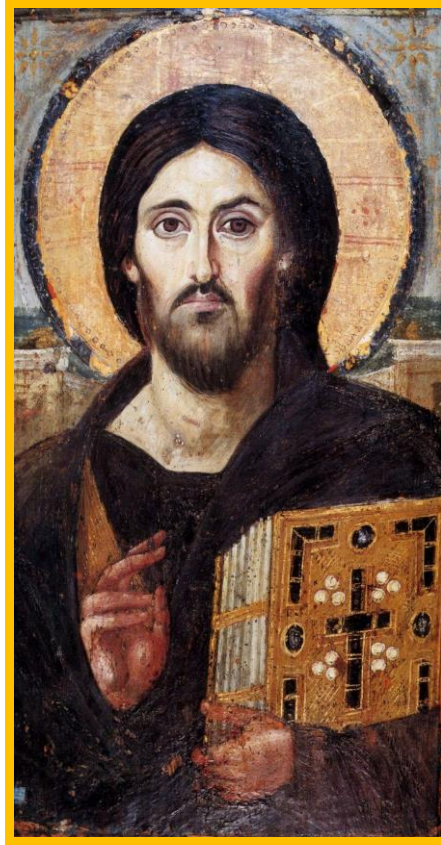


A Brief Statement



**of the
Orthodox Christian Faith**

**HOLY ASCENSION
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MISSION**

www.ascensionorthodox.org

06/07/2019

Orthodox Christianity

The Orthodox Church began on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. It subsequently spread to every corner of the world, and was planted in Australia in the late nineteenth century. The Orthodox Church considers itself to be the organic continuation of the Apostolic Church of the first century, preserving, without adulteration, the original Christian Faith. It also holds that this Faith is maintained by a direct and permanent action of the Holy Spirit onto the entire body of the Church, into which each of its members enters through Baptism, through Chrismation, and the through Communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ.



A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 4

The fact that faith is a personal, responsible, and direct commitment does not preclude difference of ministries and functions in the Church. For example, the bishops, in virtue of their sacramental office, are invested with the function of teaching, for which they receive a special grace of the Spirit. Grace, however, never acts magically; it does not force itself upon human freedom or replace human responsibility. Bishops are not infallible, for the Infallibility of the Church is nothing else than a commitment, a promise of God Himself to guide in all Truth the Church as a body, as a whole, and not any particular individual.

One of the major differences, in fact, between Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics, is the doctrine of Infallibility of the Roman Pontiff and his immediate jurisdiction over the entire Church. It would be impossible to enumerate here the other points of conflict between Rome and Orthodoxy, but the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and of the Procession of the Holy Spirit “from the Son,” as expressed in the interpolated Creed, the Doctrine of Merits and Indulgences and the belief in Purgatory, remain major points of contention. All the above-mentioned doctrines are rejected by the Orthodox Church.

It should be recognised, however, that Christian East and Christian West have a millennium of common history and common tradition. Both hold the same sacraments and the same traditional structure of Church organisation with a threefold hierarchy of bishops, priests, and deacons. In matters of canonical discipline, a substantial difference lies in

A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 5

the introduction of clerical celibacy in the Latin Church in the early Middle Ages. The Orthodox Church admits married men to the priesthood; however, Orthodox priests cannot marry after their ordination, and bishops are always chosen from monks or celibate priests.



Monasticism

Monasticism has always played an important role in the Orthodoxy. Constant prayer, poverty, obedience, and celibacy were chosen by many men and women as a way of life in order to anticipate and enjoy the real presence of the Kingdom of God “within us” (Luke 17:21). The Kingdom where “they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30). Monasticism also inspired a whole tradition of prayer and spirituality which has always had a profound influence in the life of the Church.

Foundations of the Faith

Holy Scripture is the inspired word of God and the written record of His revelation. The Old Testament relates the manner in which God the Father prepared the world for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament completes God's revelation by proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord, God, and Saviour.

Holy Scriptures are the foremost product of Holy Tradition, that which is passed on or given over within the Church, from the time of Jesus Christ to the present. It is the ongoing life of God's people, and it consists of that which is essential to God's revelation and necessary for our salvation. It is the living link by which Orthodox Christians of all ages are united together in a common faith, life, and experience. Other elements of Holy Tradition include prayer and liturgical worship, the accepted creed and acts of the early Church's councils, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the lives of the Saints, and the Church's artistic and musical expressions.

The Holy Trinity

Orthodoxy holds that there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in One God. While separate and distinct, each share fully in the divine nature and will; is equally infinite, perfect, all-powerful, all knowing, ever existing, and eternally the same; and is united together in perfect love.

A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 7

God the Father is the Source of all things. Because of His great love for humanity, He sent God the Son, Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God and the fullest revelation of the Father. He became man while remaining God in order to redeem us and to unite us to God. Jesus Christ is our Saviour Who leads all humanity into God's eternal Kingdom. God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, the Inspirer, and the Comforter. He proceeds from the Father and was sent into the world to dwell within us and to sustain us.



One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

For Orthodox Christians, the Church is One because it is one body with one head, Jesus Christ. The Church cannot be divided or separated because Christ cannot be divided or separated; Holy, because the Holy Spirit dwells in God's people in as much as they respond to His call to salvation and the gift of eternal life; Catholic, because it is whole, complete,

A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 8

lacking in nothing, and universal. Apostolic, because it continues in the Apostles' teaching and experience. The Church carries on the same mission and ministry as Christ and the Apostles, namely to bring the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to all.

Salvation

Salvation is the process by which we enter into eternal life with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation ends our separation from God, enabling us to begin a new life according to His will. It is ultimately attained through faith and living a lifestyle based on Christ's, and is to be proclaimed to all by God's people through evangelisation, mission, and witness.

Worship

Private prayer is essential for spiritual growth. It is inseparably linked to the Church's liturgical worship.

The public proclamation of God as Lord is the common action, or liturgy, of God's People. The most important is the Divine Liturgy. During the Divine Liturgy, we proclaim God's Word as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and we respond in thanksgiving through the reception of Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ.

The sacraments enable Christ God to enter into our personal lives as we become members of His Church through Baptism and Chrismation; proclaim, through Holy Communion, His

A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 9

death and resurrection while awaiting His Second Coming at the end of time; are forgiven by and reconciled with Him and those around us through Confession; share his love through Marriage; dedicate our lives and work to Him through Ordination; and receive His healing grace through Holy Unction.

The Liturgical year includes the annual cycle of feasts and fasts, as well as various other rites and services for specific occasions and needs.



The Church and the Divine Liturgy

The Liturgy has always been the very centre of Orthodox Christian life, not only as an assembly of the People of God gathered together in His Name. When Orthodox Christians gather together around the Bread and the Cup, they are no longer simply an assembly of sinful and limited human beings,

A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 10

but the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church. The fullness of Christ's presence in the Eucharistic Liturgy is the main sign of God's faithfulness to His Church, the great miracle of new life appearing to humanity.

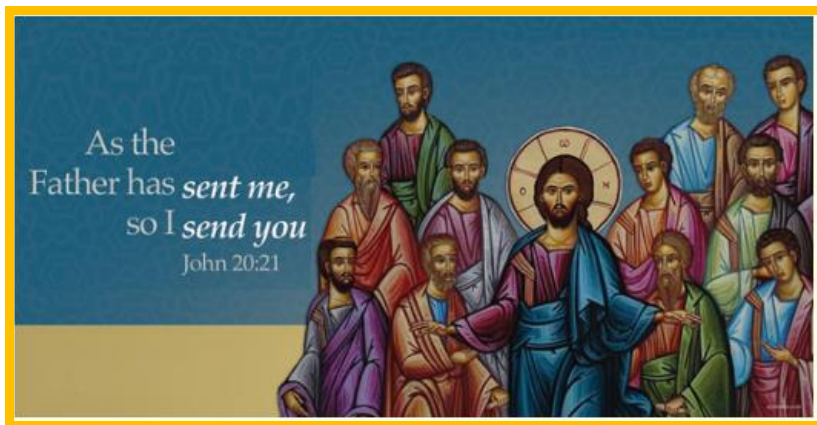
A Christian enters into this new life through Baptism and Chrismation. In the Orthodox Church, Baptism is performed by immersion, as it was in the primitive Church. The sacrament of Chrismation corresponds to the Western Confirmation; it is performed by the priest immediately following Baptism, anointing with a special oil or "Chrism" consecrated by the bishop. Once baptised and chrismated, a person can immediately receive Holy Communion, which is always given under both forms of bread and wine, and thus to be received into full membership in the Church.

The Liturgy in the Orthodox Church is always a formal, but joyous event. Theoretically, it remains a meeting together of the entire community. Nothing comparable to the "low Mass" has developed in the East, for the Liturgy is never considered as a private affair of the priest, but rather as an action of the whole Church. It is always sung. Only one Liturgy can take place on the same altar on a given day; this is a canonical stipulation aimed at maintaining the unity of the parish, or Eucharist community, into one single sacramental act.

As the Church continues to perform its social and missionary tasks, the Liturgy is the criterion and the inspiration for Orthodox Christians; they experience it in the very reality of the Kingdom of God, which has already appeared on earth

A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 11

and which is the yeast transforming the entire realm of cosmic realities into “a new Heaven and new Earth,” not magically, but by replacing man in his original relation with God in the building up of God’s Kingdom (1 Cor. 3:9).



The Orthodox Church Today

The Orthodox Church today is not a centralised organisation. Its present structure is based partly on ancient Christian tradition which gives a certain pre-eminence to the four ancient Patriarchates whose glory goes back to the time of the first Ecumenical councils, and partly on more recent social and political realities. Orthodox churches throughout the world today are either under the spiritual jurisdiction of the four ancient Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, or the Patriarchates of Moscow, Belgrade, Sofia, and Bucharest, or one of Autocephalous (self-governing, independent) Churches, such as the Church of Greece, Cyprus, and others. The Orthodox Church is thus a family of self-governing Churches. It is held together, not by a centralised organisation, nor by a single prelate wielding

A Brief Statement of the Orthodox Christian Faith 12

absolute power over the whole body, but by the double bond of unity in the Faith and communion in the sacraments. Each Church, while independent, is in full agreement with the rest on all matters of doctrine, and between them all there is full sacramental communion. There is in Orthodoxy no one with an equivalent position to the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church. The Patriarch of Constantinople is known as the Ecumenical Patriarch, and since the schism between East and West he has enjoyed a position of special honour among all the Orthodox communities but he does not have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of other jurisdictions. Orthodox Churches can be found in all parts of the world from Congo to Korea, and from Alaska to New Zealand. In Australia, the Orthodox Church is made up of several jurisdictions: Greek, Russian, Serbian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Bulgarian, and other smaller groups, totalling approximately 700,000 communicants.

