

## *The Mystery of Holy Baptism*



## Planning Your Child's Sacrament of Baptism

## GREETINGS IN THE LORD!

The St. Nicholas Cathedral community shares your joy in anticipation of the sacrament of Holy Baptism for your child. Through Baptism, your child will be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit and be brought into the fullness of life in the sacred Orthodox Christian Church, the Body of Christ.

Enclosed, kindly find the information regarding Baptism in the Church, as well as forms to be completed in order to schedule the sacrament and provide us necessary information to issue the Certificate of Baptism. Please complete these forms carefully, as soon as possible and return them either via postal mail: St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Attn: Fr. Eleftherios Constantine, 419 South Dithridge Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, or by e-mail: [fr.ec@stnickspgh.org](mailto:fr.ec@stnickspgh.org).

We join you in solemn prayer and joyful celebration as you prepare for the Holy Baptism of your child. We look forward to serving you through this most sacred sacrament. May God grant your precious child many years!

*The Cathedral Clergy and Administrative Staff*

## PROCEDURES FOR SCHEDULING BAPTISM

1. **INITIAL CONTACT:** Initial contact is usually made by the parents of the child (*there are separate procedures for adult baptism*), either by telephone or e-mail. A baptismal packet is sent to the parents electronically via e-mail. The parents complete the enclosed scheduling and parental information sheets (see FORMS A & B attached) and return them to the Cathedral as soon as possible. A folder is created into which all returning paperwork and pertinent documentation is placed.
2. **THE SCHEDULING SHEET (FORM A):** The scheduling sheet (FORM A) is reviewed by the Cathedral clergy, who then schedule the date and time based on careful consideration of the Orthodox ecclesiastical calendar, major feast days of the Church, and previously scheduled services, sacraments, and/or conflicts. PLEASE NOTE: baptisms are generally not permitted from Christmas Day through the Feast of Theophany (December 25 – January 6), during Holy Week (including Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday), or on any of the Great Feast days of the Lord.

The Cathedral clergy try to honor one of the three requested dates, beginning with the first. If none can be scheduled, the Cathedral clergy will directly contact the parents in order to seek possible alternative dates and times. **PLEASE NOTE:** NO date or time is considered final until approved by the Cathedral clergy. Therefore, NO plans should be finalized by the parents, including those involving the deposit or down payment of monies for reception venues, until final approval is given. Once the Cathedral clergy have approved the date and time, the baptism may be scheduled.

3. **PARENTAL INFORMATION SHEET (FORM B):** The parental information sheet (FORM B) must be completely filled out. It is used by the Cathedral clergy to prepare the *Certificate of Birth and Baptism*, which will be signed by the Orthodox sponsor(s) upon completion of the sacrament on the day of the baptism, and then, issued to the parents of the child. \*

**\*IMPORTANT NOTE:** The child must be baptized in the name of a canonized Saint of the Orthodox Church. If there is uncertainty concerning the appropriateness of a baptismal name, inquiry should be made directly to the Cathedral clergy.

4. **THE BIRTH CERTIFICATE:** By decree of the Chancellor's office of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, no baptism may be celebrated without the prior submission of an official birth certificate issued by the State in which the child was born. The birth certificate may be scanned electronically and submitted via e-mail ([fr.ec@stnickspgh.org](mailto:fr.ec@stnickspgh.org)) or photocopied and submitted (St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Attn: Fr. Eleftherios Constantine, 419 South Dithridge Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15213). **The birth certificate must be received by the Cathedral office no later than fifteen (15) days before the date of the baptism in order for the sacrament to proceed as scheduled.**
5. **PARISHIONER(S) IN GOOD STANDING:** "Good standing" refers to both ecclesiastical and financial status. The Uniform Parish Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (Article 18, Section 1) defines a parishioner as: "Every person who is baptized and chrismated according to the rites of the Orthodox Church. The religious, social and moral duties of a parishioner are to apply the tenets of the Orthodox Faith to his/her life and to: adhere to and live

according to the tenets of the Orthodox Faith: faithfully attend the Divine Liturgy and other worship services; participate regularly in the holy sacraments; respect all ecclesiastical authority and all governing bodies of the Church; be obedient in matters of the Faith, practice and ecclesiastical order; contribute towards the progress of the Church's sacred mission; and be an effective witness and example of the Orthodox Faith and Traditions to all people." Furthermore, "a parishioner in good standing must: be eighteen years of age or over, be current in his or her stewardship and other financial obligations to the Parish," and "cooperate in every way towards the welfare and wellbeing of the Parish."

**6. FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS FOR PARISHIONERS IN GOOD STANDING:**

A primary privilege of parish membership is full participation in the sacramental life of the Church. The parents should be enrolled, contributing members of an Orthodox Christian parish. If you are a member of St. Nicholas Cathedral, then a church donation is not required. For families who are not members of St. Nicholas Cathedral, kindly provide us with a letter of good standing from your home parish priest (*and we also we ask for a donation to the Cathedral for facility usage*). If you are not enrolled in any parish, we would be pleased to make you members of St. Nicholas Cathedral. This is something that we would like you to arrange at least two weeks prior to the Baptism. For questions regarding stewardship, please feel free to call the church office.

In addition to the sanctuary usage donation, honoraria for the chanter and for the custodian are strongly encouraged. \*

**\*IMPORTANT NOTE:** In cases of financial hardship, and upon confidential consultation with the Cathedral clergy, necessary adjustments to the above Cathedral financial obligations will be made. No child will be refused baptism due to financial reasons.

**7. THE ORTHODOX SPONSOR(S):** The Orthodox sponsor(s) MUST:

- a. Be baptized and/or chrismated Orthodox Christian(s)
- b. Be at least thirteen years of age or older.
- c. If married, be married in the Orthodox Church. Please note that only ONE individual is permitted to act as sponsor (godfather/godmother). The ONLY exception to this canonical rule is the case of a MARRIED COUPLE who are BOTH Orthodox Christians, and who are thus defined by the Church through the sacrament of marriage as ONE individual. In the case of an Orthodox

- sponsor married to a non-Orthodox spouse, the latter may *indirectly* participate in the sacrament as “honorary sponsor.”
- d. If divorced, the sponsor **MUST** have received an ecclesiastical divorce.
  - e. Be member(s) in good standing with the St. Nicholas Cathedral: “A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish.” If the sponsor(s) is ***not*** a member of St. Nicholas Cathedral, they must obtain a letter from the priest of their home parish affirming they are a member in good standing of ***that*** parish. This letter may be delivered to St. Nicholas Cathedral either by postal mail or e-mail (see above) and must be received no later than fifteen (15) days before the scheduled date of the Baptism.
  - f. Be prepared on behalf of the child to respond to the questions of the Orthodox Catechism posed by the Priest, and recite or read the Nicene Creed (see rubrics below: “The Catechism Preceding Holy Baptism”). \*

**\*IMPORTANT NOTE:** Parents should give serious consideration to their selection of the sponsor, keeping in mind that the primary responsibility of the godparent is the profound role of lifelong spiritual guide to the child. This is a great and awesome spiritual responsibility, and only those qualified and eager to fulfill this sacred trust to the best of their ability should be chosen.

**9. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR SPONSOR(S):** Traditionally, the sponsoring godfather and/or godmother provide the following necessary items for the baptismal service (in contemporary practice, however, the parents, grandparents, or family members, often do):

- a. An Orthodox baptismal cross (NOT a crucifix), usually made of gold.
- b. Three white candles. Typically, the one for the godparent(s) is larger than the two smaller ones held by the witnesses, who are traditionally, but NOT necessarily, young children. All three candles are usually decorated with ribbons or trimming of some kind (a custom, NOT a requirement)
- c. A complete change of clothes, into a celebratory baptismal outfit (including undergarments) for the child, traditionally white.
- d. One large white bath towel
- e. One white twin bed flat sheet
- f. Two small white hand towels (not wash cloths)
- g. One small bottle of olive oil (new)
- h. One new bar of bath soap (for the priest and sponsor[s] to wash their hands).

Additionally, together with the parents, the godparent(s) appoint special individuals to undress and dress the child – typically, but NOT exclusively, the grandmothers – and to serve as witnesses (see b above).

Finally, it is a great honor and sacred responsibility of the sponsor(s) to bring the child – along with the large baptismal candle – to church to receive Holy Communion at the next two Divine Liturgies the child is able to attend (traditionally, the child receives Holy Communion three times, the first being on the day of the child's baptism). If the sponsor(s) is unavailable, then by all means, the parents or other family members may bring the child, instead. Above all, continue intentionally and prayerfully to nurture the child in ALL sacramental life.

#### **IMPORTANT GENERAL INFORMATION:**

1. Photographs and/or video of the baptism are permitted. However, to ensure the proper dignity and solemnity of the sacrament, the use of flash or video lights are discouraged. Our primary purpose on this day is to initiate the child into the Church, the Body of Christ, not to create theater.
2. In the instance when the family wishes to invite the Cathedral clergy to a reception or gathering following the sacrament, a formal invitation is to be sent, as is the case with all other guests. If scheduling and prior commitments permit, the Cathedral clergy will attend such gathering.

**SCHEDULING – BAPTISM (FORM A)**  
(Please Print)

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Male                      \_\_\_\_ Female                      Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

**Names of Parents:**

Father: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

REQUESTED DATES AND TIMES (in order of preference):

1.     Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_
2.     Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_
3.     Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact telephone numbers (as applicable):

1.     Father's cell: \_\_\_\_\_
2.     Mother's cell: \_\_\_\_\_
3.     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact e-mail addresses (as applicable):

1.     Father's e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_
2.     Mother's e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_
3.     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Questions or comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## PARENTAL INFORMATION SHEET (FORM B)

**Child's Information:** \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female

Legal name(s) on Birth Certificate (First, Middle, Last): \_\_\_\_\_

\* Anticipated Baptismal Name in English: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Anticipated Baptismal Name in Greek: \_\_\_\_\_

*\* According to the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, a child is baptized with one name of Orthodox Christian origin, that of a canonized Saint of the Orthodox Church.*

Born in (City, State, Country): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth (Month, Day, Year): \_\_\_\_\_

### Parent's Information:

**Father's Name** (First, Middle, Last): \_\_\_\_\_

Born in (City, State, Country): \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother's Maiden Name** (First, Middle, Last): \_\_\_\_\_

Born in (City, State, Country): \_\_\_\_\_

**Father's Religion:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Mother's Religion:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent's Current Mailing Address (complete):**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Marriage (Month, Day, Year): \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Marriage (City, State, Country): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Church (if Orthodox): \_\_\_\_\_

Marriage Performed by: \_\_\_ Priest \_\_\_ Civil Official \_\_\_ Parents Not Married

### Godparent(s) Information:

Godparent(s) Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Member of which Church: \_\_\_\_\_



# BAPTISM CHECKLIST

## Parents:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Copy of Baby's Birth Certificate
2. \_\_\_\_\_ St. Nicholas Cathedral Membership for 2023
3. \_\_\_\_\_ *Non-members only:* Church donation for facility usage
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Baptismal Fees: Honoraria for Chanter and Sexton
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Identify who will undress and dress the baby
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Select who will hold small candles for the procession

## Godparent(s):

1. Proof of parish membership
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ St. Nicholas Cathedral Membership 2023,  
or
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ If a member of another Orthodox Christian parish other than St. Nicholas, a "Letter of Good Standing" from their parish priest
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Baptismal certificate(s) of Godparent(s)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ If married, a copy of Ecclesiastical Marriage Certificate

*\*\*Note: If the Godparent(s) has been divorced, they also need to have obtained an Ecclesiastical Divorce.*

## Items needed for the Baptism (*the Godparent[s] typically is responsible for all these items*):

- ❖ a Cross with a chain for the baby,
- ❖ the baby's new white clothes in which child will be dressed after the Baptism,
- ❖ a white cloth—*ladopano* (*twin bed flat sheet*) to receive and dry the baby,
- ❖ 1 large white bath towel,
- ❖ 2 white hand towels (not washcloths),
- ❖ a small bottle of olive oil,
- ❖ a bar of soap, and
- ❖ one large baptismal candle. *Additional small candles can be used as well.*

# The Sacrament of Baptism and Chrismation

(source: [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org))

## Baptism



The Sacrament of Baptism incorporates us into the Church, the Body of Christ, and is our introduction to the life of the Holy Trinity. Water is a natural symbol of cleansing and newness of life. Through the three-fold immersion in the waters of Baptism in the Name of the Holy Trinity, one dies to the old ways of sin and is born to a new life in Christ. Baptism is one's public identification with Christ's Death and victorious Resurrection.

Following the custom of the early Church, Orthodoxy encourages the baptism of infants. The Church believes that the Sacrament is bearing witness to the action of God who chooses a child to be an important member of His people. From the day of their baptism, children are expected to mature into the life of the Spirit, through their family and the Church. The Baptism of adults is practiced where there was no previous baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity.

## Chrismation

The Sacrament of Chrismation immediately follows baptism. As the ministry of Christ was enlivened by the Spirit, and the preaching of the Apostles strengthened by the Spirit, so is the life of each Orthodox Christian sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Chrismation, which is often referred to as one's personal Pentecost, is the Sacrament which impacts the Spirit in a special way.

In the Sacrament of Chrismation, the priest anoints the various parts of the body of the newly baptized with Holy Chrism saying: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Oil, which is blessed by the bishop, is a sign of consecration and strength. The Sacrament emphasizes the truth that not only is each person a valuable member of the Church, but each one is blessed by the Spirit with certain gifts and talents. The anointing also reminds us that our bodies are valuable and are involved in the process of salvation.

The Sacrament of initiation are always concluded with the distribution of Holy Communion to the newly baptized. Ideally, this takes place within the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, especially in the case of an adult baptism. This practice reveals that Orthodoxy views children from their infancy as important members of the Church. There is never time when the young are not part of God's people.

## Overview

The service begins with initial petitions and prayers, blessing the water and then the baby is anointed with pre-baptismal oil. Oil is an oft-used symbol of the Orthodox faith, representing light, reconciliation, and peace. From ancient times, oil was recognized as having marvelous medicinal properties, and as such represents the healing of the stain of ancestral sin. The priest makes the sign of the cross in the water with the oil three times and anoints the baby on its brow, chest, ears, hands, feet and back. The sponsor makes the confession of faith on the child's behalf by reciting the Nicene Creed. The baby is immersed in water thrice in the name of the Holy Trinity, during which the entire Church "seals" an immersion with an "Amen". After the service, the child is dressed in a post-baptismal outfit representative of its new spiritual life. For two consecutive Sundays after the Baptism, the sponsor carries the infant to the Holy Altar to receive Holy Communion.

## FOR THE GODPARENT



Congratulations on being chosen to be a Godparent in the Holy Orthodox Church! The parents have given serious consideration to your selection as the sponsor of their child's baptism. Always keep in mind that your primary responsibility as godparent is the profound role of life-long spiritual guide to the child. This is a great and awesome spiritual responsibility, and only those most qualified and willing to fulfill this sacred trust to the best of their ability are called to serve as sponsor in Holy Baptism.

Below you will find information regarding your spoken role during the Catechism immediately preceding the Sacrament of Baptism. Please read it carefully so that you will be better prepared to publicly respond on that day on behalf of the child.

If you are NOT a member of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, a letter of membership in Good Standing from your parish priest must be obtained and submitted to the St. Nicholas Cathedral no later than fifteen (15) days before the date of the baptism in order for the sacrament to proceed as scheduled.

If you have any questions, please contact the Cathedral at: 412-682-3866, or by email at: [fr.ec@stnickspgh.org](mailto:fr.ec@stnickspgh.org).

May the Lord bless you with His grace and peace!

*The Cathedral Clergy and Administrative Staff*

# THE CATECHISM PRECEDING HOLY BAPTISM

Questions posed by the Priest [**bold blue**]  
and the responses of the sponsoring godparent(s) [*bold italics*]

*Holding the child, the Sponsor faces West, away from the altar.*

The Priest says (*three times*): **Do you renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his worship, and all his angels, and all his pomp?** (3x)

The Sponsor responds each time: *I renounce him.* (3x)

The Priest again asks three times: **Have you renounced Satan?** (3x)

The Sponsor responds each time: *I have renounced him.* (3x)

After the third time, the Priest says to the Sponsor: **Then breathe and spit on him.**

*And the Sponsor blows thrice towards the West, and spits thrice down on the floor.*

*The priest then turns the Sponsor to face East, towards the Altar, and asks three times:*

Priest: **Do you join yourself to Christ?** (3x)

The Sponsor responds each time: *I do join myself to Christ.* (3x)

Again, the Priest asks: **Have you joined yourself to Christ?** (3x)

The Sponsor responds each time: *I have.* (3x)

And the Priest adds: **And do you believe in Him?**

To which the Sponsor responds: *I believe in Him as King and as God.*

*On behalf of the child, the Sponsor recites the Nicene Creed:*

## **THE SYMBOL OF OUR FAITH**

*I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator 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, through Whom all things were made.*

*Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.*

*He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried;*

*And He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures.*

*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father;*

*And He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom shall have no end.*

*And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.*

*In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.*

*I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*

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

*After the Nicene Creed, again the Priest asks three times:*

Priest: **Have you joined yourself to Christ?** (3x)

The Sponsor responds each time: *I have.* (3x)

The Priest then says to the Sponsor: **Then bow before Him and worship Him.**

*The Sponsor and Priest bow towards the altar as the Sponsor says:*

*I bow down before the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Trinity, one in essence and undivided.*

And the Priest exclaims:

**Blessed is God Who wills that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth; always, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.**