

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
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY SERIES:**

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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."
ISBN 978-0-385-51813-0*

Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk

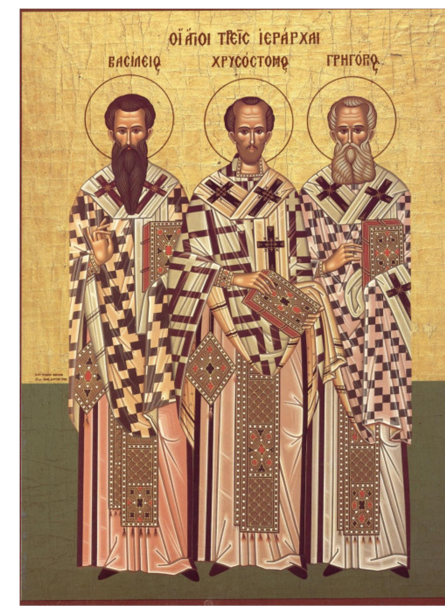
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Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Vestments



This icon of the Three Holy Hierarchs – Basil the Great (379), John Chrysostom (407) and Gregory the Theologian (389), shows them in iconographic form wearing episcopal vestments of their time – little changed over the centuries.

When we talk of **vestments** we mean those garments worn by the clergy and some others in the context of the Divine Liturgy, the Mysteries (sacraments), other services and times of prayer.

Over their normal everyday clothes the clergy wear a **rasson** (cassock) which is a long coat buttoning to one side and often further secured by a cord or ribbon at the waist. It is usually black but sometimes grey or blue may be seen. Over the rasson an **exorasson** should be worn. This is a fuller loose fitting over-cassock buttoning at the neck. For services the exorasson is removed.

The **kalimafchion** is the familiar hat worn by clergy. Monks often wear a smaller hat - the **skufya**. For clergy who are also monks the hat will have a covering veil hanging to the sides and back. In the Greek tradition headwear is black but in the Russian there are additional colours and shapes.

The colours of Orthodox Liturgical Vestments do not have the same more strict application found for instance in the Roman Catholic Church. In general terms there is a distinction between light and dark colours which becomes apparent at the various times and seasons in the course of the year.

A deacon does not serve alone but only with a bishop or priest. Of vestments common to bishops and priests, depending on the service, the **epitrachelion** is always worn. It is put on with the following prayer:

Blessed is God, who pours his grace upon his priests, as myrrh upon the head, which ran down upon the beard, Aaron's beard, and ran down to the collar of his robe.

The Vestments

The following vestments are those worn for the Divine Liturgy. Each vestment has been given a spiritual significance and is put on with an accompanying prayer.



A newly ordained deacon with bishop and three priests.

For a deacon:

Each deacon's vestment is made from the same fabric, usually brocade or of a lighter material.

Stikarion - a tunic with wide sleeves, fastened at the neck, buttoned down the sides and reaching to the ground.

Orarion - a broad and very long strip of material hanging over the left shoulder and worn across the chest.

Epimanikia - secured by cords these wrist cuffs cover the end of the rasson sleeves.

For a priest:

Stikarion - unlike a deacon's stikarion this is a long white lightweight garment similar to the western alb. It buttons at the neck with the sleeves secured at the wrists with cord or ribbon wound round. Ideally it should reach to the ground, covering footwear.

Each of the following vestments can be in brocade or simple material. They usually have applique or embroidery work on them

Epitrachelion - a broad strip passing round the neck and falling near to the ground in front, usually with buttons down the centre

Zone - a narrow strip passing round the waist and secured by ribbon. It holds the epitrachelion in place.

Epimanikia - wrist cuffs which cover the end of cassock & stikarion sleeves. Each cuff is secured with cord or ribbon wound round the wrist

Epigonation - a lozenge shaped vestment that hangs by a cord or ribbon, on the right side. In some traditions this is awarded to a priest rather than to be worn of right.

Phelonion - the large outer vestment reaching to the waist in front and almost to the ground at the back. (Similar to the western chasuble).

Pectoral Cross - again in some traditions awarded to a priest rather than worn as of right. It hangs by a chain from the neck over the phelonion.

For a bishop:

The stikarion, epitrachelion epimanikia, zone and epigonation as priests above.

Sakkos - similar to the deacon's stikarion but shorter and not unlike a western dalmatic.

Omophorion - a very broad and relatively short vestment worn round the neck. It is removed and replaced at certain moments in the course of the Divine Liturgy.

Engolpion - the bishop's pectoral cross.

Panagia - the bishop's pectoral icon of the Theotokos.

Mitre - this final piece of clothing to be put on by a bishop is, unlike the cloven and pointed hat of western bishops, in the shape of an imperial crown.

Mandya - usually purple in colour, a long garment worn at various times but removed before putting on the above episcopal vestments.

A stikarion and orarion are worn by sub-deacons and may also be worn by readers and servers (boys and men). They are worn in slightly different ways than by a deacon. A loose fitting black robe a little like an academic robe is often worn by psaltis - singers, and servers.