christ our God.”

(The Faith, p. 179)

What is Holy Baptism? As one of the Holy “Mysteries” in the Church, we can only begin to discuss this topic.

“Simply put, Baptism is our death, burial, and resurrection in union with Jesus Christ. It is a rite of passage, given by Christ to the Church, as an entrance into the Kingdom of God.” *(The Orthodox Study Bible, p. 352)*

“To baptize” (in Greek, *baptizo*) literally means “to immerse”, “to put into”, to dip.

Christ instructed His Disciples to go into all nations and to make disciples from among those nations, and to baptize them “**in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**”

Matthew 28:19

19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

Since the first century, the Orthodox Church has been immersing its converts fully into blessed water three times, according to the Holy Tradition of the Apostles.

Baptism unites the convert with Jesus Christ: the convert “puts on Christ”.

Galatians 3:27 “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Holy Baptism is central for our salvation: it is the necessary union.

Mark 16:15-16

15 “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved; but he who does not believe will be **condemned**.”

One must believe and one must be baptized if one wants to be among the saved.

Usually, an adult, or a youth who is old enough to understand what is happening, chooses to believe first, and then follows up afterwards by choosing to unite to Christ by being

baptized. However, for many infants, they are united to Christ through holy baptism first, with the hope that within the community of a believing family and god-parents, at some time later, they will eventually also choose to believe and “own” their baptism. Regardless of the order, **both belief and baptism** are needed. To be baptized and *never* have faith is useless.

Christ is our **Saviour**, and He gave us **Holy Baptism** as a mystical way to **join Him** and to enter **into** the eternal **communion** of **Divine Life** and love of the **Most Holy Trinity**.

John 17:23, 26

23 “**I in them**, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me... 26 ...that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, **and I in them**.”

John 14:20-23

20 “At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and **you in Me, and I in you**. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and **manifest Myself to him**.”

22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?”

23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our home with him**.”

Old Testament Images of Baptism:

1) **Israel and the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of Baptism**.

I Corinthians 10:1-2

1 “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 **all were baptized** into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”

Exodus 14:21,22,29

21 “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left...29 But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”

Just as the children of Israel **passed through the sea** and were **liberated** from bondage to Pharaoh and from certain death in Egypt, so too Holy Baptism is a person’s personal Pascha, an **exodus and a liberation** from bondage to the devil, sin, and death.

2) Noah's Ark was a prefigurement of Holy Baptism.

1 Peter 3:20-21

20 “who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the **ark** was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype **which now saves us—baptism** (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

Just as only Noah's family and the animals were saved in the ark on the water, so too the Church, which is the Body of Christ, the New Ark, offers salvation through the waters of Holy Baptism.

3) Circumcision was a prefigurement of Holy Baptism (the new circumcision not made by hands).

Genesis 17:12-14

12 He who is eight days old among you shall be **circumcised**, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. 13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

In the days of Abraham, the **circumcision** of the flesh was commanded by God (in Genesis 17:12-14) as the rite of initiating an eight-day-old male Hebrew into the Old Covenant (the Agreement, or Testament) that God had made with Abraham and to his descendants after him. To remain uncircumcised was seen as one's refusal of God's covenant. The individual had broken God's covenant and was “cut off” from the people of God. The infant Hebrew boy was not asked IF he wanted to part of the chosen people, part of the Old Covenant. Rather, his parents decided for him, they obeyed the command of God, with the hope that their boy would be raised up within their religious community to eventually decide for himself that he wanted to be a part of, and remain a part of, their Covenant community, and therefore be “bar mitzvahed” at the age 12 (or 13) and become responsible for his own actions as a believing Jew.

Circumcision in the **Old Testament** was a **pre-figurement**, a **foreshadowing** of **Holy Baptism** in the **New Testament**. The Messiah (the Christ) established a New Covenant (a *New Agreement*, a *New Testament*) in which He “circumcises” (not a piece of skin) but removes the sins of the flesh of the convert who is joining the *New People of God*, the Church, the *New* and *true* Israel of God.

Colossians 2:11-12

11 “In Him you were also circumcised with the **circumcision made without hands**, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the **circumcision of Christ**, **12 buried with Him in baptism**, in which you also were **raised** with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

The baptism of John the Baptist vs. the Baptism of the Messiah, the Christ.

John the Baptist was the greatest and last of the Old Testament prophets. He prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah. He offered a baptism of repentance, but spoke of the coming Messiah Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Mark 1:4,7-8

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins... 7 And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is **mightier than I**, whose sandal strap **I am not worthy** to stoop down and loose. 8 I indeed baptized you with water, but **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit**.”

Acts 19:4-5

4 Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, **on Christ Jesus**. 5 When they heard this, they were **baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**.”

Jesus transforms the water of the Jordan, by personally entering it, and thereby, transforming baptism itself, raising it up from a simple expression of a desire to be cleansed of sins, to a **mysterious actual union with the Messiah**, in the water of one’s own baptism, which **actually washes** away one’s sins and **actually unites** one to the Most Holy Trinity, **renewing** God’s Image in us, **recreating** us, **regenerating** us.

Holy Baptism is “the washing of regeneration” (regenerate means to start over, to begin again, to give life to again). We are saved by this “washing” that starts a NEW LIFE in us.

Titus 3:5-6

“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy **He saved us, through the washing of regeneration** and renewing of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior”

Holy Baptism is a washing of regeneration, while Holy Chrismation, (which always immediately follows Baptism in the Eastern Orthodox Church), is the receiving of the Gift of the Holy Spirit (“the renewing of the Holy Spirit”). Thus, for each person there is a **personal Pascha** followed by a **personal Pentecost**.

Holy Baptism is our entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and the entrance of the Kingdom of God into us.

John 3:3-8

3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.** 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Baptism is for us a rebirth, a regeneration. One “must be born of water and the Spirit” in order to enter the Kingdom of God. (John 3:5) We are spiritually reborn and come alive with Christ in the Holy Water of Baptism, where we “put on Christ”, and then we are given the “power from on high”—the Gift of the Holy Spirit—in Holy Chrismation.

Jesus **showed us this pattern** when He humbled Himself to be baptized in the River Jordan and immediately afterwards the Holy Spirit was seen visibly descending upon Him in the form of a dove. He had no sins and did not need to be washed clean. He was always united with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But He entered the Jordan to make the waters holy for all of us, for our baptisms. He is the “Divine soap”, so to speak.

In Holy Baptism we are granted remission of sins, followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38

38 “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the **remission of sins**; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Holy Baptism joins us to Christ and to His Death and Resurrection.

His victory over sin, death, and the devil becomes quite tangibly ours, by a mystical sharing, a real union.

Romans 6:2-11

2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were **buried with Him**

through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our **old man was crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1) In Baptism there is a first dying, and a second ongoing continual daily dying.

In Holy Baptism we die to sin. This is the “first dying.” We participate mystically in Christ’s own Death. Our “old man” (the Old Adam, our fallen nature) is put to death.

St. Paul said this concerning the first dying:

Galatians 2:20

“I have been **crucified with Christ**; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Romans 6:3, 6

3 “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?...6 knowing this, that our **old man was crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”

See also Colossians 2:9-15 (quoted in part above)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Cent.) offers this quote concerning the first dying: “You descended into the water and came up again three times. In the very same moment you died and were born.” The Font of Baptism is our mystical **Tomb**.

St. Paul said this concerning the second ongoing continual daily dying:

Colossians 3:3-5

3 “For **you died**, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. 5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

We must live our Baptism; swim daily in our Baptism. We must own our Baptism. We are to “deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Christ.” (Luke 9:23)

2) In Baptism there is the resurrection of righteousness.

It is our entrance into the Kingdom of God.

John 3:3

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God’.”

It is our “newness of life.”

Romans 6:4

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life**.”

It is the promise of our final resurrection.

Romans 6:5,8

5 “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be **in the likeness of His resurrection**... 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that **we shall also live with Him**.”

The font of Baptism is also our mystical Womb into a new life in God. Christ lives in us.

Galatians 2:20

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me.”

3) In Baptism there is a union and a communion with Christ.

Galatians 3:27 “As many of you as were baptized into Christ, **have put on Christ**.”

John 14:23 “We will come to him and make **Our home with him**.”