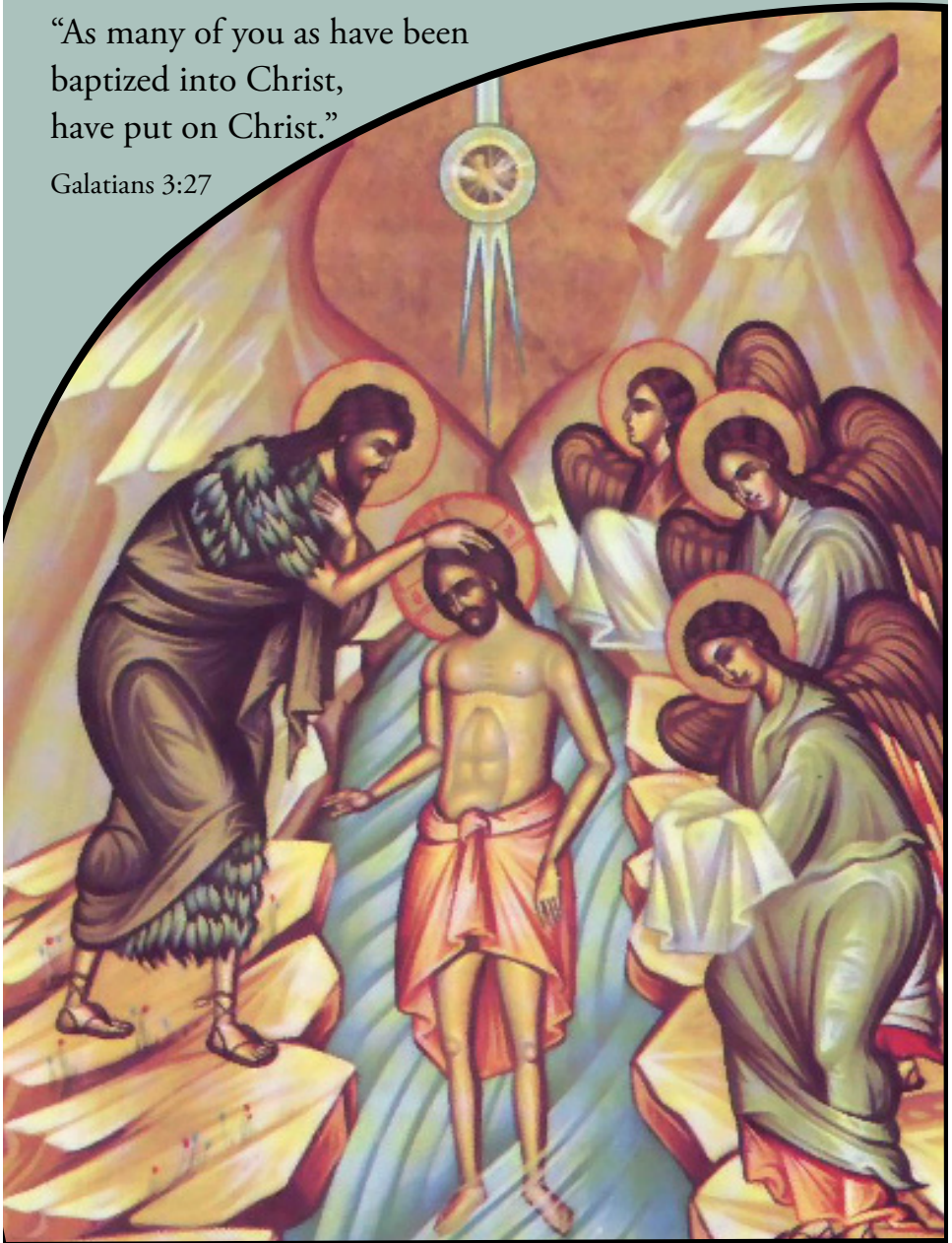


# PUTTING ON CHRIST

BECOMING AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
IN THE PARISH OF ST. JOHN THE FORERUNNER

“As many of you as have been  
baptized into Christ,  
have put on Christ.”

Galatians 3:27



# INTRODUCTION

We'll begin by saying 'thank you'—after all, if you are even reading this brochure then that means you are at least interested in becoming an Orthodox Christian and a member of our parish, and we want you to know that we are grateful for your interest. But we also want you to know right up front that Orthodox Christianity is a big commitment: it not only involves a new way of life, it also involves living that new way of life in a specific community of particular people. Becoming an Orthodox Christian is also a lengthy and time-consuming process: it generally takes close to a couple of years. We are not trying to discourage you in any way—far from it! We just want you to be absolutely clear as to what you might be getting into—even if you are just at the stage of beginning to think about Orthodox Christianity. So what this brochure is designed to do is spell out the process by which a person can become Orthodox and also join the parish of St. John.

STEP

1

## BECOME AN INQUIRER

An Inquirer is simply someone who is inquiring about

Orthodox Christianity. In fact, by reading this brochure, you may have already decided that you have an interest in the Orthodox Church. But it is absolutely critical that you investigate even more. So we want to encourage you to worship with us and attend any of the classes that we offer. We have a very informative website at [www.theforunner.org](http://www.theforunner.org). We have an excellent lending library which you are welcome to use. You should also stop by Christ the Lightgiver Bookstore; this full service bookstore is located in our facility, and it offers an extensive range of materials which can help you explore Orthodox Christianity. Also, twice a year, we host a seminar called [An Introduction to The Church](#). This event is specifically designed to provide lots of basic information about Holy Orthodoxy; just log on to our website calendar for the specific dates and the seminar schedule.

But as we have already mentioned, becoming an Orthodox Christian isn't just a matter of adopting a new set of beliefs; it is also about joining a parish, a community of other Orthodox Christians. So it is just as important for you to get to know the people at St. John's. If you're not especially outgoing, that may sound difficult, but the folks in our community are friendly, and we have a number of

events each week that are specifically designed to help people get to know each other better: for example, after each Sunday morning service, there's fellowship hour, a time for refreshments and visiting. We also have dinners at the parish on a monthly basis; these meals typically follow Sunday morning services, and they provide still another way for people to get to know each other better. But, at St. John's, we also like to get together just to have fun, so when you're checking out the website calendar, be on the look-out for events like the Annual St. Patrick's Day Celtic Games or the St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco Chinese Food Festival and Limbo Contest. We sponsor these events just because we enjoy being together as a parish, and you're welcome to join us because you can tell a lot about people by the way they have fun.

Visiting with our pastor is also a great way to learn more about our community. Father Aidan enjoys meeting people, and his schedule is flexible enough that he can accommodate just about any appointment. Visiting with him can also give you the opportunity to talk over any personal concerns or issues you may have in regards to Orthodox Christianity. You can email Father Aidan at [fraidan@austin.rr.com](mailto:fraidan@austin.rr.com).

But just how long does one stay an Inquirer? That really depends. Some folks spend months or even years working through this step—they just have a lot of questions, or they like to proceed at a slow and steady pace. Other people like what they see right away, and it doesn't take them very long at all before they decide that they want to officially begin the process of becoming an Orthodox Christian. However, time is really not the issue; what is important is that you understand what Orthodox Christianity is all about and that you are sure that you want to be received into the Church in this particular parish. But here's a good real of thumb: If all of your initial questions have been answered, and you feel that you have enough information to proceed, you can be certain that you are ready to move on to the next step if there is someone in the parish that you know well enough to ask them to be your sponsor or godparent. A sponsor or godparent is someone (of the same sex) who acts as your spiritual friend; it is someone that you can confide in; it is someone that you feel comfortable going to for advice. When you get to the point where you know at least one person in the parish on that level, then you are ready to take the next step in the process of becoming an Orthodox Christian in the parish of St. John.

## BECOME A CATECHUMAN

A catechumen is someone who has officially been received into the Church as an Orthodox-Christian-in-training.

Catechumens do not yet participate in the Holy Mysteries—the sacraments of the Church—but they are prayed for at each of the services of the Church, and they are blessed during each Divine Liturgy. When you feel that you are ready to become a catechumen, just notify Father Aidan; he will get together with you to talk about this step and to help you select a sponsor or godparent. Father Aidan will also walk you through the service for becoming a catechumen.

The service takes place towards the end of the Divine Liturgy. You will meet Father Aidan out in the narthex—the lobby—of the temple. The service itself consists of a prayer of blessing, several prayers of exorcism, and a series of brief questions and answers; at the end of the service, everyone recites the creed together, and there is another prayer of blessing. Father Aidan will then take you back into the temple with him, and, at the very end of the liturgy, he will officially introduce you to everyone in the parish. Folks will then greet you and introduce themselves, but, by this time, you will already be familiar with most of the people in the community.

The catechumen step is a time of formal preparation and study. The exact amount of time varies from person to person. In the early centuries of the Church, it was not uncommon for people to be catechumens for upwards to five years. That is no longer the case, but it is not because we have lowered our standards; it is simply that nowadays folks have more time to study, and we have more resources at our disposal, and so the process goes by much more quickly. But there are specific tasks which we ask catechumens to accomplish. Here is a list of those tasks:

- We expect catechumens to attend at least 20 sessions of Orthodox Instruction on Saturday afternoons.
- We expect catechumens to attend the services for 8 out of the 12 great feasts during the liturgical year.
- We expect catechumens to read four books about the Orthodox Church or the Orthodox Christian life.
- We expect catechumens to participate in the services of the Church on a regular basis.
- We expect catechumens to contribute to the life of the parish through gifts of time, talents, and money.

These tasks can be modified to fit a person's particular situation: for example, due to work or a family commitment, some people cannot attend very many classes on Saturday afternoons; so these folks read additional books. These sorts of modifications are very common, but the tasks themselves are an absolute requirement.

The person who will be helping you through the catechumen process is our Director of Catechumens, Subdeacon Thomas Wilson. Subdeacon Thomas has been a member of St John's parish for many years, and he is also a licensed social worker. He will help you put together a personalized plan for accomplishing each of the five catechumen tasks, and he will provide you with help and support along the way. If you would like to get in touch with Subdeacon Thomas and find out what a personalized catechuman plan might look like in your situation, his email address is [soctgw@excite.com](mailto:soctgw@excite.com).

## STEP 3

# RECEPTION INTO THE CHURCH

For most people, the catechumen process lasts a little over a year. However, the decision to be received into the Church will be made only after all of the catechumen tasks have been accomplished and after both you and Father Aidan have determined that it is time to take this important step. Reception into the Church takes place in two different ways:

If you have never been baptized, then you will be received by baptism and chrismation. In Holy Orthodoxy, baptism signifies the forgiveness of sins, and the person who is being baptized is immersed—the person actually goes under the water—three times. Chrismation is a short service that takes place after the baptism; in this service, you will be anointed with a special oil; this anointing signifies the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

If you have already been baptized with water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then you will be received by chrismation only.

After talking with you about your religious background, Father Aidan will decide which way you will be received into the Church, and he will walk you through the appropriate services.

Before you are received into the Church, you will also make what is called a 'life confession'. As part of this important step, you will need to set aside some time to

take a good, long look back at your life, and you will need to make an inventory of the sins and bad habits and destructive behavior patterns that have been a part of your life. A day or so before your baptism or chrismation, you will discuss the inventory with Father Aidan, and then you will present the inventory to Christ Jesus as part of your first confession. Many times people are nervous about discussing their sins with a priest, but it is important that you understand that Orthodox priests are hardly ever shocked or scandalized, and that they can never under any circumstances reveal what has been said to them during confession.

The day you are received into the Church will be an especially joyous occasion. You will share in the eucharist for the first time, your godparent or sponsor will present you with some special gifts, and the whole parish will be present to welcome you. Because being received into the Church is such an exciting event, it is usually scheduled on one of the twelve great feasts. You will work out all the details with Subdeacon Thomas and Father Aidan, and there will be plenty of time to let family and friends know so that they can also be present on your special day.

## STEP 4

# THE FIRST YEAR

After you are received into the Church, we will continue to provide you with formal guidance and support for a full twelve months—because there are still a great many things to learn. Subdeacon Thomas will check in with you once a month to see if you have any questions about the liturgical calendar, fasting, the Holy Mysteries or life in the community. Also, in addition to doing all the things that other members of the parish do—things like attending services and volunteering and contributing time and energy and money—we require that those who are in their first year attend the monthly Orthopraxis Seminars and participate in at least one book study during the course of that year. The Orthopraxis Seminars are taught by Subdeacon Thomas; they are offered on a monthly basis, and they focus on the practical, hands-on, ‘how-to’ aspects of the Orthodox Faith. Book studies are offered on a seasonal basis; the featured books range from histories to manuals of spiritual instruction to novels, and the study format is always one of open discussion. Of course, both the seminars and book studies are open to anyone, inquirer or catechumen, who wishes to attend. But we require that people in their first year of parish membership attend because we want everyone to understand that education and spiritual growth are a life-long process. Once we are received into the Church, we don’t stop learning and growing; once we are received into the Church, we continue to learn and grow until we “have put

off the old nature...and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God," until we have "the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge", until we are "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 4.22,18-19).

We hope this brochure has been helpful. If you have questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with us; email Father Aidan or Subdeacon Thomas; or just stop by the bookstore. We want you to have as much information as you need. As you can tell, becoming an Orthodox Christian in the parish of St John is a major undertaking! Nevertheless, it is also a great blessing, and we hope that, when the time is just right, we can share that blessing with you.

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