

**Holy Baptism and Holy Chrism**  
Re-Catechism 3  
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**“ 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, 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.” (Matthew 28:19-20).**

**“Go therefore”**. Three and a half years have gone by with Christ living amongst people, teaching, helping, and performing miracles. The time has come to return to heaven, to go back to the Father, to **“the glory He had before the world began” (John 17:5).**

In the Gospel of Matthew our Lord is giving the last instructions, the last commandments, to the disciples just before he will be ascending to heaven. He is telling them to go and do what He was doing all these years.

The first thing they had to do was to make disciples, then to baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and, and, once they were baptized, to make sure they observe all things that He commanded them.

What is Baptism? Why did they need to be baptized first? Wasn't it enough to believe in Him to be saved?

The word Baptism comes from the Greek word **“Βαπτίζω”**, meaning to immerse some one in the water. Not sprinkled, not sprayed, but immersed and that is because it symbolises our burial. Our old sinful self dies and the new one rises from the dead. We become new creation. Paul puts it this way:

**“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2nd Corinthians 5:17).**

In the letter to the Romans, the portion recited during the baptism, Paul says:

**.... Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection (Romans 6:3-5)**

Baptism therefore is new birth; it is the entry to the body of the church, the church that Christ is the head.

When Nicodemus approached Christ he had one question in his mind. How can I be saved? And, although he did not ask the question right out, Christ answered him this way:

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3).**

In other words, if some one wants to go to heaven he must be born again.

Nicodemus answered:

**“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4).**

And Jesus answered:

**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:6).**

Nicodemus, you are thinking of natural birth. I am talking about spiritual birth. In other words, unless the Holy Spirit baptizes you in water, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. So, born again is to be baptised, not just accept Jesus Christ as a Saviour, but baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Some people are wondering what happened to the people that are not baptized. What about babies that born dead or die soon after they are born and they are not baptized, How about people that they are not even Christian for that matter they have never heard about Christ. Will these people be saved?

The truth is that we don't know. Having said that, I believe that God will judge these people different than He will judge the Christians, only He knows who will be saved and why. Paul is dealing with this predicament this way:

**Romans 2:12 “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law”.**

Law in this case is the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament or the Christian law as it was updated and fulfilled by Jesus Christ himself in the New Testament.

You are probably wondering: But these people never heard of Christ how could they be judged according the Christians Laws.

You are right, they will not be judged according to what they know about Christ or they don't know for that matter. That is why Paul is saying “**as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law**”.

Every one of us, Christians or not Christians, we have something inside us called “**Conscience**”. It is placed there by God to show us what is right or wrong. Those that are not Christian therefore, will be judged according to their conscience.

On the other hand, for those of us that know Christ and His teaching, we are responsible to accept the baptism or reject it. As for the rest, as **St. Gregory of Nyssa** puts it, **it is up to God to decide and not us**. When we pass away and meet Him, He will not ask us about the salvation, or luck off, other people, but for our own. He might want to know what we have done to spread the Gospel to these people. If we, as Christians, followed His command:

**Matthew 28:19-20** **“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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”**.

Baptism is the first of the seven Sacraments, “Μυστήρια” in Greek, and one of the four that is necessary for our salvation. Only through Baptism we cleanse ourselves from the original sin, the disobedience of Adam and Eve in Paradise. The original sin is the only one that we cannot confess. Also, when some one is baptized he/she is washed out of all sins committed up to that day, regardless of age.

When Apostle Paul was converted into Christianity, he saw a light stronger even than the sun, so strong that he was blinded, and had a vision of Christ. He was told to go to Damascus and wait until he will be told what was expected of him. Here is how Paul describes the visit of Ananias:

**“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, came to me; and he stood and said to me, “Brother Saul, receive your sight.” And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, “The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:12-16).**

Although Paul was to become the apostle of the gentiles, although he had the blessing to speak to Christ himself, first he had to be baptized; he had to wash away his sins.

As we mentioned above, when some one is baptized he/she is washed out of all sins committed up to that day, regardless of age.

This washing of all the sins committed up to the day of baptism, created some problems in the early church, because people were delaying to be baptized until they were very old, hoping to die with all of their sins forgiven when they are baptized. The only problem is, since we don't know when or how we will die, there were quite a few cases that people died suddenly during a war, due to an accident, or while sleeping, and had no chance of getting baptized. That is why the fathers of the church stopped this practice. After all, that is why we have the Sacrament of Confession.

While on the subject of sudden death, all Sacraments are performed by a clergy, usually a priest or a bishop. Baptism is the only Sacrament that can be performed by a layperson, but only in a case of extreme emergency, e.g. a baby is born and it is so weak that is in the verge of dying, or, some one had an accident and there is no time to get a priest on time and so on. We call this “αεροβάπτισμα” and we will talk about it later on.

Again in the early years of the church, people knowing that it is necessary to be baptized in order to be saved, if some one died and had not been baptized, they were baptising them on the deathbed. While the dead person was lying on deathbed, some one would hide underneath the bed and when the priest would ask if they wanted to be baptized, the person under the bed will answer positive and the priest would go ahead with the Sacrament of Baptism. St. Paul mentions this practice on the first letter to the Corinthians:

.... Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:29).

Again the fathers of the church put a stop to it. **St John Chrysostom** says, **we should not mock the Sacrament of Baptism by baptizing dead people.**

Chris was also baptized by John the Baptist, although he had no need to do so. For that matter, when He was baptized, the Bible says that:

**“Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17).**

When John the Baptist baptized people, they would stay in the water and confess their sins before they were baptized. **St. John Chrysostom** explaining that Jesus came up **“immediately”**, because He had no sins to confess.

The disciples were also baptized by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as Christ had promised them. In the book of Acts we read:

**And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-6).**

Also, on the day of Pentecost and right after the Holy Spirit came down in the form of flames, Peter is talking to the crowd that is gathered outside of the house and he is asking them to repent and be baptized.

**“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.”(Acts 2:38).**

This shows clearly that the disciples followed the command of Jesus Christ right away.

If you noticed, there was a certain order that they had to follow. First they had to repent, then they had to be baptized and then and only then they would receive the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is not enough just to say that you believe. In order to be saved, you need to be baptized. The Bible is very clear on this issue:

In the Gospel of Mark we read:

**.... and He (Christ) said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; (Mark 16:15-16).**

Even today when some one is baptized, they follow the same order, first they repent, then they are baptized and then they receive the Holy Spirit. We will come back to this later on one when we discuss the Sacrament of Baptism in details.

Although baptising infants started very early in the church, during the first two centuries, most of the Christians baptized were adults. Before they were baptized, they had to go through catechism, meaning, they had to learn all about the faith. That is what Christ commanded, to make disciples of all the nations. During catechism, they had to find a Christian that would assist them and vouch for them that they have good intentions to become Christians and be witnessing their baptism. That person was called **“Godparent”** and is still a part of the whole process.

Needless to say that, in the Orthodox faith, the Godparent must be orthodox.

Today, since most people are baptized infants, the role of the Godparent is not only to witness the baptism, but together with the parents is responsible to teach the newly baptized the right faith. Also, the Godparent will be responsible for the child in case both parents die. That is why, although it is not prohibited, it is very unusual for a parent to be also a Godparent for his/her children.

Although baptism is necessary, one will not be saved just because he was baptised. As it was mentioned above, baptism is the entry to the church of Christ. The baptised person is expected to live the Christian life. It is what it was described above; the baptised person should **“observe all things that Christ has commanded”**. It is a life commitment not the decision or the act of one particular moment of our lives.

If some one wants to become a doctor they will show their intentions by applying to a university. If the university is convinced that the candidate is the right person, they will accept him to attend lessons. He would however be expected to attend the lectures of the professor, to go through tests and at the end of the studies he will have to practice next to a licensed physician, just to make sure that what he has learned in theory, is what he will be using in his practice. When the licensed physician is sure that the person is ready, then the university will issue a diploma and he will be a licensed physician himself, ready to have his own practice.

The same goes for baptism. The individual will show his intentions to become a Christian. If the church feels that the intentions are genuine, he will be baptised and accepted into the church of Jesus Christ. He would however be expected to keep the commandments to observe all the things that Christ gave to the disciples and the disciples to the fathers of the church and son on.

Luke, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, is giving us a good example of a person that was baptised but he never intended to follow the commandments.

**“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs, which were done. (Acts 8:9-13)”**

Later on however, when he saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, **“Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:18-19).**

You probably say he just made a mistake we all do, and you are right. The Holy tradition though states that later on he went to Rome and went back to worship the demons. At one point, he wanted to show every one that he could fly in the air. With the help of the demons he did fly. As he was showing off, the demons that were holding him dropped him and he was killed. Getting baptised was not enough for him to be saved.

As I mentioned before, from the early Christian years, we have infant baptism as well as adults.

**St Hippolytus**, a Christian writer that lived in the second century writes:

**Prayer shall be made over the water, they shall shed their clothes (the infants only because the adults wore white tunic) and first baptize the little ones; if they can speak for themselves, they will do so; if not, their parents or relatives shall speak for them. Then baptized the men and the women last.**

Also, **St Irenaeus**, another Christian who also lived the second century, writes:

**Christ came to save all who through Him are born again (baptized) unto God: infants, children, young and aged persons.**

The baptism in the early Christian years was taking place on certain days of the year. One of them was the feast of Christ's baptism (Epiphany) which we celebrate the 6<sup>th</sup> of January and the feast of the Resurrection (Easter).

Epiphany was called the Feast of Lights (τα Φώτα in Greek) because Baptism is regarded as the "Illumination of the Soul". Easter is still called "**Λαμπρή**" in Greek, which means bright. Later on, and I guess when they were too many to be baptized, they started baptizing them any day of the week

In the sacrament of Holy Baptism, as in any sacrament, we have visible signs and invisible. The visible signs are the **water**, the **oil** and the **prayers**. The invisible sign is the Holy Spirit who actually performs the sacrament through the clergy (priest or Bishop).

The prayers have a dual purpose:

First they prepare the person to be baptized and all participants to receive the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

Second, they use to prepare the water and the oil, which will be used during the sacrament.

Other visible signs are the **white clothes** that the Godparents bring and they are used to dress up the newly baptized person and they symbolize the purity, **the cross and the chain** who symbolize the new life in Christ and the **white candles**, which symbolize the light, the Illumination of the new Christian.

When the person is an infant, we have two preliminary services before he or she is baptized. The first one takes place eight days after the baby is born either at home or at the hospital. The priest will bless both the mother and the baby

and actually that is when they baby gets their name, although not too many people today use this practice.

The second one takes place at the church, usually forty days after the baby is born or some times earlier. This shows the intention of the parents to bring up the child to love and live according to God's will. This is also to follow the example of Theotokos who brought Jesus Christ to the temple, as it was customary then and to purify herself after the birth.

**Luke 2:22-24 “Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him to the Lord* (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “*Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD*”), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “*A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*”**

The priest will meet the mother and the baby at the entrance, he will take the baby and he will say: “**The servant of God** (and he will mention the name of the child) **enters the Church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**” Then if it is a boy he will enter the Alter and will recite the prayers for entering the church. If it is a girl he will stand in front of the Royal Gate. Today some priests enter the girls into the Alter as well as the boys.

On the day of baptism, the priest will meet the parents and the baby at the Narthex and first he will go through exorcism. Although the individual might not be necessary possessed by demons, he wants to make sure by praying over the child and driving away all bad spirits by saying:

**“The spirit of error, the spirit of guile, the spirit of idolatry and of every unclean desire, the spirit of deceit and of every uncleanness which operates through the prompting of the devil.”**

Once the evil spirits are driven away, he calls upon God to make him or her **“a sheep in the body flock of Christ, an honourable member to His Church, a child of the light and an heir of His Kingdom.**

At this point, the priest will ask God to provide the soon to be baptized with a guardian angel to protect him or her for the rest of their lives here on earth.

Then it starts a dialogue between the priest and the person to be baptized if it is an adult, or the Godparent if it is an infant. With their backs to the Altar the priest on behalf of the church will ask a few questions and the individual or the Godparents will answer:

**“Do you renounce Satan...?”** and **“Have you renounced Satan?”** The individual will answer,

**“I renounce him”** and **“I have renounced him”**. These questions and answers are repeated three times in the name of the Holy Trinity. After the statements of repentance the priest will ask the individual or the Godparent to **“blow and spit upon him (Satan).”** With this act of defiance of **“spitting on the devil”** the group then turns towards the altar (towards God) and continues the dialogue.

**“Do you join yourself to Christ?”** and **“Have you joined yourself to Christ?”** The questions are once again asked three times in the name of Holy Trinity, and responded to three times, with the following confession of faith: **“I do join myself to Christ”** and **“I have joined myself to Christ.”** A final question is asked, **“And do you believe in Him”** and answered **“I believe in Him as King and as God.”**

The godparent, or, if the individual is an adult, recites the Creed paying further witness to the faith and teachings of the Church. That is why the Godparent must be an orthodox Christian and not of any other denominations.

This part concludes with the name giving prayer, which is:

**“O Master, Lord our God, call your servant (and he will call the name) to the Holy Illumination and grand unto him or her that great Grace your Holy Baptism. Put off him or her that old man and renew him or her unto everlasting life; and fill him or her with the power of the Holy Spirit in the unity of your Christ; that he or she may be no more a child of the body, but a child of your Kingdom.”**

After the child has been named the priest, the Godparents, the child and the parents walk towards the Baptismal Font.

The priest will first recite the blessing of the water prayers while the parents remove the cloths of the child.

**“Great you are, O Lord and marvellous are your works and there is no word which is sufficient to hymn your wonders”.**

**“Therefore You, O King, who love mankind, come now and bless this water by having the Holy Spirit dwell in it”.**

Yes the priest has coasted out all the evil spirits from the individuals but he wants to make sure there are no evil spirits hiding in the water.

Once the water is blessed, the parents will bring the child to the Baptismal Font and the priest blesses the olive oil that was brought for this purpose for the child. This is not to be confused with the Holy Chrism, the Myron, of which we will talk later on.

The olive oil represents the olive oil that was used by the soldiers to anoint themselves and protect them against any injury in the battle. In the case of baptism, we anoint the child to give him, or her, the strength to become a soldier of Jesus Christ and fight the evil spirits.

The priest will anoint the child on the forehead, chin, cheeks, chest, back, hands and feet saying:

**“The servant of God is anointed with the oil of gladness”.**

Then he holds the child and the Godparent anoints the rest of the body with the remainder of the blessed oil.

After the anointing, we have the main act of the sacrament. The priest takes the child and places him or her in the font three times saying:

**“The servant of God is baptized in the name of the Father (first immersion) and of the Son (second immersion) and of the Holy Spirit (third immersion). Amen.”**

By immersion we mean that the entire child’s body is covered in the water including the head. Only if the child has some kind of health problem in which case only the body is covered in the water. Again the word “**Βαπτίζω**” in Greek means I immerse some one in the water not sprinkle or any other way.

After the third immersion, the Godparent has placed a white sheet over the arms and the shoulders and the priest places the child in his arms.

That is the end of baptism; however is not the over yet. Following the sacrament of baptism, we have the sacrament of Holy Chrism.

The priest anoints the child with special oil called Chrism or (Μύρον) in Greek. It is specially prepared out of forty nine aromatic substances and symbolizes the infinite Gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is prepared once every ten years in a special service and blessed by the Patriarch of Constantinople and distributed to all of the Orthodox churches around the world.

The priest again anoints the child on the forehead, chin, cheeks, chest, back, hands and feet saying:

**“The Seal of the Holy Gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen”.**

This is the fulfillment of the promised of Jesus Christ:

**Acts 1: 4-5 “And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost for the disciples but as Peter explained it was the promised of God through the mouth of **Joel the prophet** that said:

**“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.” Joel 2:28.**

Under the old covenant the Holy Spirit was given only to the priests, the prophets and the kings. However there was another prophecy that the Holy Spirit will be given to everyone:

**Ezekiel 36:25-27 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.**

In the New Testament, the new covenant, all baptized Christians receive the Holy Spirit.

At the beginning the Holy Spirit was given by the disciples placing their hands on the baptized Christians.

**Acts 8:14-17 “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”**

Later on however, because it was impossible for the disciples or the bishops who took over from the disciples, to be present at every baptism, the fathers of the church gave the responsibility to the individual priest on behalf of the Bishop to administer the Holy Spirit at the time of baptism. For that matter, the priests perform all the sacraments, with the exemption of Holy Orders, on behalf of the bishop of their Diocese.

It is almost over. The newly baptized person has received the best present any one could receive. Through baptism and Chrismation he has entered the church of Jesus Christ and now he can expect to receive the salvation and the kingdom of Heaven.

When some one gives us a present, we are obliged to reciprocate. But what could an infant give as a present. He came to the world with nothing. He has nothing but himself to give. The hair on his head is the first thing that he owns. And that is what he will offer.

The priest now performs the **Tonsure** (the cutting of hair). He takes the scissors and cuts the child’s hair from the front to the back, the left and right side making the sign of the cross. That symbolizes completely surrender to Christ.

Then the priest takes the undershirt provided by the Godparent and he places on the chest of the child saying:

**“Grant to me a garment of light, You who wore light as your cloak, full of mercy, O Christ our God”.**

After the undershirt, the priest takes the cross, which is also provided by the Godparent and places it around the child’s neck repeating the words of Jesus Christ:

**“He who wishes to follow me let him pick up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24).**

When the child is fully dressed, the priest hands the child to the Godparent and he will hand over the child to the parents.

The child is now a full member of the church and it is time to receive, for the first time. Holy Communion. The priest will give the Holy Communion and will conclude with the Benediction Prayer. The parents are expected to bring the child back for Holy Communion the next two Sundays but also to make sure that the child receives Holy Communion on a regular basis, as any Christian should do, in order to stay connected with Christ and receive spiritual food and eternal life. As Christ put it:

**“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6:53) and**

**“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:54).**

We mentioned earlier that Baptism is the only Sacrament that can be performed by a layperson and only in a case of emergency. In that case, they will hold the child up (if it is possible) and will say:

**The servant of God (give the name) is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

If it is impossible to hold the child up, or in a case of an adult, then the person will bless some water in the name of the Holy Trinity, touch the forehead with a few drops of water and recite the words. If the child or the adult regains health, the rest of the prayers are read in the church at a later time.

As it was explained, Baptism is absolutely necessary for our Salvation and one cannot be called a Christian unless he is baptized. For that reason, it can be performed, if necessary, any day of the week any time of the day and any time of the year.

If a Christian of another denomination wants to become an Orthodox and they have already been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, then they are not baptized again, because, once a person is properly baptized he is never baptized again. In our Creed we recite:

**“I believe in One Baptism for the forgiveness of sins”.**

If they are properly baptized, we only perform Chrism. The emphasis here is on the word **“properly”**

This concludes the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Chrism. I have tried to explain as much as possible the details of both Sacraments and I hope next time you attend these Sacraments you will have the knowledge of what Baptism is all about and why we, as Orthodox do things they way we do them.