

On The Mystery of Holy Chrismation: 7 Questions, 7 Answers

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Question #1: What is Holy Chrismation?

Answer: Holy Chrismation is the Mystery or Sacrament in which the priest anoints the various parts of the person's body – the forehead, the eyes, the nostrils, the mouth, the ears, the chest, the hands and the feet – marking them with the Sign of the Cross, with holy chrism (*myron* in Greek), saying each time: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Question #2: Why is one anointed with Chrism?

Answer: Holy Chrism is administered to give the fullness of the Holy Spirit to the person anointed and a power which enables him to develop his new spiritual state, which he entered at his baptism. It is, in a very real sense, one's personal Pentecost – when like the Apostles on the first Pentecost, he receives the Holy Spirit and is strengthened in his faith in Christ. It further makes him a member of the Holy Orthodox Church, which was born on Pentecost as well. For this reason, the Sacrament is normally administered immediately after Baptism (even in the case of infants).

Question #3: Where does the Chrism come from?

Answer: Holy Chrism is different from any of the other forms of oil that are used in the Church – for example, the oils used to bless water for Baptism, to bless a new home, or to anoint sick persons. The Holy Chrism used in the Sacrament of Chrismation is mixed and stirred for three full days and nights – the first three days of Holy Week – by bishops and priests in the holy altar. Then, on Great and Holy Thursday, it is consecrated by the metropolitan (or patriarch – the head of an autocephalous Church), according to a rich and ancient liturgical tradition. Finally, the Chrism is distributed to each of the diocesan bishops, who then distribute it to their priests. Chrism is made of pure olive oil and various aromatics. The olive oil symbolizes the spiritual power obtained by the anointing to fight off the enemies of our salvation, and the aromatics symbolize the sweet smell of the good deeds pleasing to God that the newly-baptized person must always perform. (In the West, it is normally the bishop in person who confers "Confirmation"; in the East, Chrismation is administered by a priest but the chrism which he uses must first have been blessed by the hierarchy).

Question #4: What happens in Chrismation?

Answer: In the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, "with the visible chrism the body is anointed, and the soul is sanctified by the Holy and Life-Giving Spirit." Chrismation "is the Holy Spirit ... Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit, the actualization of His Divine Presence." Thus, while Baptism gives us a new, or spiritual nature in Christ, the anointing with chrism further expands it, shaping the newly-baptized person into the form or image of Christ. Again this is why Chrismation normally

occurs immediately after Baptism – our personal Pentecost, right after our personal Pascha.

Question #5: How, specifically, is Chrismation our personal Pentecost?

Answer: Chrismation is an extension of Pentecost: the same Holy Spirit Who descended on the Apostles visibly in the form of tongues of fire now descends on the newly-baptized person invisibly, but with no less reality and power. Through Chrismation every member of the Church receives the gift of prophecy – the gift of “speaking for God” to the world. Every chrismated Christian receives a share in the royal priesthood of Christ, and is called to act as a conscious witness to the saving Truth that is our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Question #6: What is the Scriptural basis for Chrismation?

Answer: **Acts 8:15-17:** *When Peter and John came to the Samaritans, “they prayed for them so they might receive the Holy Spirit. As yet He had come upon none of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And so they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”*

Acts 19:5-6: *When the disciples of John heard this teaching of the Apostles, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them.”*

II Cor. 1:21-22: *“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”*

I John 2:20: *“You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things (through Him).”*

Question #7: How often can we receive Chrismation?

Answer: Like Baptism, Chrismation, once canonically performed, cannot ever be repeated. The anointing with chrism of people who convert to Orthodoxy from various confessions is not a repetition of this mystery. It is granting the sacrament, for the first and only time, to one who was not a member of the Holy Orthodox Church and had been deprived of her mysteries. Sometimes, people from other Eastern churches, who have been chrismated, are received into our Church by Confession and Communion. Other times, people whose faith is not Christian or who have not been baptized properly, are received into our Church by both Baptism and Chrismation. Didymus of Alexandria tells us that in the ancient Church, people who were baptized but did not hold the Orthodox Faith were received by being “chrismated, for they did not already possess the holy anointing with chrism.”

As we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, we are reminded how receiving the Holy Spirit transformed the Apostles, especially Saint Peter, from cowering in the Upper Room to fearlessly preaching the Gospel to a world starving for it. In the Sacrament of Chrismation, we receive that same Holy Spirit, and we are empowered, and expected, to do the same work of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.