

A faded background image of a religious fresco depicting the Baptism of Christ. In the center, Christ is being baptized in a pool of water by John the Baptist. The scene is surrounded by other figures, including the Holy Spirit as a dove above Christ's head. The text is overlaid on this image.

**Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox
Cathedral**

**The Mystery
of
Holy Baptism**

**Planning Your Child's
Sacrament of Baptism**



SAINT SOPHIA GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

THE REVEREND STEVEN P. ZORZOS, D.MIN., PROTOPRESBYTER & PRESIDING PRIEST
THE REVEREND DIMITRIOS J. LEE, M.DIV., PRESBYTER & ASSISTANT PRIEST



CHRIST, THE HOLY
WISDOM OF GOD

GREETINGS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD!

Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral shares your joy in anticipation of the Holy Baptism of your child. Through Baptism, your child is filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit and is brought into the fullness of life in the Holy Orthodox Church, the Body of Christ.

Enclosed you will find information regarding Baptism in the Church, as well as forms to complete in order to schedule the sacrament and provide us necessary information to complete the Certificate of Baptism. Please complete these forms carefully, as soon as possible, and return them either via postal mail: Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Attention: Pete Panagiotopoulos, Cathedral Administrator at 2815 36th Street, NW Washington, D.C., 20007, or fax: 202-625-7173, or email: ptpoulos@saintsophiadc.com.

We join you in solemn prayer and joyous celebration as you prepare yourselves for the Holy Baptism of your child, and we look forward to serving you through this most holy 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 email. A baptismal packet is sent to the parents electronically via email, or by printed copy via postal mail. The parents complete the enclosed scheduling and parental information sheets (see FORMS A & B below) and return them to the Cathedral office 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 and sacraments. PLEASE NOTE: baptisms are not permitted from Christmas Day through the Feast of Theophany (December 25 — January 6), during Holy Week (including the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday), or on any of the Great Feast days of the Lord. Also, baptisms are not scheduled during wider community events, such as the Saint Sophia Festival.

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 email (ptpoulos@saintsophiadc.com), or photocopied and submitted via postal mail (Saint Sophia Cathedral, 2815 36th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007), or faxed (202-625-7173). 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) define 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 well being of the Parish."
6. **FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS OF PARISHIONERS IN GOOD STANDING:** A primary privilege of Parish membership is full participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Hence, parishioners in good standing with Saint Sophia Cathedral — those current in "stewardship and other financial obligations to the Parish"— may schedule a baptism. If both parents are Orthodox, they must be family members in good standing of Saint Sophia Cathedral. If only one parent is Orthodox, he/she must be an individual member in good standing of Saint Sophia Cathedral.

7. **FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS OF NON-PARISHIONERS:** If neither parent is a member in good standing of Saint Sophia Cathedral, an \$2,000.00 Cathedral Sanctuary Usage fee is required. This fee offsets some of the expenses of clergy, chanter, and sexton, as well as the Cathedral overhead costs involved in opening and closing the church building on that day. *

Stewardship Type: Saint Sophia Stewards are expected to carefully review their personal circumstances and make a commitment of time, talent, and treasure to support our Parish and her Ministries. Saint Sophia encourages new members to consider stewardship when joining our community. The annual cost to operate the Cathedral and fund her many ministries for calendar year 2020 is \$2,310 per steward. We encourage those who can meet this commitment amount, or even exceed it, to do so. However, we equally welcome any stewardship contribution below this level. We welcome ALL with open arms and open hearts.

All financial obligations to the Parish must be recorded 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. *

***IMPORTANT NOTE:** In cases of extreme financial hardship, and upon confidential consultation with the Cathedral clergy, necessary adjustment to the above Parish financial obligation fee schedule will be made. No child will be refused baptism based solely on the inability of the parents to totally fulfill Parish financial obligations.

8. **THE ORTHODOX SPONSOR(S):** The Orthodox sponsor(s) MUST:
1. Be baptized or chrismated Orthodox Christian(s).
 2. Be thirteen years of age or older.
 3. If married, be married in the Orthodox Church. Please note, according to Orthodox Canon Law, 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,” but may NOT *directly* participate in the sacramental Rites of the baptism.
 4. If divorced, the sponsor MUST have received an ecclesiastical divorce.
 5. Be member(s) in good standing with Saint Sophia Cathedral (Please see the “Pastoral Guidelines” of the *Yearbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*: “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) are *not* members of Saint Sophia Cathedral, they must obtain a letter from the priest of their home parish affirming they are members in good standing of *that* parish. This letter may be delivered to Saint Sophia Cathedral either by postal mail, fax, or email (see above), and must be received no later than fifteen (15) days before the scheduled date of the Baptism.
 6. 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):

1. An Orthodox baptismal cross (NOT a crucifix), usually made of gold.
2. 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).
3. A complete change of clothes into a celebratory baptismal outfit (including undergarments) for the child, traditionally white.
4. One large white bath towel.
5. One white twin bed flat sheet.
6. Two small white hand towels (not wash cloths).
7. One small bottle of olive oil (new).
8. 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 #2 above).

Finally, it is the great honor and sacred responsibility of the sponsor(s) to bring the child to church to receive Holy Communion 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) are unavailable, then by all means, the parent or grandparents or other family members may bring the child, instead.

10. **IMPORTANT GENERAL INFORMATION:**

1. Photographs and/or video of the baptism are permitted, but only to ONE designated photographer and/or videographer. Furthermore, to ensure the proper dignity and solemnity of the sacrament, the use of flash or video lights is expressly FORBIDDEN. Our primary purpose on this day is to initiate the child into the Church, the Body of Christ, NOT to create theater. This strict Cathedral policy MUST be respected and followed.

***IMPORTANT NOTE:** A maximum time limit of 10 minutes is allocated for picture taking after the sacrament of baptism has been completed.

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 to their home address, as is the case with all other guests. If scheduling and prior commitments permit, the Cathedral

SCHEDULING – BAPTISM (FORM A)

(Please print)

Child's name: _____

☉ Male ☉ Female Date of Birth _____

Names of Parents:

Father: _____

Mother: _____

Guardian (if any): _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zipcode _____

REQUESTED DATES AND TIMES (in order of preference):

1. Date: _____ Time: _____

2. Date: _____ Time: _____

3. Date: _____ Time: _____

Contact telephone numbers (as applicable):

(1) Home: _____

(2) Father's cell: _____

(3) Father's work: _____

(4) Mother's cell: _____

(5) Mother's work: _____

(6) Other: _____

Contact email addresses (as applicable):

(1) Father's email: _____

(2) Mother's email: _____

(3) Other: _____

Questions or comments: _____

PARENTAL INFORMATION SHEET (FORM B)

Child's Information: Male Female

Legal name(s) on Birth Certificate (First & Middle): _____

*Baptismal Name(s) in English (First & Middle): _____

*Baptismal Name(s) in Greek (English phonetics): _____

*According to the Great 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.

However, in practice, the child may receive a second, or middle name, as well.

Born in (City, State, Country): _____

Date of Birth (Month, Day, Year): _____

Parents' Information:

Father's Name (First, Middle, Last):

Born in (City, State, Country): _____

Mother's Full Maiden Name (First, Middle, Last):

Born in (City, State, Country): _____

Father's religion: _____ **Mother's religion:** _____

Parents' 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:

Name (First and Last):

_____ If Married, Name

of Spouse (First and Last) serving as:

Orthodox Co-Sponsor: _____

Non-Orthodox Honorary Sponsor: _____

The Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation



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 when there was no previous baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. (Source: www.goarch.org)

Chrismation

The Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) 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 imparts 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 also 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 Sacraments 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 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.

(Source: www.goarch.org)

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 in 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 original 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" each 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 publically respond on that day on behalf of the child.

If you are NOT a member of Saint Sophia Cathedral, a letter of membership in Good Standing from your parish Priest must be obtained and submitted to Saint Sophia 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 202-333-4730, or by fax at 202-625-7173, or by e-mail at ptpoulos@saintsophiadcom or call Pete directly at (202) 838-1553.

May the Lord bless you with His peace!

The Cathedral Clergy and Administrative Staff



THE CATECHISM PRECEDING HOLY BAPTISM

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

Holding the child the Sponsor faces West, away from the Altar. The Priest says thrice: ***Do you renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his worship, and all his angels, and all his pomp?***

The Sponsor responds each time: ***I do renounce him.***

The Priest again asks three times: ***Have you renounced Satan?***

The Sponsor responds each time: ***I have renounced him.***

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

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

The Priest then turns the Sponsor to face East, toward the Altar, and asks three times: ***Do you join Christ?***

The Sponsor responds each time: ***I do join Him.***

Again the Priest asks three times: ***Have you joined Christ?***

The Sponsor responds each time: ***I have joined Him.***

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 NICENE CREED

"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.

For us all and for our salvation, He came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.

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

On the third day He rose according to the Scriptures.

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

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver 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 acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

I expect the resurrection of the dead.

And the life of the age to come. Amen."

After the completion of the Nicene Creed, again the Priest asks three times:
Have you joined Christ?

The Sponsor responds each time: ***I have joined Him.***

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

Together with the Priest the Sponsor bows down and says: ***I bow down and before the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; Trinity One in Essence and Undivided.***

And the Priest responds: ***Blessed is God Who desires that all people should be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth; both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.***