

# ON INFANT BAPTISM

*WHAT IT IS*

&

*WHAT IT IS NOT*

Orthodox holy Baptism is a Mystery that makes us ontological members of Christ's risen Body, i.e. not merely metaphorical members of Christ. While there is symbolism in the ceremony and accompanying rite, that is secondary.

Baptism is neither a mere symbol nor a juridical "ordinance" nor, (in the case of infants), a washing away of guilt for something -- someone else before us has done. For adults, it washes away the guilt of what the person being baptized has done. The Orthodox **do not** believe in inherited guilt or the loss of the Icon (Image) of God. We believe that the sinning of Eve and Adam damaged the Icon--reason and freewill -- but that what was lost of the Likeness of God (of which the first chapter of the Bible speaks).

Baptism restores the Likeness of God -- the Grace of incorporation into Him and the Grace of beginning to obey Him as we should.

Orthodox Baptism is by trine immersion.

After such preliminaries, it may be said that, since infants are baptized for ontological reasons -- to make them members of Christ, heirs of His Kingdom, and partakers of the divine Nature (2 Pet. 1:4) -- rather than for volitional or other reasons, there is no need for them to consent. Their godparents consent for them till they reach the age of reason and confirm their membership in Christ in the Holy Communion and other Mysteries properly received with repentance, the true belief, and pious obedience to the way Christ have indicated Christians should go. They may fall away from this way -- through bad training in the family or influences outside of the family.

Western Christians have a problem with infant Baptism. If Baptism washes away inherited guilt and is without any other ontological effect, and if there can be no guilt without reason and intention, Baptism loses its logic; unless one embraces the absolutely indefensible notion of inherited guilt which is accepted by both Latins and the Protestant Reformers? But if will and intention (or consent) are necessary for Baptism, how can infants -- or the feeble-minded and insane -- provide this in order to be Baptized? It is inconsistent to baptize one and refuse it to the other.

Note that infants receive the Holy Chrism and the most Holy Communion at the time of their Baptism -- and the last (i.e. Holy Communion) weekly thereafter. The most Holy

Eucharist, it may be added, incorporates us into Christ (when properly received with repentance and true Faith) after we have fallen back through sin. But Holy Baptism begins the whole process of Grace, the uncreated divine Energies, that cumulates in Divinization through the vision of the uncreated Light and Energies of God.

The Orthodox are chary about acknowledging Baptism by other Christian bodies, where it often means quite different things--however sincerely undertaken and however heartfelt the effect on the one so baptized. This is because the Orthodox think that without intending the Orthodox Faith Orthodox Worship is realizable, and where Orthodox Faith and piety are absent, Mysteries are not dispensed or "served"--or in many instances recognized. Note that the effort to lead a pious life is necessary for Orthodox to reach the goal of Divinization in Christ; for it is a goal that can be wiped out by disbelief or sin.

The Orthodox tradition has not (except under Uniate influence) adopted "conditional Baptism" in cases of doubt with regard to the generic validity of a given Orthodox Church's Baptisms.

But conditional Baptism has been served in instances of doubt over individual identity. One example is from St. Cyril of Alexandria. Of two infants, one had been baptized, but there was confusion over which one had received the Mystery. So St. Cyril conditionally baptized both.