

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

**LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO
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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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Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk

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Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.
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Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.03.15

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Holy Matrimony.



Icon of the Marriage at Cana in Galilee.

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding." Gospel of John 2: verses 1 and 2.

After Jesus turned water into wine:

"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him." Verse 11.

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.

Holy Matrimony or marriage is a mystery of the Church, uniting one man with one woman in a life long bond to the exclusion of others, blessed within a service in the presence of relatives and friends. It is a relationship ordained by God since the Creation, and through the unique male and female characteristics and physical union enables human kind to be continued with father, mother and child(ren) establishing a family in which each depends upon & supports the other.

Marriage appears in Matthew's Gospel chapter nineteen and in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians chapter five in which marriage is called **a great mystery** as between Christ and the Church. That is, the perfect union between man and woman at the beginning of creation, through a sacred bond is, in a mysterious sense, an image and likeness of Christ's mystical union with the Church. Paul thus gives a mystical sacredness to marriage by the comparison which he draws.

"When two people get married, it's as if they're saying: Together we will go forward, hand in hand, through good times and bad. We will have dark hours, hours of sorrow, filled with burdens, monotonous hours. But in the depth of the night, we continue to believe in the sun and the light."

"The woman is the heart that loves. In her husband's moments of difficulty, she stands at his side. In his moments of joy, she tries to raise him up to even higher heights and ideals. In times of sorrow, she stands by him like a sublime and peaceful world offering him tranquility."

"The husband should remember that his wife has been entrusted to him by God. He loves his wife as Christ loves the Church (Eph 5.25). He protects her, gives her security, particularly when she is distressed, or when she is ill."

"Marriage, my dear friends, is a little boat which sails through waves and among rocks. If you lose your attention even for a moment, it will be wrecked."

Extracts from a sermon by Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra, contained in: *The Church at Prayer. The Mystical Liturgy of the Heart.* Indictos. ISBN 960-518-251-3



The marriage service is in two parts - the **Service of Betrothal** (once held separately) and the **Service of Crowning**. During the prayers in these services frequent reference is made to Old Testament characters, the significance of rings and the right hand of God (rings are placed on the right hand of bride and groom during the Service of Betrothal).

Within the Crowning Service a number of ceremonies occur including the exchange of crowns (usually in the Greek custom simple floral wreaths kept at home after the service, in the Russian a more realistic imperial type kept in the church for all marriages). The readings are Ephesians 5:20-33 - the mystery and mutual respect and care by husband and wife, and John's Gospel account of the Wedding in Cana of Galilee: 2 1-11. The couple share a common cup, a ceremonial first walk together led by the priest carrying the book of Gospels, the crowns are removed, the husband and wife blessed and the service is concluded.

Orthodoxy has **An Informal Engagement Service** which without ceremony brings a man and woman into a prayerful preparation for a subsequent marriage. Ring(s) are given.

An Anniversary Service may be used on any anniversary of a marriage and in this service prayers of thanksgiving and for continuation of the marriage are used.

Divorce and remarriage.

Whilst Orthodoxy regards marriage as in principle a lifelong and indissoluble bond broken only, according to the words of Our Lord, by the infidelity we call adultery, she also desires to help those who have failed in this or other ways, allowing them a second marriage (even in very special circumstances a third). In such cases **The Order of Second Marriage** is used in which the betrothal section has prayers of a penitential nature. The service of crowning is then as at a first marriage.

"Divorce is seen as an exceptional but necessary concession to human sin; it is an act of *oikonomia* ('economy' or dispensation) and of *philanthropia* (loving kindness). Metropolitan Kallistos (Timothy Ware): *The Orthodox Church*.

Married life is not only a state of nature but a state of grace. It is a special vocation needing a particular gift of the Holy Spirit conferred in the mystery (sacrament) of Holy Matrimony.



The crowns resting on the Book of the Holy Gospels.

NB. Unless the Orthodox church has been licensed it is necessary for a civil ceremony to have taken place before the Orthodox marriage blessing.