

Mind of Christ and acquiring the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox Church is the place to discover who you truly are, in Christ, with practical teachings to uplift and transform your mind, open and expand your heart, and experience the freeing, awesome, and intimate presence of God in your soul.

One of the principle tools of transformation the Church utilizes is prayer, especially the cultivation of ceaseless prayer. The Jesus Prayer is the most famous formulation of this: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*. The two pillars of this prayer are *hesychia* and *nepsis*, two Greek words which mean, respectively, stillness and watchfulness. Stillness refers to inner calm or quiet, especially the stillness of the passions, which are the inner motions or activities of pride, anger, and lust. Watchfulness refers to attentiveness to one's thoughts and emotions, with an especial alertness to the forgetting of God, guarding the mind against distraction towards a fragmented and worldly perspective. Slowly, but surely, through prayer we train our minds to maintain a constant awareness and living sense of God's presence, centering and healing our soul's habit of being dispersed across the multifarious concerns of the world. This inner consolidation frees us to love God and people more freely, without expecting anything in return, bringing the Light of Christ into the darkness of the world.

God loves you so much that He wanted to exchange His life for yours. In His mind you are worth His Life. He wanted to make sure you had His own unending, Trinitarian life of love, joy, and peace abiding in you. This is a tremendous truth, preserved in its fullness in the Orthodox Church. Christ did not come only to die for your sin, but to restore your created value, and transform you into His living image so that you can enjoy Him in holiness and multiply His Kingdom on earth. This life is both easy and hard. It is easy because it is embraced through grace-born surrender to the awesome power and love of God. It is hard because we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, putting all our faith in Him, and fighting against our fallen nature's urge to a self-centered worldview. We therefore invite you to consider entering the Orthodox Church, or, if you have already entered, to enter more deeply into her Life. In her you can find grace, healing, transformation, and peace; you can find Christ Himself!

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Essentials Series

Welcome to the Orthodox Church!



Explore the Living Depths of the Unbroken Church

by

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Welcome to the Orthodox Church! If this is your first time, or if you've been an Orthodox Christian your whole life but are now beginning to take your faith seriously, or perhaps if you know someone who could benefit from knowing about the Orthodox Church, then what follows may be of special interest. The Orthodox Church is old, and big, and deep, and so it can be intimidating trying to navigate all the information that is available. This pamphlet will attempt to address the essentials so that you can get rightly oriented to Orthodox Christianity.

In short, the Orthodox Church is biblical, sacramental, patristic, Christ-centered, and Spirit-filled. Let's take a look at each of these terms.

To begin, the Orthodox Church is biblical. The Orthodox Church believes that the Bible is the authoritative, inerrant, infallible, efficacious, and inspired Word of God. No single Christian stands above or equal to the authority of the Word of God. The Church, as a whole, is the Body of Christ, and so she stands as the pillar and ground of the truth. Having, moreover, the mind of Christ, the Church is the supremely authoritative and innerent interpreter of the Scriptures, and as such no single Christian can stand above the Church's infallible interpretation of the Scriptures. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the New Testament was written by the Church, and in this way the Church is the womb and mother of the Scriptures. The Church's worship, furthermore, is saturated with Scripture, and as such the Orthodox Church brings the truth of the Bible to life in her worship, and the power inherent in God's Word accomplishes it. Daily reading and meditating on the Bible is a vital part of Orthodox Christian life.

The Orthodox Church is also sacramental. The Church has several sacraments, Baptism and Communion being chief among them. By Baptism we understand that a person is spiritually and truly identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. This Baptism is a full immersion, indicating that the entire person is reborn by water and the Spirit. Baptism provides a completely new identity in Christ, and makes one a new creation, an adopted son or daughter of God. Communion is the Church's highest and most intimate sacrament, where the very Body and Blood of Christ are received through the mystical transformation of Bread and Wine. By receiving Christ we receive Forgiveness, Adoption, Sanctification, New Life, and Covenant bonding with God; we receive God Himself. These sacraments become part of the very fabric of our being, and are essential to the Christian life.

The Orthodox Church is patristic. This refers especially to the unbroken chain of transmission of the faith throughout history, from Christ to the Apostles to this very day. We have not reinvented the faith only this century, or a few centuries ago. We have remained steadfast for two thousand years. There has been an unbroken unity of worship, belief, and confession, and the wisdom of the Church is therefore not simply a past achievement we stand in critical judgment over, but a present living deposit that Orthodox Christians draw from. Church Fathers from the Second, Third, and Fourth Centuries speak with living voices, as living as today's Elders, and as such the Church speaks with one voice across millennia. The diversity of Fathers does not diminish their unity, and their unity does not diminish their diversity. The living wisdom that has been preserved has served to teach and enlighten minds, heal and transform souls, and soften and deepen hearts.

The Orthodox Church is, above all, Christ-centered. Christ is our Life, the very Light of our mind. Identified with Him in Baptism, He comes to live in us through Communion, and by faith we in turn live out His life through ours. Fully God and fully man, the Mystery of Christ encompasses the entire cosmos, the Cross standing at the center of all reality. Christ does not simply provide an answer, He is the Answer, and He is also the Question, the Mystery kept hidden since the beginning of the world, the Secret disclosed to the saints and revealed in the Church and through the Church to the whole world. Christ does not simply give us life; He Himself is our Life. Likewise, He is our Sanctification, our Resurrection. He is Truth.

The Orthodox Church also is Spirit-filled. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, who has been poured into our hearts. The life we live is not under our own power, but under the power of God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Orthodox Church acknowledges and manifests the life and the gifts of the Spirit as her authentic life. Many of the Church's saints and elders have been known to have gifts of healing, of insight, of words of knowledge and prophetic wisdom. These are available to all Orthodox Christians, but even more than this, the Spirit works humility, love, joy, and peace into those who steadfastly devote themselves to the Christian life of prayer, as we are transformed from glory to glory in the process of theosis, becoming by grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all that Christ is by nature, partaking of the divine nature.

Each local expression of the universal Orthodox Church is a community of Orthodox Christians seeking to know and live the Gospel by putting on the