

Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

The Holy Mystery of Matrimony



THE HOLY MYSTERY (SACRAMENT) OF MATRIMONY is one of the seven channels of divine grace, instituted by Christ, to sanctify and to support Christian family life. A Christian marriage is a vocation, that is a special invitation of God to two baptized persons to marital union, in order to devote themselves to the service of a new life in Christ.

That is why St. Paul considers Christian marriage as a “special gift of God.” (1 Cor. 7:7) The Council Fathers of Vatican II did not hesitate to underscore the great importance of married life, sanctified by a “special Sacrament.”

THE ORDER OF CROWING ~ “ЧИН ВІНЧАННЯ”

The marriage ceremony of the Eastern Churches, called the Order (Mystery) of Crowning, is quite different than that of the Western Churches. The greatest difference is the lack of the crowning ritual in the western ceremonies. But, there are other differences as well, and it is good to understand our own beautiful ceremony.

The marriage ceremony at the time of Our Lord in the Holy Land consisted of two parts the Betrothal and the Crowning. The Betrothal was held in the home of the bride after the marriage contract and bride price had been paid. The father of the family, who was considered to be the priest of the family, would celebrate the exchange of rings between the couple with a prayer. Usually a year later the couple was married. The groom would go to the bride's father's house where the father would impose the marriage crowns on the couple, join their right hands and say a prayer. The crowning of a groom is mentioned in Isaiah 61:10. Then the groom would lead the bride to his house. This procession consisted of the groom's friends and the bride's family while Psalms were sung. The Psalms were sung to celebrate a new marriage and family thus insuring the continuation of the Jewish people and fulfilling the promise that God made to Abraham that he would have countless descendants (Genesis 15:5). At the groom's house, where the wedding banquet was ready, the groom's father would say a prayer over a cup of wine. This cup was shared by the couple as a sign of their new life together and then the celebration followed. The Eastern Christians, who were the majority of Christians until 1453, took this ceremony and made it refer to Christ. The name of Christ was introduced into the prayers and eventually an Epistle, Gospel and Sermon were added to the ceremony. St. John Chrysostom (+407 AD) mentions that priests and bishops were being called upon to perform the ceremony instead of the father of the family.

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St. Volodymyr the Great ~ Baptizer of Rus'-Ukraine

AMONG THE GREAT and illustrious men of the Kyivan State, St. Volodymyr the Great, like a sun, shines forth with immortal glory, majesty and merit. His memory is inscribed in the history of Rus'-Ukraine in golden letters, not only as a powerful and wise ruler, but above all as the Baptizer, enlightener and zealous apostle of the Christian faith. The holy faith which he accepted in the Byzantine Rite became, in time, the heart and soul of our people and state, placing our nation of Ukraine on a solid moral foundation. It became the basis for our culture, customs and morality. Our faith has always provided great spiritual strength for our people, especially during times of national

misfortune and destruction. For many long centuries they lived by this faith and in it have found fortitude and vigour; by this same faith they continue to live today, and from it they receive new fervour. In this lies the very great merit of St. Volodymyr the Great for he gave to our people the priceless treasure of the holy faith. He will live forever in the hearts of the people as their Baptizer, Apostle and Saint

CHRISTIANITY ALREADY PRESENT IN RUS'-UKRAINE

The Christian faith was not something foreign and unknown to Prince Volodymyr. Already during the time of Prince Ihor, there were Christians in Kyiv who had their own church. His grandmother, St. Olga, who reared him, was a Christian. For various reasons St. Olga did not dare introduce the Christian faith into her country, but what she did not accomplish was carried out by her grandson, Volodymyr the Great. He not only accepted holy Baptism, but he also baptized the entire nation. By that act he placed Rus'-Ukraine on the same level with the Christian nations of the East and West.

Prince Volodymyr decided to accept the holy faith of the Byzantine Rite because he was bound by close political, cultural and economic ties to the Easter, in particular to Byzantium and Bulgaria. He was convinced in his heart that the Christian faith of the Byzantine Rite best suited the psychology and mentality of his people. Furthermore, the divine services and sacred books of the Byzantine Rite were written in a language understood by all the people. Volodymyr the Great accepted the holy Sacrament of Baptism in the year 988, receiving Basil as his Christian name.

After accepting baptism and destroying the pagan idols, Prince Volodymyr, first of all, baptized his twelve young sons in a fountain at a place which to this day is called in Kyiv by the name of Khreshchatyk (Baptistry). At his command, the people of the capital city of Kyiv and of the whole nation were baptized, so that everyone would become a Christian: the small and the great, the slave and the freedman, the young and the old, the boyars and the commoners, the rich and the poor. Not one person resisted his Godfearing command. They were baptized, if not out of love, then out of fear of him who gave the command...finally, then the whole nation was united in glorifying Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He departed into eternity on July 15, 1015, and was buried in the chapel of St. Clement beside his wife Anne. (†1011)

The Dormition of St. Anne

JULY 25 marks the feast of the Dormition of St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos or God-bearer. The details we know about her life, and that of her priest-husband, Joachim, are from sources within the Tradition (though not within the Scriptures). They are often pointed to as one of the great examples of married saints. Their story, like many in the Old Testament, include a time of barrenness and no child, and the promise and gift of a child in the old age. This child, Mary, was chosen of God and appointed to be the mother of the Incarnate God.

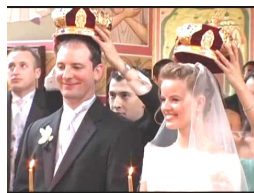
Orthodoxy (adherence to the correct or accepted creeds) is very “inclusive” when it speaks about salvation. Our salvation, of course, is accomplished and could only be done through Christ Himself. And yet Christ Himself does not become incarnate except at the humble words of Mary, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to Thy word.” By the same token, Mary is not an accident, a random choice from among the virgins of Israel, but is the culmination of Israel’s history, according to the flesh. She stands in the place of Eve, offering to God a “yes,” where our ancestor had offered “no.” In the new life of the Kingdom, she is the mother of all living, just as Eve had been called by that name according to the flesh.

But as Mary is no accident, so her parents are no accident, nor the entire history of Israel. It is all the economy of God, working out the salvation of mankind, through mankind and His grace.

THE ORDER OF CROWNING *(continued from page 1)*

The eight elements of an Eastern Rite marriage ceremony are: the Betrothal, the Consent, the Marriage Prayers, the Crowning, the Epistle and Gospel, the Cup of Wine (or the Common Cup), the Wedding Procession, and the Removal of the Crowns. According to the Canon Law of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the essential elements of our ceremony are the consent, the prayers and blessings of the priest and the marriage crowns.

The exchange of vows is followed by a moving ceremony of crowning, mentioned already by St. John Chrysostom (†407), by which the marriage becomes officially recognized by the Church. The crowning of spouses was adapted from the Old Testament (Isaiah 61:10). It symbolizes the “glory and honour” of Christian marriage, since it was instituted by God and elevated by Christ to the dignity of the holy mystery (sacrament).



The crowns should remind the spouses that in their marital union they must assist and help each other to attain “unfading crown of glory” in heaven (1 Peter 5:4), as suggested by the concluding prayer, recited by the celebrant : ” O God, our God, ... accept their crowns into your kingdom, keeping them pure, blameless and above all reproach.”

Behold the beauty and deep spiritual meaning of Christian marriage, sanctified and blessed by our Lord, Jesus Christ, who through His holy mysteries (sacraments) continues to live and act in union with His mystical Spouse, the Catholic Church.

God in the Big & Small Things of Summer

SUMMER CAN BE A TIME OF RESPITE for us at Holy Cross. The seasons of Lent, Easter, and day of Pentecost have come and gone, and St. George’s Society and the Holy Cross Golden Agers’ gatherings are on hiatus. With the exception of bingos to run at Superior Shores, the customary weekend liturgies and a few daily holydays to celebrate, the summer is a time of leisure and to give God thanks for all of His blessings bestowed upon us.

God models for us, in the first creation story in Genesis, the rhythms of work and rest. In God’s good creation, we humans are given everything we need before we ever put our hands to the plow or the mill. We were made to enjoy the natural world, walking in peace and friendship with God (Genesis 3:8).

The fullness of creation beckons in the summertime. Days are long. Grass is green. The sun is high and hot. Trees are in full leaf for shade. Warm nights invite us to gaze at the stars. Our summer encounters with creation can serve both to enrich our own relationship with the Creator and to open us to new ways of bringing creation into our catechesis.

Finding God in the Big Things

Do you live near a lake or the mountains? Are you near a zoo where you can observe rhinos or giraffes, or near a museum where you can see the remains of dinosaurs? Look at the sky and its vastness. The sky looks blue in the day, but beyond the blue is the blackness of space. The sun that keeps us alive is almost 93 million miles away — the perfect distance to sustain life on Earth. The night sky reveals stars whose light, when we see it, is centuries old. The heavens indeed declare the glory and greatness of God (Psalm 19:2)!

Meditate on the vastness of God’s creation. What do the big things speak to you about the nature and character of the One who has created them? What do you notice about yourself as you spend time with this facet of the Creator’s revelation in creation?.

Finding God in the Small Things

A single leaf. A blade of grass. A fly or an ant. A grain of sand. What are the smallest created things you can think of and explore? However small, each one is made up of atoms — as are we. These atoms themselves are comprised of particles so mysterious that we are only beginning to learn how to think about them. The God Who numbers the hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7) made it all.

Meditate on the intricacy of God’s creation. Who is this God Who made and set in motion a self-renewing universe of matter for God’s Spirit and our souls to inhabit? What does God have to say to you?

~ from an article by Chris Sullivan
(edited by Michael Watral)

