

## **Preparing for Chrismation/Conversion in the Orthodox Church**

Chrismation is the name given in Eastern Orthodox Churches to the sacrament known as confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church. It is so called because of the holy oil, or chrism, which has been consecrated by the Patriarch of Constantinople and with which the recipient of the sacrament is anointed, as the priest speaks the words, "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit."

For those desiring to convert and be chrismated at St. George Cathedral, it is important to speak to the priest, to discuss how the process of education or catechesis takes place. Most importantly, it is necessary for the catechumen to become of regular attendee or worshipper on Sunday mornings at the very least. In the case of unbaptized young children, it is necessary that they attend Sunday School for a minimum of one year with at least 60% attendance for the year. At the conclusion of one year, a Chrismation may be scheduled.

As with Baptism, the catechumen must select a godparent to sponsor them. The sponsor must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the Church sacramentally. Most importantly, the sponsor should be a faithful Christian and good example of Orthodox Christian behavior. The relationship that is created through sponsorship is a lifelong relationship and one that should benefit the new Orthodox Christian.

It is traditional, although it is not absolutely necessary, that the sponsor (male or female) purchases the two candles for both to hold during the administration of the sacrament as well as an appropriate cross to be worn around the neck after the sacrament. The candles should be about two feet long, about 1" wide and may be decorated with a small bow. Together with the catechumen, the sponsor will recite the Nicene Creed during the ceremony, a sign of his/her own continued belief in the faith of the Church.

For more information on conversion to the Orthodox Church, please call Fr. Chris at St. George at 413-737-1496.

### **The Sacrament of Chrismation**

All Orthodox Christians are required to receive the sacrament of Chrismation. "Cradle" Orthodox Christians receive the sacrament immediately after they are baptized, usually as infants. For those coming into the Orthodox Church later in life, a person originally baptized according the Trinitarian formula (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) would receive the sacrament of Chrismation alone and would not need to be rebaptized.

The sacrament, as it applies to adult converts, consists of a number of prayers and hymns, all of which are also used during the Baptism Service. The conferring of the grace of God through the sacrament takes place as the priest anoints the forehead, chin, ears, and hands of the newly baptized with chrism (myron), a mixture of olive oil and balsam. The catechumen (the person who has studied the faith) also is expected to recite the Nicene Creed as an indication of their acceptance of the Orthodox faith and doctrines. Through Chrismation a person is given the "power from on high" (Acts 1-2), the gift of the Spirit of God, in order to live the new life received in baptism. He is anointed, just as Christ the Messiah is the Anointed One of God. He becomes-as the Fathers of the Church dared to put it -- a "christ" together with Jesus. Thus, through Chrismation we become a "christ," an anointed child of God, a person upon whom the Holy Spirit dwells, a person in whom the Holy Spirit lives and acts -- as long as we want him and cooperate with his powerful and holy inspiration. Thus, it is only after our Chrismation that the baptismal procession is made and that we hear the epistle and the gospel of our salvation and illumination in Christ.

After the Chrismation, the person newly-received into God's family is tonsured. The tonsure, which is the cutting of hair from the head in the sign of the cross, is the sign that the person completely offers himself to God -- hair being the symbol of strength (Jud 16:17). Thus, until the fifteenth century the clergy of the Orthodox Church -- the "professional Christians," so to speak -- wore the tonsure all their lives to show that their strength was in God.

After receiving this sacrament, the recipient is eligible to receive the Eucharist (Holy Communion). In both Eastern and Western traditions, the sacrament is considered to bind the recipients more perfectly to the Church, and to enrich them with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. It should be emphasized that ethnicity has no part in either the education of the catechumen nor in the administering of the sacrament. One does not need to be from a traditionally Orthodox Christian country like Greece or Russia to be an Orthodox Christian. In fact, it is important to note that all "traditionally Orthodox countries" were originally the beneficiaries of missionaries like St. Paul and Sts. Cyril and Methodios.