

To Schedule a Baptism for a Child at St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church

1. At least one parent must be attending the church on Sundays and feast days, coming regularly to confession and Holy Communion.
2. You must be striving to live the life that Christ taught us, through prayer, fasting, and works of charity.
3. You must be helping to support the work of God in the church with your efforts and by making regular financial contributions to the church
4. If both spouses are Orthodox, you must be crowned in the church. If one is not Orthodox, you should consult the priest to see if you may still be crowned in the church.
5. You must read the following *Guidelines* carefully and be ready to follow them completely.

Guidelines for Baptism At St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church

Baptism is the new birth in Christ which makes us part of the Body of Christ, His Church. It is the essential beginning of our salvation. It opens the doors of the Kingdom of God to the one who truly lives the life in Christ given him at Holy Baptism. Our Baptism and our receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion make this time the most important in our life. For this reason, it is essential to prepare carefully for this very critical moment in life.

The parents who wish to have their child baptized must be attending the Divine Services in the church on a regular basis. If they are not now attending regularly, they must begin doing so, and only after attending for a significant period of time may they make arrangements for the baptism of their child. If they are both Orthodox, their marriage must be crowned in the church before scheduling the baptism. If one of the parents is not Orthodox, both parents must speak with a member of the clergy about whether crowning in the church is possible for them. If not, they must in any event commit themselves to raising their child in the Orthodox Faith and bringing him regularly to church and to the Holy Mysteries.

Sponsors are an essential part of the Holy Mystery of Baptism. They vouch for the sincerity of the one who desires to be united to the Holy Orthodox Church, and they encourage and admonish their Godchild as he goes through this life. A spiritual bond is established between the sponsor and his Godchild, a relationship much like that of a parent to a child. The sponsor is called "Godfather" or "Godmother" and the one who is sponsored, his Godchild, is called "Godson" or "Goddaughter" because the relationship is in God Himself.

This relationship is taken very seriously in the life of the Church. Ideally, the sponsors should not be related by blood to the one they sponsor because there should be no confusion of relationships. For example, one should not be both a Godfather and a brother by blood to the one he sponsors. Over the centuries these particular canons have been relaxed so that it is possible, though not ideal, for blood relatives to be sponsors for the one to be baptized. However, Godchildren may not marry their Godparents or, without special permission, the natural children of their Godparents.

Sponsors must always be committed **Orthodox Christians** who are in good standing with the Church. They should regularly partake of the Holy Mysteries. If married, they must have been crowned in the Orthodox Church. Under no circumstances may anyone be a sponsor who is "living together" with someone to whom he is not married. Sponsors must be able to give the kind of encouragement, good example, and advice that we all need from time to time in our lives. Sponsors must be willing and able to give the time and effort necessary to care for their Godchild. While only one sponsor is absolutely required, traditionally we have two, a Godfather and a Godmother. If there is only one sponsor, that sponsor must be of the same sex as the Godchild.

There are specific obligations that sponsors must accept. Some may do more, but every sponsor must at least be committed to fulfilling the following obligations:

Helping to prepare the temple for the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation, being there at least half an hour before the service begins:

To help fill the baptismal font and arrange items needed for the service;

To provide the information for completing the church records (full name of parents and sponsors of the one to be baptized, full name of the one to be baptized along with his place and date of birth, and his Patron Saint's name, the name with which he will be baptized);

Providing one large and one medium-sized bath towel;

Providing three candles (may be obtained from the church);

Providing a new, white baptismal garment to be worn **after** baptism and for the first three times that the newly-baptized receives Holy Communion;

Providing a cross and chain to be worn around the neck of the newly-baptized;

Preparing himself through confession and the normal discipline of prayer and fasting to receive Holy Communion with his Godchild the first three times he receives Holy Communion, and regularly thereafter;

Preparing a reception for his Godchild after the Baptism or after the first Divine Liturgy at which they receive Holy Communion together (fasting discipline, if applicable, must be observed);

Remembering his Godchild on his Name Day and on special feasts of the Church, at least at the Nativity of the Lord and Holy Pascha;

Providing a good example to his Godchild through his living of the Christian life;

Praying for, encouraging, and instructing his Godchild in the Orthodox Faith;

Correcting and admonishing his Godchild. The sponsor has the right and obligation to correct his Godchild just as his natural parents do.

Sponsors must be approved by the priest who will be performing the baptism. No one should ever arrange for sponsors before obtaining the blessing of the priest for asking the particular persons to be sponsors, and no one should undertake the responsibility of being a sponsor without the blessing of his spiritual father for this awesome responsibility.

Following is a summary of the duties of sponsors at the baptismal service itself:

Both sponsors come a half hour before the service begins;

The Godmother provides the baptismal garment and the towels;

The Godfather provides the cross, chain, and candles;

If the one to be baptized is an infant boy, the Godmother holds him before the actual baptism itself; if a girl, the Godfather holds her;

If the one to be baptized is an infant boy, the Godfather answers the questions and recites the Symbol of Faith (Creed); if a girl, the Godmother does this;

If the one to be baptized is an infant boy, the Godfather holds the large towel to receive him from the font after his baptism, and the Godmother dries him with the medium-sized towel; if a girl, the Godmother receives her, and the Godfather dries her.

Both Godparents dress an infant or small child after the baptism;

The Godfather assists an older male child or a man in dressing after the baptism, and the Godmother assists a female child or woman;

The Godfather picks up an infant boy from the amvon after his churching, and the Godmother picks up an infant girl.

The Godfather holds an infant boy with his head on his **right** arm the first time he receives Holy Communion while the Godmother holds his candle, and the Godmother holds an infant girl with her head on her **right** arm the first time she receives Holy Communion while the Godfather holds her candle.

Both Godparents accompany an older child or an adult the first three times he receives Holy Communion. All three hold their candles, passing them to one another as they actually receive Holy Communion.

May God bless you and empower you for this beautiful and awesome task of being a sponsor!

Responses at Holy Baptism

The following questions and responses are made at the end of the rite of the reception into the catechumenate, just before the beginning of the Mystery of Holy Baptism itself. The responses are made by the one to be baptized if he can speak for himself, or, in the case of an infant, small child, or one who cannot speak for himself, the responses are made by the sponsor of the same sex as the one to be baptized. These are the only verbal responses required of the one to be baptized or his sponsor, and **they must be learned by heart.**

After the exorcisms, the priest directs the one to be baptized and his sponsors to turn around toward the west, facing away from the priest, toward the region of sunset, or darkness, Satan's region.

The one who will make the responses will be directed to raise his hands (to do battle with Satan).

The priest then begins with this question, asking it **three times**:

Dost Thou renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his angels, and all his service, and all his pride?

And the catechumen answers, or his sponsor for him, and says:

I do. (three times, once after each question)

The priest then asks this question **three times**:

Hast thou renounced Satan?

And the catechumen, or his sponsor for him, answers:

I have. (three times, once after each question)

Then the priest says:

Blow and spit upon him.

*Then the one to be baptized or his sponsor breathes and spits toward the floor, **not** toward the child.*

Then the one to be baptized and his sponsors are directed to turn back toward the east, the region of Christ, "the Sunrise of the East," and they stand facing the priest again with hands lowered.

*The priest then asks **three times**:*

Dost thou unite thyself unto Christ?

And the catechumen, or his sponsor for him, answers:

I do. (three times, once after each question)

The following sequence is then repeated **three times**:

*The priest asks this question **once**:*

*Hast thou united thyself unto Christ. (**once**)

And the one to be baptized or his sponsor answers **once only**.

I have. (once)

*The priest then asks **once**:*

Dost thou believe in Him? (**once**)

*And the one to be baptized or his sponsor answers **once**:*

I believe in Him as King and God.

Then the one to be baptized or his sponsor recites the Symbol of Faith:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

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; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from the heavens, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man; and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and

was buried; and arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures; and ascended into the heavens; and sitteth at the right hand of the Father; and shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

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. In One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen.

*And when he has finished the Holy Symbol, the priest again says to him **once**:*

Hast thou united thyself unto Christ? (once**)*

And we repeat the sequence a second and a third time.

*Then after the third time, the priest asks the following question **three times**:*

*Hast thou united thyself unto Christ? (**three times**)*

The one to be baptized or his sponsor then answers:

I have. (three times**, once after each question)**

The priest then says:

Bow down also before Him.

Then the one to be baptized or his sponsor says the following, making the sign of the cross on himself:

I bow down before the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in Essence and indivisible. *(And the one to be baptized or his sponsor makes a full prostration to the earth.)*

The priest makes an exclamation and we take a step forward for the prayer, after which we begin the service for the Mystery of Holy Baptism.