

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST?



ORTHODOX BROTHERHOOD OF  
APOSTLES SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST?

- For those preparing for Baptism
- For those who wish to have their children baptized
- For those who have been baptized but never prepared for Baptism

The purpose of this brochure is to help all those who desire to receive the sacrament of Baptism not blindly, not merely out of tradition, but with understanding, with a seeing faith, and truly for their salvation. This work explains what Baptism is, how it is performed, and what is required of a person so that it may bring them a blessing, not condemnation and sorrow.

The brochure is intended for a wide audience: for those considering baptism, for priests who conduct catechetical preparation, and for the faithful who wish to help their neighbors and to be strengthened in the faith themselves.

## Preface. The Second Baptism of Rus'— A Tradition or the Beginning of a Grace-Filled Life?

The current generation of Christians has become a witness to and participant in the "second Baptism of Rus'," but unlike the first, which was performed by the holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir, for many of those who were baptized, it has not become the beginning of a new life with Christ.

According to some statistics<sup>1</sup>, 69.3% of Russians consider themselves Orthodox Christians, and lately, an even higher figure is sometimes cited—around 80%. However, such a huge percentage, unfortunately, speaks more to an affiliation with Orthodoxy as a cultural tradition, and is not an indicator of a genuine understanding of Christianity, the essence and meaning of the Church Sacraments, or the foundations of the spiritual life by our compatriots.

Tens of millions of our fellow citizens have received Baptism, yet, in reality, very few of them have become members of the Church, parishioners of churches, and partakers of the saving Church Sacraments.

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<sup>1</sup> The All-Russian poll was conducted by ROMIR on November 8–13, 2002. RTR-Vesti.

For the most part, this is not the fault of our fellow citizens: they grew up in the times of "state atheism" and at times simply had nowhere to obtain the necessary knowledge. The fault lies with us—the people of the Church, the clergy. Who but us will tell people about the Church? Who will teach them the foundations of the spiritual life?

In many ways, such a sad situation is a consequence of the fact that, in the baptism of adults, the Sacrament of Baptism was not preceded by catechization, which is instruction in the fundamentals of the faith, and, in the baptism of children, a most important requirement of the Church was ignored: that the child has churching parents or godparents who will ensure such instruction and a Christian upbringing thereafter.

Despite the recently increased attention to the necessity of serious catechetical preparation before Baptism, in reality, and not just formally, it is still almost nowhere to be found.

The purpose of this brochure is to help all those who desire to receive the Sacrament of Baptism not blindly, not out of tradition, but with understanding, with a seeing faith, and truly for salvation. This work explains what Baptism is and what is required of a person so that it may bring them a blessing, not condemnation and sorrow.

## On the Necessity of Baptism

### **– Why is it necessary to be baptized? Is it not enough to simply believe in God?**

It is not enough. Just as in order to be nourished one must eat, and not simply be certain that food exists, so also in the spiritual life, a purely intellectual acknowledgment of God's existence is not enough. One must learn to live according to God's commandments and become a full member of the Church.

It is possible to understand the meaning and purpose of the Mystery of Holy Baptism only by understanding the meaning of Christianity itself—the meaning and purpose of the coming of Christ the Savior. The fact that the Church calls the Lord Jesus Christ "Savior" indicates that the purpose of His coming into the world, His life, sufferings, death, and resurrection from the dead, was the salvation of mankind.

### **– From what, then, was it necessary to save mankind?**

From the consequences of that corruption which is sometimes called original sin. In its very beginning, with the first people, Adam and Eve, mankind experienced a catastrophe that corrupted and distorted all of human nature. The first people, enticed by the temptation to become "as gods," but without God, fell away from Him, the

Source of life, choosing their own sinful “life,” and by this they doomed themselves and all their posterity to the same existence. God is the Source of all life; therefore, to fall away from Him is effectively death for any being. Christ came to deliver man from the consequences of this tragedy, to unite fallen human nature with the Source of life.

The purpose of Christ's coming is the overcoming of our human death in all its manifestations: spiritually, and ultimately, at the general resurrection, in the physical realm as well. The Apostle Paul writes of this: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26).

– **But Adam and Eve died that death; when did I die that death?**

Every person, as a descendant of Adam and Eve, is already born infected with this death, as it is a kind of “genetic” corruption of human nature. It is present in every person. This is a sickness of our nature, and it is proven by sinful inclinations and corrupt habits of the soul, which everyone knows and is often ashamed of, but, as a rule, cannot overcome. The illnesses, sufferings, and death of the body, as well as the history of mankind, written in blood, also bear witness to this same corruption of a once-perfect human nature.

– **Am I to blame for being born with this mortal illness?**

This is not a matter of guilt. Firstly, although one who is born sick is not to blame for his illness, this does not mean that he does not need to be healed. Secondly, it is naive to suppose that we would have behaved better in Adam or Eve's place. To think so is to reveal a complete ignorance of oneself. The history of humanity, as well as the personal life of every individual, testifies to how powerless man is in achieving the ideal of holiness, righteousness, and love, of which both our mind and our conscience speak to us. If self-salvation were possible, Christ would not have gone to His Death on the Cross. *Only He Who created man could re-create him.*

– **And what did Christ accomplish?**

Christ is the God-man, in Whom two natures are united: Divine and human. He became incarnate, took upon Himself the corrupted human nature, healed it in Himself, and by His voluntary death conquered the death that dwelt within our nature. The Resurrection of Christ is the clear witness of this victory. Through the Cross and Resurrection, the Lord accomplished our salvation, restoring the union with God that was destroyed by sin.

The Risen Christ became the progenitor of a new humanity. The holy apostle Paul calls the Lord Jesus Christ the *Second Adam* (1 Cor. 15:45–47). For just as from Adam, with all the consequences of his sin, the entire human race originated

according to the flesh, so from the Lord Jesus Christ a new race of people began, born of Him according to the spirit.

**– But how does the healing of human nature in Christ affect the salvation of mankind?**

Participation in the human nature renewed by Christ is accomplished through the Sacrament of Baptism, in which the “seed” of the New Adam, Christ, is sown in our fallen nature. A second birth of man occurs when he is joined to the Church, which is called the Body of Christ. This is precisely why the Sacrament of Baptism is necessary. The Lord said that this Sacrament is one of the main conditions for salvation. But, of course, Baptism cannot be a “guarantee” of salvation. The seed of Baptism can sprout and bear its fruits—the salvation of the soul and spiritual gifts—only under favorable conditions (a proper spiritual life). However, under unfavorable conditions (if a person continues a sinful life and does not begin to cleanse his soul through repentance), it may remain unsprouted and bear no fruit, and it may even serve as a cause for the greater condemnation of the person who has neglected this sacred gift.

**– Why then did God not save us by His omnipotence?**

To save someone, the desire of the one being saved is, at the very least, necessary. Man is a being to whom God granted freedom from the very beginning, at creation. To save us without our participation is simply impossible! It would be a violation of our freedom. God never forces man; He calls, He shows the way.

God's omnipotence has never negated our freedom. One could even say that God, in creating a free being, limited His own Omnipotence by man. He awaits a free choice, a free love for Him, and the free and conscious doing of good. Can one be forced to love, or be made happy by force? No! Love can only blossom in a free heart...

We received the precious gift of freedom many millennia before some people began to fight for a pathetic semblance of freedom in social and economic terms.

## What is Necessary for Baptism

**– Who can be baptized?**

– The Sacrament of Baptism can be received only by one who sincerely believes in Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, repents of his former errors and sins, and resolves to change his life in accordance with Christ's commandments.

In Christianity, **faith** is not simply the recognition of God's existence or even the fact of the coming of the Christ-Godman (according to the testimony of Scripture, even the demons have such a "faith"), but a living sense of God. It is important to understand His significance in our lives, to feel how He cares for our salvation at every moment, and how He is ready to receive anyone, even the most lost of His sons, if only he repents and turns to Him. *True faith* is not an abstract concept; it necessarily leads to a change of life. A *true believer* in God strives to live according to the Gospel commandments, and if he does not succeed, he compels himself to repent, striving to conquer his sins, and learns to love his neighbor.

Only one who sincerely seeks the Truth and seriously ponders the meaning of his life can come to such a *faith*.

The initial faith necessary for receiving Baptism must be expressed in faith in God, the Creator and Provider, faith in Christ as God and Savior, and faith in the salvific nature of His Sacraments, and in the belief that God in every way desires and seeks our salvation: an eternal and unending good for each of us.

**Repentance** is the *foundation of Christianity* and an indispensable condition for the acceptance of Christ. The literal translation of this word from the Greek means a change of mind. The penitent person truly sees his own shortcomings, sins, and weaknesses, bitterly regrets them, or, as they say, his heart aches for them, and he strives to correct and change himself, calling on God for help.

He who does not have repentance cannot be a Christian. Therefore, the absence of repentance and the conviction of the correctness and virtue of one's own life is direct evidence that it is too early for a person to be baptized, for such a person does not need Christ the *Savior*. The Lord also said that He came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance (**Matthew 9:13**). He called 'the righteous' those who are self-righteous, who do not see their own sins.

A person preparing for Baptism needs to recognize his mistakes and sinful deeds, to sincerely repent of his sinful life, and to have a heartfelt desire to correct it and begin to live according to God's commandments.

### – **What can be an obstacle to Baptism?**

Persisting in a mortal sin that a person is unwilling to renounce—for example, a life of fornication. We will speak about mortal sins in greater detail below, but for now, it must be noted that obstinacy in them is a sign of an unrepentant heart and even of a lack of faith.

Therefore, the first step is to break away from acts that are entirely incompatible with Christianity—that is, from mortal sins. *As long as a person has not abandoned mortal*

*sins, he cannot receive Baptism.* It will not only bring him no benefit but will serve unto his condemnation.

– **How should a person prepare for the Mystery of Baptism?**

One must understand that Baptism is the most important event in a person's life. In the first centuries, in the pagan Roman Empire, such a step meant a voluntary renunciation not only of worldly goods and privileges, but often placed the one receiving Baptism outside the laws of society, condemning them to torment and death. Even just a few decades ago, in our own country, receiving Baptism could lead to unofficial persecution.

Now we live in a country where we face no threat for our faith. This is also a gift from God that must be valued. We must not turn the Holy Mystery of spiritual birth into an empty rite, a show with filming and intoxicated guests.

Reverence and repentance—this is the state of mind in which one must approach the Baptismal font. God looks at the heart of a person. He sees whether we have come sincerely or merely out of custom.

In preparing for the Mystery, one must read the Gospel and look within oneself in the light of Christ's commandments. One should look at one's past life and be confirmed once again in the resolve to correct oneself.

There are also external requirements for one preparing for Baptism. On the eve of receiving Baptism, at least a one-day fast is required, as well as abstinence from visiting theaters, cinemas, watching television, and other amusements (for those who are married, this also includes abstinence from marital relations). Adults receiving Baptism must prepare for a confession covering their entire life.

– **Can a non-believer be baptized?**

Christ said: *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (**Mark 16:16**). One who does not believe in the Savior, or who is infected with pagan, occult, or heretical teachings, cannot be baptized. For such a person, the Sacrament will not only bring no benefit, but will serve unto condemnation both in this life and in the eternal one.

No sensible person would store honey in a barrel that previously held manure; he would either wash it thoroughly or not use it at all. Likewise, the Lord will not enter a soul that has not been washed by repentance and has not abandoned harmful sinful deeds and habits.

## What One Preparing for Baptism Should Know about the Orthodox Faith

### **– What is necessary for one who desires to receive Baptism to know about the Orthodox Faith?**

The most important thing is found in the Symbol of Faith. In this prayer, the fundamental Christian truths that every Orthodox Christian must know are concisely stated. It was composed in the 4th century at the first two Ecumenical Councils. The Symbol of Faith (the Nicene Creed) consists of 12 articles.

1. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;
2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made;
3. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man;
4. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried;
5. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures;
6. And ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father;
7. And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end;
8. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the prophets;
9. In One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church;
10. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins;
11. I look for the Resurrection of the dead,
12. And the Life of the world to come. Amen.

Let us analyze it article by article:

#### **1. I believe...**

This word seems familiar and understandable, but let us try to ponder it. When we say "I think," "I know," "I am convinced," or "I feel," we remain within the limits of the explainable and the rational. The word "I believe," however, can only be applied to that which is devoid of self-evidence. We say "I believe" about that which cannot be seen with the eyes, touched with the hands, or heard with the ears. For believers, the

object of faith is distinct from all that is visible and demonstrable. The experience of faith in God consists in this: that something has touched my heart, and it has felt joy and light, and has unveiled the meaning of my life.

### **...in one God the Father Almighty...**

When Christianity entered the world, there were many different religions. Paganism sensed the divine source of the world, but did not know God. Its "gods" were merely a reflection of the world itself, a projection of the earthly world into the spiritual world. Therefore, paganism has an idolatrous and magical character, in which everything serves the earthly. Christianity revealed to the world a fundamentally new understanding of God. The one Godhead, it turns out, has Three Hypostases, or Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The first article of the Symbol of Faith speaks of the first Hypostasis of God – God the Father. The Symbol of Faith confesses Him as Almighty – that is, the One who holds in His Providence all that He has created, all the diversity of life.

### **...Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.**

The world did not arise by chance. It is not eternal and not self-existing. It is God's creation. Heaven and earth are not the sky we see above our heads, nor the ground that is under our feet. Heaven is the world of spirits; earth is the material world.

## **2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God...**

With these words begins the confession of the central dogma of Christianity: the confession of Christ. Who is He? On the one hand, He is the man Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>, in all things like unto us, apart from sin<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, Christ is the Son of God, that is, true God, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

### **Only-begotten...**

Why is it specified that the Son of God is Only-begotten? The distinction is made because among the pagan gods, we find they have any number of children. For example, Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greeks, or Krishna, one of the Hindu gods. In this case, the Creed indicates that the Son of God—the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity—is Only-begotten, meaning He is the one and only, and that there are not, nor can there be, any others.

### **...begotten of the Father before all ages...**

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<sup>2</sup> The name *Jesus*, in Hebrew, means Savior. The word *Christ* is Greek and means the same as the Hebrew word *Messiah*—the Anointed One. This is what the Hebrews called their kings. In the case of Jesus Christ, it refers to His special anointing by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> He is the only man Who lived without committing any sin.

These words mean that the generation of the Only-begotten is not an event in time; He was not born in the same way that all earthly creatures are born. The words "before all ages" signify that His birth occurred outside of time. This means there was never a time when He did not exist. He is co-eternal with the Father. This refers to the eternal generation of the Son, which takes place outside of time. In this way, the distinctive property of the Son of God is indicated.

### **Light of Light, True God of True God...**

This means that Jesus Christ is true God: equal in honor to the Father, not some lesser deity.

### **...begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father...**

The Creed emphasizes that the Son of God is of one essence with the Father. He is not a creature, nor is He a separate God from the Father, but is He Who has one and the same essence (nature) with Him.

### **...by Whom all things were made.**

This emphasizes the truth that all that exists has its source in the One God and not in one hypostasis or another.

### **3. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven...**

With these words, the Creed indicates the reason for the "becoming man" or incarnation of God the Word. This reason is the disastrous spiritual state of humanity, which requires salvation. By "salvation", what is meant is not deliverance from the calamities of life and nature, from social and political disorder, and so on, but from the power of sin and the passions that reign in man. The word "salvation" emphasizes that humanity is in such a grave spiritual condition that human means are incapable of healing it, and Divine assistance is required. This is underscored by the words "came down from Heaven."

### **...and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man...**

These words speak of the great Christian truth that He Who was called Jesus Christ is the God-man—that is, He is at the same time true God and true Son of Man. The Church teaches that in Jesus Christ, the Divine and human natures exist in a completely unique unity, a unity that no other religion in the world has known or knows. At the Fourth Ecumenical Council, it was declared that in Christ, the Divine

and human natures are united *unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably*.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried...**

First, this indicates the specific historical time when the Lord lived, suffered, was crucified, was buried, and then rose again. This time is designated by the name of the ruler, Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea, who lived in the first century AD. These words also emphasize that Jesus Christ truly suffered and was truly buried, that it was not an appearance, as some claimed, but a real fact.

#### **5. and rose again...**

The words of the Apostle Paul, if nothing else, speak to the immense significance this fifth article of the Creed holds for us. He writes: *if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14)*. In our Church, the feast of the Resurrection, the day of Holy Pascha, is the Feast of Feasts, the Triumph of Triumphs. That is, it is the highest, standing above all the feasts of the Orthodox Church. Why is this so? The reason is very simple—as the Apostle Paul writes, Christ was the first of the resurrected. By this, the Holy Apostle is saying that it is only through the Resurrection of Christ that humanity receives the possibility of resurrection to Eternal Life. Only through His Resurrection did the General Resurrection of all people become possible.

#### **...on the third day according to the Scriptures...**

This emphasizes that the events described in the Gospel were foretold back in the Old Testament era, making reference to the numerous prophecies about Christ.

#### **6. And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father...**

The sixth article of the Creed points to the state of human nature, assumed by God, for which every person is intended. Every person, it turns out, is destined to be an eternal inhabitant of Heaven. Moreover, the words "sits at the right hand of the Father" show that our human nature is, by its very nature, above all creatures. And these words—"sits at the right hand of the Father"—speak of nothing other than the highest possible degree of union with the Godhead, the maximum degree of God-likeness. The image is taken from the history of the ancient world, where the one sitting at the right hand of the king was the king's right hand, effectively, the second king in the kingdom, if you will. For the first king was the absolute ruler, and the second, sitting

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<sup>4</sup> The Divine and human natures in Christ are united in a single Person unconfusedly (without forming some third thing, a demigod-demihuman), unchangeably (without alteration of the natures), indivisibly (inseparable in the unity of the God-man), and inseparably (for all time).

at his right hand, managed all the affairs of the kingdom and resolved practically all matters pertaining to it. Therefore, the expression "at the right hand of the Father" emphasizes that pinnacle of power, strength, and glory for which man is intended by his creation, and which were made manifest in the kingdom, power, and glory in Christ Jesus, in His human nature, which was ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand of God the Father.

#### **7. ...and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end...**

This article of the Creed speaks of the completion of earthly history and the revelation of a new life. He, Christ, will complete the history of humanity with His second coming. Sacred Scripture, as well as the Holy Tradition of the Church, says that this Second Coming of the Lord will be conditioned by the state of humanity, and this coming will take place when humanity has become completely corrupt, has lost its spirit, when humanity has become completely materialistic, and there will be no other god but earthly wealth and earthly well-being. When the Spirit of God is no longer in humanity, its existence will lose all meaning. At that hour, earthly history will end. It will end with the Lord Jesus Christ coming in glory, and the final determination of each person's destiny will take place. Then there will be a new Heaven and a new earth. A new Heavenly Kingdom, in which He, Christ, will be the Lord. His Kingdom will have no end. The Kingdom of Christ is called Heavenly not because of its location, but because of the laws of love that are now inherent in the Saints and the heavenly Angels.

#### **8. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life...**

This article of the Symbol of Faith speaks of the third hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, Who is of one essence with the Father and the Son, yet distinct from Them.

##### **...Who proceedeth from the Father...**

The word "proceedeth," as distinct from the Son's being "begotten," emphasizes the unique, distinct hypostatic properties of this Third Person of the Holy Trinity. The words "Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified" indicate that the Third Hypostasis is of equal honor with God the Father and God the Son.

##### **...Who spake by the prophets...**

These words of the Symbol of Faith indicate that all the prophets spoke by the Spirit of God and, thus, all the prophecies that were spoken by them were not of men, not according to human wisdom, but precisely from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The

prophets did not speak from themselves, but spoke by the Holy Spirit, Who foretold the future as if it were the present.

### **9. In One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church...**

What is meant by the Church? The Church is not simply a society of persons having one faith, sacraments, and administration; rather, it is the unity of the Spirit of God present in those Christians who fulfill the will of God and live according to the Gospel. The Church is the Body of Christ (**Eph. 1:23**), a single Theanthropic (God-man) organism. The Church is a new creation of God. It is not men who gather the Church, but God Who created the Church. Christ's disciples, the apostles, entered into the Church; they did not form the Church by themselves, but entered into it. It is no accident that the history of the Church begins with Pentecost, with the descent of the Holy Spirit. This one Spirit, this unity of soul which was thus formed, arising as a result of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon this multitude of disciples, is the Church. Thus, the Church is Theanthropic; that is, it is, first, divine, and second, human, and the Symbol of Faith names the main characteristics of the Church.

First, "**in one... Church**"—this indicates that just as the Body of Christ is one, so also the Church is one.

The second characteristic is **Holy... Church...**

What does this mean? Many sinful people are present in the Church, and there is no person who is like God in his holiness, because all are sinful. How, then, are we to understand the holiness of the Church? Each Christian partakes of the Church to the degree that he lives according to the Gospel. And the Church itself, if one may put it this way, is present in a person to the degree that it finds a place for itself in that person. It is no accident, therefore, that during the Sacrament of Confession, at the absolution of sins, the priest always reads a prayer containing these words addressed to Christ concerning the penitent: "reconcile and unite him to Thy Holy Church." It turns out that by our sins we fall away from the Church, that is, we become lesser partakers of the grace of the Holy Spirit active within it; we can even become completely separated from the Church and, on the contrary, through repentance, we return to that holiness of the Church in which we are called to live. Thus, the holiness of the Church does not depend on the church life that we observe in earthly conditions. When we speak of the holiness of the Church, we are speaking of the holiness of God present in the Church, for the Church is Theanthropic (God-man). A person, a Christian, is united to the Church only to the extent that he actualizes the sanctity, the holiness of the divine life, in his personal life. Thus, the Church remains holy, even though it contains many people who do not possess the proper holiness.

**Catholic... Church...**

Unlike the first characteristic, which speaks of "one" Church, a numerical characteristic, the word "catholic" ("*sobornaya*" in Russian) indicates an organic unity. This shows that the Church is not simply a gathering of people, nor a mechanical union of those who believe alike. The *Catholic Church* is an organism in which every cell is alive, and the vitality of each cell affects the vitality of another; each cell receives its viability from the whole organism, just as it itself contributes to the life of that organism. Thus, the characteristic "Catholic" does not speak of the Church's ubiquity or its so-called universality; no, the catholic, that is, *sobornaya* Church, is a divine characteristic. It points to that unity of the members of the Church which in its essence should be like the unity that we see in the Holy Trinity. We call the Holy Trinity "of one essence" (consubstantial). The Church and the members of the Church are also called to be "of one essence" in the Body of Christ. That is, we must all be "of one essence" in the *Unity of the Holy Spirit*, by which the members of the Church live.

The word "**Apostolic**" signifies two characteristics. First, that the Church is founded on the faith that was announced to us by the apostles. The apostles left us the Gospel and their epistles, which are the firm foundation upon which all Christian faith and life are built. Second, the word "Apostolic" denotes another characteristic, namely, the mission of the Church. It points to the calling for every Christian. This is expressed in the words of Christ addressed to the apostles: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (**Matthew 28:19**). The mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel of Christ, which brings salvation to humanity, through both word and life.

#### **10. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins...**

This tenth article of the Symbol of Faith speaks of the Mystery of a new spiritual birth, which the apostles call the "laver of regeneration," a laver of water. It speaks of that Mystery about which Christ said in His conversation with Nicodemus: "*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God*" (**John 3:5**). This Mystery of birth is called Holy Baptism. What does it consist of? In this Mystery, to a person who has sincere faith and strives for salvation, is given the grace-filled seed of the New Man. This New Man is the Lord Jesus Christ, Who regenerated, restored, and healed that old nature which arose as a result of the fall of Adam. Saint Simeon the New Theologian writes very well about this: "*Then (at Baptism – comp.) God the Word enters into the one being baptized, as into the womb of the Ever-Virgin, and abides in him, as a seed.*" Thus, the Mystery of Baptism is the mystery of the birth of the New Man, Christ, in our old nature. By this birth, the root of our old, passionate man is cut. For the birth of the New Man and His growth in the soul is characterized by the gradual destruction of sin in human nature. With a proper

spiritual life, by compelling oneself to fulfill the commandments of the Gospel and to repent, a definite growth of the soul gradually occurs in a person. A person's struggle with his sin leads him to see the brokenness of his nature. This struggle leads a person to repentance, leads him to humility, and through this humility, an ever-greater filling with grace of the person's soul and body occurs. The New Man, growing within our old one, gradually destroys sins, and this is what is spoken of in the Symbol of Faith: *'I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.'* Thus, these words have a dual meaning: first, that in the Mystery itself, when a person accepts it with sincere faith, sincerely repents, and confesses his transgressions, the remission of all his past sins occurs. Second, by receiving the seed of the New Man, the baptized person who leads a proper spiritual life is freed from the power of sin, freed from the power of the passions, gradually grows into the new man, and thus the process of the remission and destruction of his sinfulness takes place within him.

### **11. I look for the resurrection of the dead...**

This article of the Symbol of Faith directly affirms something that no pagan religion spoke of. It speaks of faith in the General Resurrection of all people. This General Resurrection will occur at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, after which 'the life of the age to come' begins.

### **12. And the life of the age to come. Amen.**

'The life of the age to come' is life with God, the life of those people who strove to live according to the truth, strove for the truth, strove for purity and holiness. The life of the age to come will be open to all those who, according to the word of Christ, have not blasphemed the Holy Spirit: *'Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men'* (**Matthew 12:31**).

But who are these who have blasphemed the Holy Spirit? These are they who clearly saw that the Truth is in Christ and consciously fought against this very Truth, fighting not out of delusion, not out of an error of the mind, but being fully aware of what they were doing. We see a vivid example in the Gospel. When the Lord resurrected the four-days-dead Lazarus, the Sanhedrin, whose members had already become convinced that Christ was not a simple man but the Messiah, decided to commit a direct crime, a direct opposition to the Spirit of God: to kill Christ and Lazarus. This is an example that shows what the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is.

The Gospel calls the fate of the perished after death eternal torment, where 'the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die.' The Holy Fathers see in these images nothing other than a person's dwelling in the fire of those passions which he acquired and cultivated in this life and from which he had no desire to be delivered. Especially destructive of all the passions is pride, which leads to opposition to the Truth, that is,

to God. It is precisely the burning of pride, the burning of the passions, that is the unquenchable fire and the undying worm.

## What You Need to Know about the Christian Life

### – What else is necessary to know before Baptism?

Besides knowledge of the Nicene Creed, it is necessary to have a correct understanding of Christian morality, of sins and virtues.

A sin is any transgression of God's commandments, any offense against conscience. If Christ's main commandment is the commandment of love, then sin is everything that a person does against true, Christian love.

### – What is meant by *Christian love*?

– In order to understand what Christian love is, it is necessary to talk about how it is acquired. Christian love is that which is founded on *humility*. A *humble* person, in contrast to a proud one, sees his own infirmity, his inability without God to become that which we are called to be, which is, like Christ in his spiritual and moral qualities. Where there is no *humility*, there is no true love, says Christianity. Consequently, in order to understand and acquire true Christian love, it is necessary to acquire Christian humility. How is it acquired?

The answer to this question is given by St. Symeon the New Theologian, who says: "*The diligent fulfillment of Christ's commandments reveals to a person his own infirmities.*" That is, in order to acquire Christian humility, it is necessary to compel oneself to diligently keep the commandments of the Gospel. When a person begins to do this, he soon becomes convinced that without God's help, not only can he not truly fulfill a single one of Christ's commandments, but he cannot even do good deeds in the way the Gospel requires. Those who attained true holiness, the Holy Fathers, wept over their virtues as if they were sins. Think about it: they wept not only over their sins, but also over their virtues, for they saw that even our good deeds, as a rule, have a multitude of evils mixed in with them - vainglory, and, at times, self-interest, hypocrisy, and other passions.

When a person who tries to fulfill the commandments of the Gospel as they were given by Christ Himself attempts to incarnate them in his life, he will quickly become convinced of how morally and spiritually ill he is. This vision of his own infirmity, on the one hand, and, on the other, the constant turning to God with repentance, reveals God's closeness to the soul, shows how the Lord comes to our aid, how He helps a

person, and how He frees him from the burden that he lays upon his own soul through sin.

The experience of fulfilling the Gospel commandments gradually leads a person to the state that in Christianity is called humility. From this state, when a person sees his own infirmity, his powerlessness to finally conquer sin within himself, compassion for other people arises. Compassion for the infirmities of our neighbors develops into a desire to somehow help another person. This state of compassion for another person is the beginning of *Christian love*. As one is purified from sin, one acquires greater closeness to God and, consequently, greater love. Christian love comes to a person not at all quickly, but gradually, as humility is acquired. The experience of those people called saints in the Church testifies to the heights that Christian love can reach.

#### **– How can one distinguish true love from false love?**

Sometimes people call impulses of feelings and emotions, and often purely carnal passions, love. A person can love their neighbor as a part of themselves, their world, their comfort. One can "love" others simply because there is material or other benefit from them. Such love, built on egoism, can often quickly turn into hatred.

However, love as a gift from God cannot be the product of human efforts; it is precisely a gift of the Holy Spirit.

One of the main criteria for the truth of love is sacrifice: when a person is ready to selflessly sacrifice their interests, habits, and comforts for the sake of others without expecting any rewards for it, neither earthly nor heavenly. The most vivid example of true love is the Sacrifice of Christ, in which He gave Himself to people.

#### **– Which sins contradict the commandment of love?**

– In general, all of them. Sin is everything that separates a person from God and contradicts love, but there are sins that are especially grievous. A mortal sin is a sin by the commission of which a person so wounds and injures his soul and is so alienated from God that he becomes, as it were, spiritually dead; that is, he becomes incapable, for a long time (and often forever), of goodness, honesty, magnanimity, compassion, striving for the truth, faithfulness, purity in personal life, and so on. Such a sin requires an especially deep repentance, accompanied by bodily labors (fasting, prostrations, etc.).

The Holy Fathers say: there is no unforgivable sin, only an unrepented sin. Any unrepented sin is, in a certain sense, a mortal sin. Therefore, we do not have a "legislative" list of mortal sins, as do the Jews and Catholics. However, the Orthodox tradition considers the following to be mortal sins:

- *Despair*: that is, the abandonment of faith and hope in God's mercy, the forgetting of His love and saving Providence. A person without faith often falls into such a state during times of sorrow and trials, which, if approached correctly, can be very beneficial for the soul;
- *Apostasy*: the renunciation of God;
- *Heresy*: the conscious opposition of a believer to a known Christian truth;
- *Unbelief*: the denial of God's existence, the refusal to accept the Truth;
- *Suicide* (with the exception of cases of insanity);
- Murder (including infants in the womb); close to this are: complicity in murder, assisting in suicide, cursing, the infliction of injury upon a person;
- *Theft*, robbery, extortion;
- *Sorcery*, as well as turning to psychics, fortune-tellers, astrologers, soothsayers, etc.;
- *Fornication and adultery* in their various manifestations (fornication is defined as the carnal relations of a person not in a lawful marriage; adultery is defined as the failure to maintain marital fidelity). To this category also belong various unnatural sins (such sins can also occur between lawful spouses, and it is a disgrace for those who, calling themselves Christians, do such things);
- A grievous sin is *causing scandal* to one's neighbor (*temptation*): that is, activity that corrupts the morality of people, especially if it is done through the mass media, in theaters, or in movies (on account of their wide audience); participation in the creation and dissemination of video, television, radio, and other productions that carry into the souls of people the seeds of depravity, heresies, godlessness, violence, malice, and the like);
- *Drunkenness, drug addiction*, and any contribution to these (trafficking and distribution);

### – And what is virtue?

Virtue is the fulfillment of the Lord's commandments, the chief of which are the preservation of faith in Christ and the acquisition of love and goodwill towards all people without exception, especially towards fellow believers, resisting the temptations of sin, and the purification of the heart from cunning, arrogance, greed, love of pleasure, and other spiritual infirmities.

## On Infant Baptism

**– But in most cases, it is not adults who are baptized, but infants, who cannot consciously live according to the commandments. What meaning, then, does the Baptism of infants have?**

The Church permits the baptism of infants only if one fundamental condition is met: the infants' own unmanifested faith and lack of volitional effort must be compensated for by the active faith and spiritual effort of other people. This means a firm, sincere promise by the parents (and sponsors, if such can be found in substance and not just in name) before God and the priest to raise the child as an Orthodox Christian.

Naturally, the sponsors, or, as they are called, godparents, must be genuine members of the Church; otherwise, how can they bring the infant to partake in that which they themselves do not possess...

As it is said in the book "On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" by St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *"...it pleased them (the divine instructors) to admit infants to baptism under the sacred condition that the natural parents of the child should entrust him to one of the faithful who would instruct him well in divine matters, and thereafter care for the child as a father appointed from above and as a guardian of his eternal salvation."*<sup>5</sup>

**– So, is the infant himself, then, incapable of receiving grace?**

To say that an infant, during Communion for example, does not receive grace would be incorrect. However, according to Orthodox teaching, our salvation is accomplished exclusively through the cooperation of two wills—the Divine and the human. One cannot speak of any conscious and volitional cooperation on the part of an infant who is not yet self-aware.

The very fact of a person's reception of Baptism was not considered by the Holy Fathers to be a kind of indulgence, an automatic "salvation." The grace of Baptism is a gift, and like any gift, it must be freely assimilated. In the case of the Baptism of infants, grace is given in the sacred rite potentially, as a seed of future faith, in a state of potentiality<sup>6</sup> ("in embryo," as an external "seal"<sup>7</sup>), and it is actualized only through the growth of faith and volition within the person, in proportion to his free and conscious movement toward God; otherwise, *"water remains water,"*<sup>8</sup> *"for the Spirit*

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<sup>5</sup> On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy. 7, III, 11.

<sup>6</sup> The Works of St. Maximus the Confessor. Book II. Questions and Answers to Thalassius. "Martis," 1994. P. 42 (Question 6).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa. The Great Catechetical Oration, 40.

*does not give birth to an unwilling will.*”<sup>9</sup> That is, depending on a person's free efforts, the grace of Baptism either unfolds within him, “shining forth,” or it is lost by him and is extinguished<sup>10</sup>.

– **Many infants die unbaptized. What will happen to the soul of such an infant?**

– At present, unfortunately, the assertion that “*unbaptized infants go to hell*” has become quite widespread. In reality, patristic thought is altogether unacquainted with such an opinion, with the sole exception of a single Western Father—Blessed Augustine. Following him, this idea was for a long time assimilated by all of Western Latin theology. In turn, this idea migrated to us from the West.

Blessed Augustine, basing himself on the formulation of the Symbol of Faith (“*baptism for the remission of sins*”<sup>11</sup>), substantiated his opinion on the hereditary transmission of Adam’s sin. Children, he believed, are in need of baptism not because they have sinned personally, but because they “sinned in Adam”<sup>12</sup>.

The brother of St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, in a special work entitled “On Infants Who Are Prematurely Snatched by Death,” directly affirms that for infants, as they have committed no evil, nothing prevents them from being partakers of the Divine Light. Here is what he says: “*The infant who has not tasted of evil, since no sickness hinders his soul’s eyes from partaking of the Light, abides in a natural state, having no need of purification for the restoration of health, because from the beginning he did not receive sickness into his soul.*”<sup>13</sup>

St. Theophan the Recluse wrote wonderfully about unbaptized children: “*But children are all Angels of God. The unbaptized, like all those outside the faith, must be left to God’s mercy. They are not stepsons or stepdaughters to God. Therefore, He knows what and how to arrange for them. The ways of God are a great abyss!*”<sup>14</sup>

The hieromonk Arsenios of Athos (19th century), known for his ascetic life, when asked about the fate of unbaptized infants, answered: “*Regarding the infants about whom you have asked us, it can be said that those who have received Holy Baptism will rejoice and be blessed in heaven forever, even if their end was unexpected.*”

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<sup>9</sup> The Works of St. Maximus the Confessor. Book II. Questions and Answers to Thalassius. "Martis," 1994. P. 42 (Question 6).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: St. Mark the Ascetic. An Answer to Those Who are in Doubt Concerning Holy Baptism. In the book: Spiritual and Moral Homilies of Our Venerable Fathers Mark the Ascetic, Isaiah the Solitary, Symeon the New Theologian. Moscow, 1995. P. 77.

<sup>11</sup> Many modern commentators on this article of the Symbol of Faith for some reason do not take into account that at the time it was being composed, the baptism of children was, at least in the Christian East, a very rare phenomenon.

<sup>12</sup> See: Meyendorff, John, Protopresbyter. Byzantine Theology. Moscow, 2001. P. 255.

<sup>13</sup> Works of St. Gregory of Nyssa. Part 4. Moscow, 1862. P. 345.

<sup>14</sup> The Works of Our Father Among the Saints Theophan the Recluse. Collected Letters. Issues I and II. Letter 139. Holy Dormition Pskov-Caves Monastery and "Palomnik" Publishing House, 1994. P. 155.

*Likewise, one should not reject those infants who were born dead or did not manage to be baptized: they are not to blame for not having received Holy Baptism, and in the Heavenly Father's house there are many mansions, among which, of course, there are also those where such infants will find rest on account of the faith and piety of their faithful parents, even though they themselves, according to the inscrutable judgments of God, did not receive Holy Baptism. To think so is not contrary to religion, as the Holy Fathers also testify in the Synaxarion for Meatfare Saturday. Parents can pray for them with faith in God's mercy.*"<sup>15</sup>

**– And at what age were people baptized in the Orthodox Church in the past?**

In the Orthodox East, the following practice of Baptism existed:

*"The number of Christians at the time of Athanasius the Great (4th c.) was not particularly large, as many received Baptism as adults, and some postponed it until their old age. Children were only preparing to become Christians, young people were in the state of the catechumenate, and only persons of mature age were baptized, becoming 'perfect' Christians, who were then present at the Liturgy of the Faithful.*"<sup>16</sup>

*"In the 4th c., the Christian Church consisted of persons who had received Baptism as adults, and who therefore well understood their desire and their motives for converting to Christianity.*"<sup>17</sup>

Here is what an Orthodox historian writes about the baptism of Emperor Constantine:  
*"...Constantine postponed his baptism until the end of his days, and at the same time took a most lively part in church councils. This circumstance could have seemed strange only to writers of the 9th century, when it had already become a universal custom to perform Baptism in infancy. In general, Eusebius does not emphasize the fact of the baptism of Constantine the Great at all, and he hardly could have treated it with any bias: for him, as a man of the 4th century, the baptism of Constantine did not have that important and special significance that Western historians have ascribed to it. Eusebius knew well that many notable people of his time received baptism before death, and that Constantine, even before his baptism, was a good Christian, seeing that he granted freedom of confession, participated in councils, and so forth.*"<sup>18</sup>

*"Gregory of Nyssa and the son of pious parents, Basil the Great, were baptized only after completing their secular education; Ambrose of Milan, like Nectarius of Constantinople, received Baptism after their election to episcopal sees. St. John*

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<sup>15</sup> Letters of the Athonite Elder Hieromonk Arsenios, who reposed in the Lord, to various persons. Letter No. 42, issue 3. Athonite Russian Panteleimon Monastery. Moscow, 1899. Reprint: "Galaktika," 1994. P. 164.

<sup>16</sup> Bolotov V.V. Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church. Vol. 3. M. 1994. P. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Bolotov V.V. Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church. Vol. 3. M. 1994. P. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Bolotov V.V. Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church. Vol. 1. M. 1994. P. 26.

*Chrysostom, like Jerome, although they came from Christian families, were baptized as adults, as were Ambrose's brother Satyrus and the sister of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Gorgonia, despite the fact that they were already known for their piety. When the boy Augustine fell dangerously ill, his pious, caring mother Monica permitted him to receive only the initiation into the catechumenate.*"<sup>19</sup>

Children were also baptized, but how?

*"It is known that in the 10th century in Constantinople, children were not baptized very early. They approached Baptism gradually: on the 8th day after birth they received their name; on the 40th day they were churching, 'becoming Christians,' as the sources say, even before Baptism. They received the right to enter the temple and listen to the readings. They became catechumens—'those who are to be illumined'—in the 4th week of Great Lent, probably several years later. Then they renounced the devil and were united to Christ on Great Friday, during the rite which the Patriarch served before the Vespers with the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. And, finally, at the Vespers of Great Saturday, they received Baptism and Chrismation from the Patriarch, while the paremias of Great Saturday were being read in the church.*

*According to 14th-century sources, the churching of the infant and the reading of the mother's prayers of purification were performed on the fortieth day. In all the Trebniks (Books of Needs) of that time, this precedes the Mystery of Baptism.*

*After the giving of the name and the churching, the infant was prepared for Baptism through instruction in the Christian faith, which is called catechesis.*"<sup>20</sup>

*"... The candidates for Baptism were children who were not very big, who needed to be brought to the church, but who were already sufficiently developed so that they could receive some instruction, and so that, as St. Gregory the Theologian teaches (Migne PG 36: 400), they could actively participate in the rites of their own Baptism. The same practice, i.e., not to baptize very young children, was observed in Rus' in the 11th century, according to the rules of Metropolitan John I of Kiev."*<sup>21</sup>

This is how they prepared for Baptism and baptized in the past... What can we see now in our churches?

Sometimes parents, who themselves have not found the time (or have not shown the desire) to become Christians in more than just name, find for their children the same kind of "unchurched" godparents as they are... Often, one can sadly see how the future

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<sup>19</sup> Posnov M.E. History of the Christian Church (before the division of the Churches - 1054). Part 2, Ch. 5, The Sacrament of Baptism. Brussels: "Life with God", 1964 (reprint: Kyiv, 1991). pp. 496-497.

<sup>20</sup> Archpriest Gennady Nefedov. Sacraments and Rites of the Orthodox Church. Moscow, 1995. p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> Arranz, Michael. Selected Works on Liturgics. Vol. 1. The Sacraments of the Byzantine Euchologion. Moscow, 2003. p. 289.

"spiritual mentors," before entering the baptistery, put on pectoral crosses just bought from the church "box," which they had never worn before.

Perhaps all this is done with good intentions and out of sincere ignorance, or, perhaps, the parents are simply seeking to soothe their conscience, or even for superstitious and occult reasons (a "healer" grandmother said to baptize the child).

There are cases when Baptism is viewed as a kind of magical ritual, necessary so that the infant "doesn't get sick" or for another prosaic reason.

In itself, concern for a child's physical health is not something bad, as long as it does not supplant concern for his spiritual health. Man is a spiritual-physical being, and the hierarchy of values must always be correct. Just as one cannot place the physical above the spiritual in oneself, so one cannot allow this in relation to children.

It must also be remembered that our physical health largely depends on our spiritual state. If a child is simply baptized and does not receive proper instruction in faith and life (along with his parents), this will nullify both the spiritual and, consequently, the physical benefit.

#### **– What is the role of "godparents"?**

Godparents, or *sponsors for children and adults*, must be capable of providing Christian instruction to their godchildren and have the opportunity to do so. Since a child receives Baptism without having either conscious faith or even the will for it, the Church permits such a Baptism only in the families of believing, church-going people. Godparents were originally guarantors that the child would definitely be raised in the Orthodox faith.

In our time, the educational functions of godparents actually fall on the biological parents, so everything said about godparents applies first and foremost to them.

Godparents must know that they are vouching for the Christian upbringing of their godchildren and are responsible for their salvation. The seed sown in their (the baptized person's) heart must be carefully cultivated. If those who baptize the child (the godparents and the parents) do not give the child a proper upbringing, then they will deprive him of a priceless gift.

#### **– Who can be a godparent?**

Godparents should be people who are not only baptized and believing themselves, but who also have substantial experience in spiritual and church life, capable of teaching this to their godchildren. They must know the Orthodox faith well and be an example of Christian life for them, not only observing church fasts and regulations, regularly

confessing and receiving communion, but also leading a correct, serious spiritual life. In the event that there are no sponsors, if the parents themselves are not yet capable of raising their children as Orthodox, then before baptizing the children, it is necessary to focus on the education of the parents.

## How a Person Who Has Received Baptism Should Change His Life

### – How should a baptized person live from this point forward?

For many, unfortunately, their conversion to Christianity, to the Church, and their entire spiritual life concludes with that with which it ought to begin: Baptism. This speaks to a complete misunderstanding of what they have received, and to the superficiality of their faith. Baptism is the spiritual birth of the new man. Therefore, it is not the final act in the life of a believer in Christ, but only the beginning, and just as it would be strange and frightening to see parents who, after the birth of a child, ceased to care for him, so it is equally strange and unnatural for a baptized person to be forgetful of the new life of the new man born in him.

What, then, should this care consist of? There is a wonderful word for this: **compulsion**. One must precisely compel oneself to the study and diligent fulfillment of Christ's commandments. In doing so, a person will inevitably encounter a certain "but." As soon as he attempts, in practice, to live according to the Gospel, he will immediately see that he is in no way capable of it. Having begun such spiritual labor upon himself, a person will make some unpleasant discoveries: his pathetic slavery to passions great and small, and the power of bad habits over him. Only upon seeing so much defilement in himself will he understand that he needs repentance as much as he needs air. On this path, a person's spiritual formation takes place. This includes a true knowledge of oneself, an understanding of one's deep spiritual illness, and the realization of one's own helplessness to be healed by one's own efforts alone. Coming to know himself in this way, a person will at the same time come to know God as the Almighty Physician, as the Source of the joy and consolation that He will manifest to the Christian in the difficult and sorrowful moments of his life.

The new life is a constant cleansing of the conscience from unavoidable stumblings and sins through repentance in one's heart and in the Mystery of Confession. It is proper prayer—the foundation of the spiritual life and a living channel of communion with God. It is the reception of the other saving Mysteries of the Church, especially the Eucharist, the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, during which a person is united with his Savior. In order to become a new man not in name only, but

in essence, one must also read and study the Holy Scripture and the writings of the Holy Fathers of the Church, for without this it is impossible to learn the conditions and laws of the spiritual life, the dangers that stand in the way, or to understand the meaning and purpose of this life.

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**We wish all our newly-illuminated brothers and sisters  
a grace-filled life in Christ and victory over sin!**

