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All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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**"The Orthodox Church.....**has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from  
"Encountering the Mystery."  
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Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

# Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Holy Anointing (Unction).



**The Great Martyr and Healer Panteleimon.**

Panteleimon ('all-merciful') studied medicine as a young man and was baptised by Saint Hermolaus. Both suffered martyrdom in the year of our Lord 304. Panteleimon, Hermolaus and others are invoked in the prayers at the blessing of water and blessing of oil and are known as unmercenaries and wonderworkers.

**A Holy Mystery** (sacrament) can never be fully explained yet can be entered into without that full understanding our human reason so often demands. We can experience mystery with all its blessings through the Divine grace by participating in the life of the Church. Intellect alone cannot provide what man needs but through faith and the divinely instituted practices he is aided on the path to salvation.

There are numerous Old Testament references to the use of oil and for various purposes. In the New Testament there are two principle texts to refer to. The first is found in Saint Mark's Gospel chapter six. After Jesus had instructed the twelve apostles they: **"Went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them."**

The second is in the Letter of Saint James who towards the close of his letter wrote: **"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."**

From these texts and continuation of Christ's apostolic commission the service of *Efchelaion* (Gk. *Εὐχέλαιον*) 'prayer oil' takes place in the Orthodox Church and it is clear that the healing is twofold – body and soul – in that repentance is part of the process of healing. Just as Christ took material flesh so the Church also takes material things that they

might become vehicles of the Holy Spirit. Christians too, Saint Paul reminds us, are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) the Holy Spirit dwelling in our body.

**The express purpose of the Sacrament of Holy Unction is healing and forgiveness. Since it is not always the will of God that there should be physical healing, the prayer of Christ that God's will be done always remains as the proper context of the Sacrament. In addition, it is the clear intention of the Sacrament that through the anointing of the sick body the sufferings of the person should be sanctified and united to the sufferings of Christ. In this way, the wounds of the flesh are consecrated, and strength is given that the suffering of the diseased person may not be unto the death of his soul, but for eternal salvation in the resurrection and life of the Kingdom of God.** (GOArch.com).



The service of anointing or holy unction has by tradition taken place in church and with seven priests taking part. However it may take place with less priests, even one, and in the home of the sick person. If the sacrament takes place in the home it will be a much shortened form than that in church.

In the home it comprises prayers, the blessing of the oil, the reading from the Letter of James and the parable of the Good Samaritan in Saint Luke's Gospel. Prayers for the sanctification of the oil precede the prayer of anointing the sick person. If the person has made confession of sins the prayer of forgiveness is read and the service is then concluded.

It is on the Wednesday evening in Great and Holy Week – the week preceding Holy Pascha (Easter) - that the full service of the Mystery of Holy Anointing will take place even if only one priest is present, during which there are seven apostolic readings (epistles) and seven gospel readings, at each one a candle being lit close to the bowl containing the pure olive oil over which a prayer for sanctification is read (i.e., see illustration). During the Prayer of the Anointing the people kneel beneath an open book of the Gospels held over them. Then all the faithful present will be anointed on the forehead, chin, cheeks and hands, the priest saying as he anoints each person:

**"O Holy Father, Physician of our souls and bodies, have mercy, forgive and save your servant.....name....."**

This mystery is not to be confused nor identified with what in some places is called "extreme unction", associated with a person being near to death. Although it may take place at such a time Holy Anointing is available in any time of sickness of body, mind or soul.

Saint Theophylactos (765-845) wrote: **"This Holy Oil is very beneficial for those in travail; it brings about illumination and tranquility; it signifies the mercy of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit, through which we are relieved of all burdens and receive spiritual joy and tranquility."**

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