

## WHAT DO THE ORTHODOX BELIEVE ABOUT GOD?

We believe in the Holy Trinity, one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are one in essence, divinity, and will, and are equally without beginning and end. The three Persons are only distinguished in the mode of Their existence: The Father is unoriginate; the Son is begotten of the Father; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. We cannot understand these terms with our human minds but we believe them in faith as God's revelation of Himself to man. God is omnipotent, and He created the universe about 7500 years ago.

We believe that the only-begotten Son of God truly became incarnate and was born of the Ever-Virgin Mary, becoming like unto us in all things except sin. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, being one Person in two complete natures (divine and human) without division or confusion. He willingly took upon Himself His holy and life-giving Passion, death, and glorious Resurrection for the salvation of all mankind that will correctly believe in Him. The Crucifixion of Christ was not a vicarious satisfaction of the offended Father, as if God requires appeasement, but rather an offering of compassionate, co-suffering love. By death, the Lord Jesus Christ destroyed the power of death and Hades, opening the way to life eternal for all who become participants in the life of Christ through Holy Baptism. The redemption of Jesus was not in order to change the disposition of God towards us but rather to change our own disposition toward God, Who desires the salvation of all men through a life of repentance and moral perfection to transform our human nature by becoming more and more Christ-like as we grow in the virtues.

At the end of this age, the Lord Jesus Christ will come again, destroy the global kingdom of Antichrist, raise all the dead who have ever lived, and judge all men. The glory of the uncreated energies of God will fill all things, burning and

tormenting the unrighteous while simultaneously illuminating and filling with joy the righteous, according to the disposition of each.

## WHAT DO THE ORTHODOX BELIEVE ABOUT THE CHURCH?

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, the only Church in which we may be saved, and this one Church is the Orthodox Church. We believe that it is the will of God that all mankind, divided by passions and the deception of the devil, be united in truth, holiness, and in love both for each other and for God. In order to accomplish this will of God, our Lord through His holy apostles established His one Church, in which is His one Faith, to so unite mankind. He gave uniquely to her the holy, sanctifying, and saving mysteries.

## WHAT ARE THE MYSTERIES OF THE CHURCH?

There are many mysteries (sacraments) in the Church. One of the most important ones is Holy Baptism, in which one becomes a member of the Church, the body of Christ, and all his sins are forgiven as he begins a new life. After Baptism, the new initiate is then sealed in the mystery of Holy Chrismation, being anointed with sacred oil as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Holy Communion, the mystery that is celebrated at every Divine Liturgy service, we partake of the very body and blood of Christ for the nourishing of our souls and bodies, for forgiveness of sins, and for life everlasting, according to the words of the Lord: "The one who partaketh of My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up in the last day" [Jn. 6:54]. In preparation for partaking of Holy Communion, each faithful person has Confession (the mystery of Repentance), in which he privately speaks to a priest about his sins in order to reconcile his conscience and receive spiritual strength to turn away from sin. The holy Church also administers Holy Unction at least once a year to all the faithful, for the healing of both soul and body. All

the mysteries are administered by the clergy, who have been appointed to their ranks and given the divine grace for their service in the mystery of Ordination. Other mysteries include Holy Matrimony, in which a man and woman are blessed by the Church in order to be fruitful and to raise godly offspring; the mystery of monasticism, in which someone consecrates himself to the service of God in a life of celibacy; and the Blessing of the Waters, through which the physical world is sanctified by the grace of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, Who is involved in all sacred rites, has and always will be present and active in the Church, guiding, teaching, governing, working together with, sanctifying, and glorifying the various members of the body of the Lord, according as each person lovingly cooperates with the grace of God.

## WHAT DO THE ORTHODOX BELIEVE ABOUT SALVATION?

We believe and confess that it is necessary to have both a proper (Orthodox) faith and a virtuous way of life to be saved. Nevertheless, man's virtue, whatever its degree may be, cannot save him and bring him to eternal life. The fulfillment of the commandments of Christ does not permit us to demand or to merit something from God, for we are all sinners and "unprofitable servants" [Lk. 17:10]. Without Jesus Christ, a man's personal virtue and his reputation (his personal value, his works, his aptitude, his talents in the eyes of men) matters little. It is faith in Jesus Christ that justifies us. This faith in Jesus Christ, however, should not be considered simply as an ideological recognition of His divinity, nor as an intellectual knowledge of a religious system or the dogmas of the Church. Faith in Jesus Christ is not an abstraction but a communion with Him. This communion fills us with the power of the Holy Spirit, and our faith becomes a fertile reality which engenders good works in us. It is not good works that save us, however, but rather the cultivation of pious dispositions: "love, joy, peace, long-suffering,

kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control" [Gal. 5:22-23]. "For this is the will of God: your sanctification" [1 Thess. 4:3]. These holy dispositions that Orthodox Christians strive to acquire are summarized in the Lord's Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit,...the meek,...the merciful,...the pure in heart," etc. [Mt. 5:3-8]. All Christians must endeavor to cleanse their hearts from sinful desires for the pleasures of the world. This is accomplished by asceticism, that is, by prayer, fasting, self-denial, almsgiving, and participating in church services. The Church prescribes certain periods during the year in which the faithful abstain from meat, fish, dairy, and eggs, in order to humble our bodies and strengthen our spirit in order to resist sinful thoughts. All these things are done in order to increase our love for God and reduce our love for earthly things.

We must believe, therefore, with all our heart, the Orthodox Faith. It is God's desire that all men accept this Faith so that they may be saved. Faith is not imposed or withheld by God. Salvation is accessible to all men; it depends only on their free will.

#### WHAT DO THE ORTHODOX BELIEVE ABOUT ICONS?

Previous to the incarnation of God, any representation of Him would have been the fruit of man's imagination, a concept of man's reason. Since God is by nature incomprehensible, indescribable, immaterial, inexpressible and unfathomable, any conception or imagination concerning God would have been alien to His nature. It would have been false and unreal—an idol. With God taking on flesh, the indescribable One becomes describable for man's salvation. With the incarnation, God the Son can now be depicted in holy images, that is, icons (from the Greek word for "image"), since He has become a tangible, historical figure with a depictable, physical body. Since the apostolic era, images of Christ have adorned Christian places of worship. Just like the early Church, Orthodox Christians

venerate icons of Christ and the saints by bowing before them and kissing them, showing honor thereby to the prototype that is depicted.

#### WHAT DO THE ORTHODOX BELIEVE ABOUT THE VIRGIN MARY?

We believe that the Virgin Mary is the Theotokos, the Birth-giver of God, and that both before and after her childbirth she remained a virgin. We believe that she is the most God-loving and pure person that has ever existed and that for this cause she was chosen to bear God the Son in her womb and give birth to our Lord. Moreover, because she is the greatest of all the saints and is united so closely to our Lord by a maternal bond, we believe that her love for us and her prayerful intercessions on our behalf are great in power toward our salvation. For this reason, all Orthodox Christians, after God, turn especially to the Mother of God in their prayers, seeking her prayers and help in every tribulation and sorrow.

Besides the holy Virgin, the Orthodox also ask for the prayers of all the saints who have pleased God, calling upon them in all of our divine services. Those who have fallen asleep in Christ are not dead but alive, and the bond of love and communion between the Church militant and the Church triumphant is manifested whenever we commemorate the saints in our prayers or recount their lives and accomplishments. We hope to join them one day in the heavenly kingdom.

For more information about the Orthodox Church, her teachings, traditions, and how to become a part of her, please contact Archbishop Gregory:

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# The Orthodox Faith