

~ The Mystery of Chrismation ~

Chrismation is the second of the three Holy Mysteries of Christian initiation. It is through chrismation — an anointing with chrisem, a mixture of olive oil with fragrant spices which has been blessed by the bishop — that a baptized Christian receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Meaning of Chrismation

When the Gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, the holy apostle Peter told the crowds: "Repent and be baptized... and you will receive the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). This was the same Spirit that our Lord, during his earthly ministry, had promised to send to all those who would believe in Him (John 7:39).

At first, the apostles bestowed the Holy Spirit on new believers through the laying-on of hands (Acts 8:17). Over time, this was supplanted by an anointing with blessed oil. Anointing is an ancient symbol of kingship and priesthood; likewise, in the Old Testament, altars were anointed with oil, a symbol of richness, healing, and strength.

The mystery of holy chrismation completes and perfects the mystery of baptism. In baptism, the believer is granted a share in the death and resurrection of Christ. In chrismation, the baptized believer, washed clean of sin, is given a share in the ministry of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. For the believer, chrismation is Pentecost.

In holy chrismation, God imparts to the believer those gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary for his or her own sanctification, and for whatever work or ministry God has appointed that person to carry out. As Nicholas Cabasilas, the noted 14th century Byzantine writer put it: "if any spiritual energy... is to be found among men, it must be referred to those prayers, and to the sacred Chrismation."

Cabasilas further compares baptism, chrismation, and Eucharist by pointing out that Christ first acquired a share in our flesh and blood (in the Incarnation), then deified it, then died and rose again. We in turn must die and rise with Christ (in baptism), experience deification

(in chrismation), and share in the Body and Blood of Christ (in Holy Communion). The order is reversed, because just as Christ descended to save us, we must begin "at the foot of the ladder" in order to ascend to God.

Finally, chrismation also emphasizes each Christian's connection to the bishop, who is a successor of the Apostles. In the West, each Christian is chrismated ("confirmed") by the bishop; in the East, the bishop blesses the holy chrism, and delegates his priests to perform the rite of chrismation. But in both cases, we receive are "sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit" by Christ, through the hands of the apostles and their successors. This "seal" of God upon us completes the work of holy baptism in us, and prepares us to receive Christ in Holy Communion.

The Rite of Chrismation

In the Byzantine Rite, chrismation normally takes place immediately after baptism. The official Slavonic text of the rite of chrismation can be found pages 25-71 of the *Malyj Trebnyk* (Small Euchologion), printed in Rome in 1952. Unofficial texts were printed by the Byzantine Seminary Press in 1955, and the Eparchy of Passaic released an official text in 1997.

After an introduction ("Let us pray to the Lord." "Lord, have mercy"), the priest says the prayer of holy chrismation:

Blessed are You, Lord, God, Ruler of all, Source of all good things, Sun of Righteousness. You have raised up a light of salvation for those in darkness, through the manifestation of Your only-begotten Son and our God. Though we are unworthy, You have given us a blessed cleansing in holy water and a divine sanctification through life-giving anointing. Now, to Your newly-enlightened servant, you have been pleased to give a new birth by water and the Spirit, for the forgiveness of voluntary or involuntary sins. Now, O Master and gracious King of all, You Yourself grant him (her) also the seal of the gift of your holy, almighty, and adorable Spirit, and the communion of the holy Body and precious Blood of Chris, Your anointed one. Keep him (her) in Your holiness, strengthen him (her) in the true faith., and deliver him (her) from the evil one and all his deceitful ways. Keep him (her) in purity and righteousness by a fear of You that brings salvation, that

he (she) may please You in his (her) every word and deed and will be a son (daughter) and an heir of Your heavenly kingdom.

For You are our God, a God of mercy and salvation, and we give glory to You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever.

And the candidate for chrismation, along with those present, respond "Amen."

Then the priest anoints the baptized person with holy chrism, making the sign of the cross on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, breast, hands and feet, saying:

The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When the chrismation is complete, the cantor and people sing, three times:

All you who have been baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. Alleluia!

Then the newly-chrismated believer receives the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

If for any reason the mystery of chrismation is celebrated separately from baptism, then the liturgical books provide for a service consisting of prayers before chrismation, readings following chrismation, and a concluding litany and dismissal. See Singing the baptismal services.

Recommended Reading

- *Holy Chrismation (Confirmation) according to the Byzantine Rite tradition.* Byzantine Leaflet Series, No. 49. (Pittsburgh: Byzantine Seminary Press, June 1990).
- *Light for Life: Part Two, The Mystery Celebrated.* (Pittsburgh: God With Us Publications, 1996). Chapter Five covers the Holy Mysteries.
- Nicholas Cabasilas. *The Life in Christ* (Crestwood, NJ: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974.) Classic Orthodox explanation of the place of the Mysteries in the life of the Christian believer.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1285-1321: The Sacrament of Confirmation.