

The Sacrament of  
**HOLY BAPTISM**  
And of  
**HOLY CHRISMATION**  
(Confirmation)



**St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church**  
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## **An Explanation of the Baptismal Service**

The Baptismal Service begins in the narthex (entrance hall) of the Church where the priest calls upon the sponsor to denounce (for the child) the devil and all his works and to declare his belief in Christ. To symbolize the renouncing of the devil the priest faces West and blows gently making a gesture of spitting upon the unseen enemy. The sponsor does the same. In accepting Christ for the child the sponsor faces the altar (East) and recites the Creed.

**As God Breathed Upon Man** to make him a living soul, so the priest breathes three times upon the infant to symbolize the new life that it will receive through Baptism.

At the conclusion of this introductory service, the priest and sponsor come forward to the Baptismal Font where the remainder of the service takes place.

**The Sponsor:** The use of sponsors in Baptism dates back to the days when Christians were persecuted by Nero. Parents were often massacred during these persecutions. Thus sponsors were provided to instruct the children in the Christian faith in the event the parents were martyred.

**The Baptismal Font:** In the language of the Church Fathers is the "Divine Womb" whence we receive the second birth as children of God (John 1:12, 13).

**A Christian Name** is given to the infant. From the moment the child is received into the Church, emphasis is placed on his individuality. He is given his own particular name.

**Water:** Water is a visible means used to express to us that through Baptism the child is being invisibly cleansed of sin.

**Olive Oil:** Olive oil is blessed and then applied by the priest to the various members of the child's body: hands, feet, ears, mouth, etc. in order to dedicate them to the service of Christ. The sponsor then



anoints the entire body of the infant with olive oil. This custom had its beginning among the ancient Greek wrestlers who anointed their bodies with olive oil to make it difficult for the opponent to maintain a grip on them. In Baptism the child is anointed with olive oil to symbolize the fact that with Christ's help the infant will be able to elude the grip of sin.

**Triple Immersion:** We believe that Christ died for our sins. To show that we, and not Christ, are worthy of death because of our sins, we are immersed in the Baptismal Font. The immersion in water symbolizes death, since a person cannot live long under water. The person being Baptized, however, is not kept under water, he is immediately taken out. This shows our faith that we do not have to die for our sins, since Christ already died in our behalf. So the Baptized person rises out of the Baptismal Font a new man, cleansed of every sin and promising, like St. Paul to surrender his life to Christ, his Saviour: "He died for all that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them". The triple immersion symbolizes the three days our Lord spent in the tomb.

**Confirmation:** Having taken the child out of the Baptismal Font and placed it in the sponsor's arms, the priest then administers the Sacrament of Confirmation by anointing the child with Holy Myron, which is blessed on Holy Thursday by the Patriarch of Constantinople. While Baptism empties the child of all sin, confirmation fills the vacuum by imparting to the child the grace of God, thus enabling it to live the life of Christ. This is the Sacrament by which we receive the Holy Spirit.

**Cutting of Hair:** After confirming the child, the priest cuts three locks of hair from the child's head. This is an expression of gratitude from the child, who having received an abundance of blessings through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation and having



nothing to give to God in return, offers part of its hair, which is symbolic of strength (see Samson in the Old Testament). The child, therefore, promises to serve God with all its strength.

**New Clothes:** New clothes are put on the infant after Baptism to signify that it has become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

**Holy Communion:** The Epistle and Gospel are then read and immediately afterward Holy Communion is given to the child. It is customary that the Godparents bring the child to Church on the following two Sundays to receive Holy Communion.

**A Religious Dance** is made around the Baptismal Font with the priest accompanied by the sponsor who holds the newly-Baptized infant. This reflects the belief that at this moment the angels in Heaven are dancing expressing their joy that a new soul is registered in the Book of Life. The priest sings, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). This expresses our belief that through Baptism the child had "put on Christ". Tradition states that at this moment God assigns a guardian angel to stay with the newly-baptized person until the end of his earthly life.

**Your Presence at This Baptismal Service** should serve as an occasion for you to reaffirm your Baptismal vows. Carried before the Baptismal Font, you, too, once vowed through your sponsor that you would renounce the devil and become a child of God, believing, obeying, loving and serving Him. God promised to be your Father, to forgive your sins, to provide for your needs and to bring you to Heaven. Baptism is a solemn promise between God and His children. God never breaks His promise. Have you remained loyal to yours? Baptism is thus a matter of daily concern. It signifies that the "old Adam" in us, that is, our old evil nature, is to be drowned and destroyed by daily sorrow and repentance, and that the new life, planted in us by the Holy Spirit in Baptism, should daily come forth and grow.