

Eastern Orthodox Church



Orthodox prayer rope

The Orthodox Church is one of the three main Christian groups. Around 200 million people follow the Orthodox tradition.

It is made up of a number of self-governing Churches which draw on elements of Greek, Middle-Eastern, Russian and Slav culture.

The word 'Orthodox' takes its meaning from the Greek words *orthos* ('right') and *doxa* ('belief'). Hence the word Orthodox means correct belief or right thinking.

The Orthodox Churches share with the other Christian Churches the belief that God revealed himself in Jesus Christ, and a belief in the incarnation of Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

The nominal head of the Eastern Orthodox Churches is the Patriarch of Constantinople. However, he is only first among equals and has no real authority over Churches other than his own.

Life and worship

The Bible of the Orthodox Church is the same as that of most Western Churches, except that its Old Testament is based not on the Hebrew, but on the ancient Jewish translation into Greek called the Septuagint.

The wisdom of the Fathers of the Church, believed to be the teachings of the Apostles passed down in their pure form, is central to the Orthodox way of life.

Prayer

At the centre of worship and belief is the Eucharist surrounded by the Divine Offices or the Cycle of Prayer. These prayers are sung particularly at Sunset and Dawn and at certain other times during the day and night.

Personal prayer plays an important part in the life of an Orthodox Christian. For many Orthodox Christians an important form of prayer is the Jesus Prayer. This is a sentence which is repeated many times; for example: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The aim of this repetition is to enable the person to concentrate solely on God.

The strict life of a monk or nun is seen as an important expression of faith.

Fasting and prayer

Fasting and prayer play an important part of the Orthodox Christian life. Orthodox believe that fasting can help believers to concentrate their minds totally on preparation for prayer and things spiritual.

Sacred Mysteries (sacraments)

Baptism and Chrismation

The first two are Baptism and Chrismation. Baptism of adults and infants is by immersion in water three times in the name of the Trinity and is both the initiation into the Church and a sign of forgiveness of sins. Chrismation follows immediately after baptism and is by anointing with holy oil called Chrism. Chrismation is followed by Holy Communion. This means that in the Orthodox Church babies and children receive Holy Communion.

The Eucharist

The Orthodox believe that in Holy Communion the bread and wine are truly changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Prayer of Consecration calls on the Father to send down his Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Communion is given in a spoon containing both the bread and the wine and is received standing.



Icons

Icon of Mary and child

Icons are very important to Orthodox Christians. These beautiful and elaborate paintings are described as "windows into the kingdom of God". They are used in worship both in the decoration of the church and for private homes.

Icons often have a gold leaf background and are usually on wood. They depict Christ, Mary, scenes from the Bible or the lives of the Saints.

By worshipping at the Icon the Orthodox Christian enters into a sacred place with God. The icon is venerated and often candles and oil lamps are burnt before them. The worshipper kisses the icon, making the sign of the Cross and may kneel before it.