



Sacraments of the Church:

Chrismation (Confirmation)

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Introduction

As we celebrate the “Pentecost”, the real birthday of the Church, we in fact celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. During our Lord Jesus Christ’s ministry on earth, He made it clear to His disciples that He will be with them in the flesh for a short period of time. Being the Light of the world, He said, **“A little while longer the light is with you”** (John 12: 35). Thereafter, He must go to prepare a place for them, **“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself;”** (John 14: 2,3). When these words troubled the disciples, He told them **“I will not leave you orphans”** (John 14: 18), **“I will pray The Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth”** (John 14: 16,17). The Holy Spirit is sent to abide in us, the believers, until the Lord comes again to take us to the place He is preparing for us. The role of the Holy Spirit as explained by the Lord Jesus Himself is to teach and to remind, **“He (the Holy Spirit) will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14: 26).

However, our Lord Jesus Christ promised us, again through His words to the disciples, **“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28: 20). So, how does the Lord leave us to prepare a place for us, yet He is with us even to the end of the age? In fact, what seems to be a contradiction testifies to two important points; first, it strengthens the concept of “The Trinity” and secondly, the importance of the Sacrament of Chrismation.

a- In the concept of the Trinity, clearly the Holy Spirit is not the Lord Jesus Christ the Son, nor God the Father. He is sent by the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name..”** (John 14: 26). If the Holy Spirit is to dwell in us during the transient time in which God the Son is preparing a place for us, then the Holy Spirit must be equal to the Son in order to

take His place in our life, even to the end of the age. Thus, the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is a fulfillment of the Lord Jesus’ promise that He is with us even to the end of the age. This is similar to the incident when Philip asked to see the Father, the Lord Jesus answered him saying, **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”** (John 14: 9), thus proving Himself One with God the Father. Therefore, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are One with each other. The Church expresses this fundamental part of our faith in a very simple way when we proclaim in the Communion Hymn during the Fast of the Apostles that “Three in One and One in Three; the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. He ascended to Heaven and sent us the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, Amen, Alleluia”. Thus, it is essential for every believer to receive the Holy Spirit, and to allow Him to dwell in him/her in order to abide in the Lord Christ “even to the end of the age”.

b- In the Sacrament of Chrismation, the bishop (or priest) calls upon the Holy Spirit (the Helper) to come and dwell in the newly baptized person. Not having the Helper dwelling in us means we are not abiding in the Lord Jesus, and accordingly we cannot see the Father. When St. Paul felt that the believers of Ephesus were not properly instructed in the faith, he asked **“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”** (Acts 19: 2). St. Paul, realizing that they were not baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, re-baptized them and laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them. If receiving the Holy Spirit were not a sacramental part of the faith, St. Paul would have simply explained to them its importance without having to lay his hands. Nevertheless, what St. Paul has done with the Ephesians confirmed to us two essential parts of our faith:

i- Baptism has to be according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord commanded His disciples to **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the**



Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”
(Matthew 28: 19)

- ii- The Sacrament of Chrismation must follow the baptism immediately. The Holy Book of Acts makes it clear that ***“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them”*** (Acts 19: 5,6).

This is what the Church practiced then, and still today, as the Sacrament of “Chrismation”. It is performed immediately after the baptism in order to seal the newly baptized person by the Holy Spirit Who will guide and remind him/her of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Biblical Basis of the Sacrament

The Lord Jesus Christ founded the Sacrament of Chrismation, as He did with all the other sacraments. In the Holy Gospel of St John 7, we read ***“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*** (John 7:37-39). St. John clearly here refers to the Holy Spirit as rivers of living water. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can give this living water. He said to the Samaritan woman ***“but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”*** (John 4: 14). Before the Lord’s ascension, ***“He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now”*** (Acts 1: 4,5). On the Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, ***“suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the***

Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2: 2-4).

It is interesting to note that St. Peter in his famous sermon on the Pentecost day made a reference to an Old Testament prophecy of Joel, ***“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days”*** (Joel 2: 28,29). This promise was significant because under the Old Covenant, the gift of the Spirit was given only to a few - the patriarchs, the prophets, and some of the judges. Certain leaders of Israel were indwelt with the Holy Spirit to accomplish their tasks. The prophet Joel, however, prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be given to all God’s people, “all flesh.” This was fulfilled on the Pentecost day, for St. Peter exclaims, ***“this [outpouring of the Spirit] is what was spoken by the prophet Joel”*** (Acts 2: 16).

It was not only prophet Joel who prophesied concerning the Holy Spirit, but Jeremiah the prophet, also said ***“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”*** (Jeremiah 31: 34). Compare this prophecy with what the Lord Jesus said about the Holy Spirit ***“He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”*** (John 14: 26).

The Prophet Ezekiel tied together the water and the Spirit in a prophetic vision of Baptism and Chrismation, ***“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them”*** (Ezekiel 36: 25-27).



In the New Testament, there are many references to the Sacrament of Chrismation. In addition to what we already mentioned above, we note what St. Paul has said to the Ephesians ***“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”*** (Ephesians 4: 30). This Seal is the One Who distinguishes the good from the evil ones. In the Holy Book of Revelation, the good ones will carry the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on their foreheads ***“They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads”*** (Revelation 22: 4), while the evil ones will carry the mark of the beast on their foreheads ***“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand..”*** (Revelation 14: 9).

Historical Development of the Sacrament

As soon as the Lord Christ was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3: 16). This was not the result of Baptism, but rather the step that follows it. We may understand this point from the account of the Samaritans mentioned in the Holy Book of Acts 8. ***“For as yet He (the Holy Spirit) had fallen upon none of them (The Samaritans). They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”*** (Acts 8: 14). This “fallen of the Holy Spirit” was accomplished through the prayers of Sts. Peter and John ***“prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit”*** (Acts 8: 15), and through the laying of their hands on the people of Samaria ***“Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit”*** (Acts 8: 17). As it was mentioned earlier, St. Paul laid his hands and the Holy Spirit came upon the Ephesians (Acts 19: 1-6). We may conclude then that the Rite of Chrismation was through praying and laying hands. However, it was only for the apostles to lay hands on the newly baptized persons (Acts 8). As the number of believers increased, and it became more difficult for the apostles to go to every village and town to lay hands, they gave the priests the authority to perform this sacrament, not by laying hands but by anointing with special oil called Myron.

The word Chrismation is derived from the Greek word “Chrismatis” meaning “anointing” and the Greek word



This is the 4th time the Sacred Myroun was made by Pope Shenouda, III. This was a record in the church history due to the great revival and the widespread immigration of the Coptic Orthodox Church around the world.



“Myron” means “fragrant spice”. The latter denotes a special batch of oil made by the apostles using a mixture of myrrh, aloes, and some spices and fragrance. The myrrh and aloes were the ones poured by Nicodemus on the Lord Jesus’ body, while the spices and the fragrance were the ones brought by the women to Jesus’ tomb on the day of His Resurrection. The apostles mixed all of these with pure olive oil and through their prayers it became a holy anointment. When a newly baptized person is anointed by this oil, he/she receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit, ***“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things”*** (1 John 2: 20).

When St. Mark came to Egypt, he brought with him some of this oil for the use of the Church, which lasted until the time of St. Athanasius, the 20th Pope of Alexandria (326-372 AD). Following the method described in the Holy Book of Exodus 30, St. Athanasius made a new batch of Myron, and added to it what was left from the original batch. He distributed some of this new batch to the Churches in Rome, Antioch and Constantinople, together with the recipe in order to be able to renew the oil before it is completely used. In our Coptic Church, the Myron has been made 37 times, and it is composed of over 30 different types of



spices. It is very comforting feeling to know that when one is chrismated by the Myron, he/she has shared with the Lord the same burial spices!

In the Coptic Church, the Bishops and the Priests perform the Sacrament of Chrismation by anointing the person after his/her baptism with the Myron 36 times, each on the likeness of the cross. Eight anointments around the head to sanctify the senses, two on the chest area to sanctify the heart, two on the back area to sanctify the deeds, and 6 anointments on each of the hands and legs to give power to overcome the evil attacks and to walk along the narrow path. Special prayers are accompanied these anointments, and the person is believed to be confirmed in the life of faith and grace (Romans 11: 24, and Galatians 5: 22). Shouldn't we all rejoice that the same oil that touched the Lord's body has sealed us? I am!

The Spiritual Benefits of Chrismation

1. **Our confirmation in the life of faith and grace**, *"But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him"* (1 John 2: 27). We may think of Chrismation as the ties with which we will be grafted into the cultivated olive tree mentioned by St. Paul, i.e., the Lord Christ (Rom 11: 24).
2. **The seal of God on our souls**, *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"* (Ephesians 4: 30). The seventh canon of the second council of Constantinople (381 AD) states that the holy Myron on their foreheads, eyes, noses, mouths and ears will seal the believers. This seal protects us from the evil (1 John 5: 18).
3. **Our consecration to God**, for through Chrismation the body becomes an altar of the Lord, *"But you were washed (by baptism), but you were sanctified (by Chrismation), but you were justified (by the blood of*

the Lord) in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (the Holy Spirit), (1 Corinthians 6: 11). St. Cyril of Jerusalem said, "Never underestimate the act of the Myron. As the thanksgiving bread, after the action of the Holy Spirit, becomes the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, likewise also the holy Myron becomes the gift of Christ."

4. **Victory**. St John Chrysostom explained that those who were anointed in the Old Testament were either priests or kings. But, for us Christians who have the New Testament, we are anointed by the Myron to be kings controlling our lusts, priests sacrificing our bodies and presenting them as a holy living accepted sacrifice, and prophets because of the great mysteries we have experienced.
5. **Spiritual Growth**. St Didymos the blind explained that through the Myron we are renewed and armed by the power of God so that no evil obstacle will prevent us from growing spiritually.
6. **Divine Comfort**. The Holy Spirit fills the soul with love, joy, and peace. The Holy Book of Acts describes the early Church as *"the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied"* (Acts 9: 31).
7. **Illumination of our Mind**. From the past, the Holy Spirit reminds us of the commandments of God (John 14: 16, and Acts 11: 16). For the present, He teaches us everything (John 14: 26 and Luke 12: 12). St. John also said *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things"* (1 John 2: 20). As for the future, The Holy Spirit *"will tell you things to come"* (John 16: 13). This is why the Holy Spirit is also known as the Spirit of Prophecy (Acts 2).

These are a few of the benefits that we receive as we are anointed with the Holy Myron. May the Holy Spirit manifest these spiritual benefits in each one of us.