

The understanding of the sacredness of the Sacrament of Baptism by our faithful has become over the years less than what is once was. Why we baptize, the role that the godparents play, the importance of a prayerful attitude by those who are witnessing the entrance of a new member into the society of the Church, all have become secondary matters. The following article is offered to assist our faithful in reversing that development.

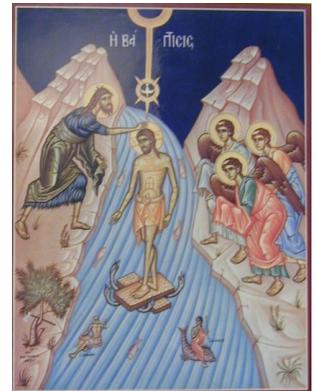
BAPTISM, CHRISMATION, AND HOLY COMMUNION AS THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION ACCORDING TO THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC ORTHODOX CHURCH.

The word **baptism** is derived from a Greek word that means **washing by entering the water**. The word **christening** means **to become or to make someone a Christian**. **Chrismation** means **anointing with Chrism**, i.e. with holy oil or **Miuron**. The Armenian word for baptism is **Mkrtel, Mkrtut'yun**. The word **k'nunk** is also in common use, meaning **sealing** (with Miuron).

Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Communion are the most important **Mysterics** or Sacraments of the Church. The Order of Baptism of the Armenian Church, as that of other Orthodox Churches, combines all three of these mysteries together with certain related Sacraments, which complete the sacred rite of Christian Initiation.

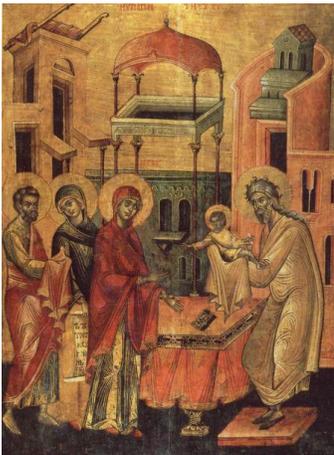
Why do we baptize?

The Lord Jesus himself received Baptism and Chrismation in the river Jordan at the hands of St. John the Forerunner and thus showed his solidarity with sinful men. (Matthew 3:16-18; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). Our Lord expected his followers to be baptized with the Baptism with which he was baptized, (Mark 10:38) and so instructed his disciples to do likewise. (Matthew 28:1-9). The church thus faithfully and diligently observed Christ's ordinance to baptize all those who wanted to enter into his Kingdom (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; I Corinthians 1:16-2:13; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12; I Peter 3:21). Without Baptism, a person cannot obtain salvation (John 3:5).



Baptism is performed only once. The church's Creed declares that there is only one Baptism so long as it has been administered in a manner in which its essential conditions are fulfilled, that is with water and the invocation of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is not to be repeated and is valid for all Christians who form the one fellowship in Christ.

Why do we baptize infants?



An infant is not conscious of what takes place at his Christening. Yet, as in all the other spheres of his growing life, his parents take upon themselves the responsibility of bringing up their child in a way that they believe is best for him. They make a commitment with a view to rearing the child in the faith of their fathers. Godparent(s) declare the infant's faith on his behalf and declare to watch over the child, to see that he receives proper Christian training in the Orthodox faith of the Armenian Church, to instruct him and to correct him, and, if necessary, to help and protect him as a father or mother would. And, above all, to always pray for him.

Thus the child is taken into the company of believers, where what is affected in Baptism and Chrismation gradually unfolds in his soul. He is put on the

path leading to Christian perfection. As the child clings during his immaturity to his parents and receives nourishment and care from them, so also he clings, during his formation years, to his Mother Church wherein he is born anew and receives the nourishments of the faith.

A child brought to Baptism receives all the three great mysteries necessary for salvation and becomes a full Christian through one continuous sacred act. For the Church will not set age limits for the salvation of man through God's grace.

As the child grows, gradually becoming independent and assuming responsibility for his own life and conduct, spiritually and in all other respects, he becomes free to accept or reject what he has received as an infant. We must keep in mind that the Christian who does not keep the vows of Baptism, *i.e.* who does not love and worship God but makes himself a slave of vices and sins, is a Christian and child of God only in name. Our Lord warns us of this self-deception and will not accept such individuals on the Day of Judgment (Matthew 7:21-23). St. Paul calls unworthy Christians the enemies of Christ (Philippians 3:18-19).

What is Chrismation?

Chrismation or *Confirmation* is the sacramental or mystical invocation of sealing by the Holy Spirit whom the neophyte receives after his Baptism. Through this act, one becomes engrafted and integrated into the Body of Christ and a participant in its life. Thus, through the Seal of Chrismation, a Christian is assured of the power of the Spirit and of resurrection. Chrismation is the Pentecost of the new Christian as well as the anointing of the neophyte into the royal priesthood of the faithful (I Peter 2:9).

Why also Holy Communion?

Holy Communion nourishes and sustains the spiritual life of a Christian who is continuously renewed with the power of the Holy Spirit whereby his bond of union with Christ Jesus is maintained.

As a Baptized and Chrismated member of the Armenian Church, the child is now entitled to the joy of participation in the Holy Sacraments of which the greatest is the Holy Eucharist, to complete the initial steps of his journey toward the true life of salvation. (John 6:54-55).

Guidelines for Families in the Administration of the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Chrismation

In our Mission Parishes, prior to any other arrangements being made, the date for the ceremony is to be set in consultation with either the regular visiting priest or with the with the Parish Council in order for them to seek through the Diocesan offices, the availability of a priest and of the local church used. Baptisms normally take place within 40 days of the birth of the child.

It is the right of any child to be baptized regardless of the parent's marital status, providing the child is brought to the Armenian Church by the parents with the specific intention and desire of the child's baptism and confirmation and, with the sponsorship/witness of a baptized member of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church who is to be the child's godparent.

An adult who wishes to receive Chrismation or, not having been baptized, both Baptism and Chrismation, is normally first required to receive proper instruction as to the teachings of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox church prior to the administration of the sacraments.

The Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation are to take place in the church proper. In cases of a medical emergency, the child is born premature or is seriously ill, the baptism may be performed in the hospital or at home.

When selecting godparents.

When selecting baptismal sponsors for your child, the individuals are to be members in good standing of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church for, according to the teachings and canons of our Church, it is they who are to see to the nurturing of the child's faith as an Armenian Orthodox Christian. They should be individuals who are of good Christian character, attend the Divine Liturgy regularly and are frequent communicants of Holy Communion. Parents are to take care in choosing devoted, faithful, practicing members of the Armenian Church for this responsibility and privilege. Baptismal godparents, conversely, cannot be indifferent about their awesome responsibilities and should also give prayerful consideration before accepting.

The baptismal sponsor of the neophyte who responds to the questions posed by the priest performing the baptism must be a communicant member – baptized and confirmed – of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. Traditionally this has been the privilege of men only who served as godfather of the child. Recently, the Armenian Church has granted this privilege to women to serve as baptismal sponsors or, godmothers. If parents wish for the godfather or godmother be a person of another Christian denomination, then the other godparent must be a member of the Armenian Church and must be present at the ceremony.

On the day of the ceremony,

The family will need to bring to the church for the child:

- A large white towel to wrap about the child when removed from the baptismal waters;
- A new white outfit to be worn after the ceremony.

During the ceremony the priest shall ask the child's sponsor(s):

- *What does this child request?*
- Yerakhays zeench khuntreh?

The sponsor(s) shall answer:

- *Faith, hope, love and baptism, to be baptized and justified, to be cleansed of sins, to be freed from demons and to serve God.*
- Havadk, Hooys, Ser, yev Mugurdoutiun. Mgrdeel yev artaranal, srpeel ee meghats, azadeel ee teevats, yev dzarayel Asdoudzoh.

The priest shall say:

- *Be it unto thee according to thy faith.*
- Usd havadots kots yegheetsee kez.

After the ceremony:

When the child is to be bathed for the first time at home, the water of the washing should be poured into the soil directly rather than down the drain into a water waste system. The reason being that any trace of the Holy Myron should not be mixed with unclean water.

The custom and practice of presenting an offering to the church on the occasion of a Baptism comes from both Scripture and our own traditions. When Our Lord was brought to the Temple on the eighth day of his birth by his parents for purification and circumcision, we find that they offered their gifts to fulfill their religious obligations " . . . as it is written in the law of the Lord, . . . to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ' a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'" (Luke 2:23-24). As Jesus tells us in the Luke's gospel, " . . . where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."

It is in the offering of one's monetary gift to the church in celebration of the sacrament as an expression of thankfulness for the occasion and of love of God that allows this donation to become a gift of joyous giving, rather than a "fee" of obligation that one is required to pay out of compulsion. The church historically has always been dependent upon such gifts from the faithful to help, in part, maintain the continuation of her mission.

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