

The Eastern Orthodox Church

The Eastern Orthodox Church (including Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and others), is one of the oldest Christian traditions. Its roots trace back to the early days of Christianity, as they affirm to be the original church founded by Christ. In the Great Schism of 1054, the church divided into the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic branches. The Greek Orthodox Church has a rich history and has played a significant role in shaping Eastern Christianity.

Core Beliefs: The Greek Orthodox Church shares many core beliefs with other Christian denominations, such as the belief in one God, the Holy Trinity, and Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of humanity. The Church places great emphasis on the Nicene Creed, which outlines its fundamental doctrines. The Bible, comprising the Old and New Testaments, is regarded as the inspired word of God and is central to the Church's teachings.

More info: <https://www.goarch.org/-/teachings-of-the-orthodox-church>

Practices and Rituals: Worship in the Greek Orthodox Church is characterized by its rich liturgical traditions. The Divine Liturgy, especially the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, is the central act of worship. It includes hymns, prayers, readings from the Scriptures, and the Eucharist, where believers partake in the Body and Blood of Christ. The Divine Liturgy is typically celebrated on Sundays and major feast days, lasting around two hours. Other important sacraments include:

1. **Baptism:** Baptism is the sacrament of initiation, where individuals are immersed in water three times in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. **Chrismation (Confirmation):** Immediately following baptism, the individual is anointed with holy chrism (oil) to receive the Holy Spirit.
3. **Confession (Reconciliation):** Confession is the sacrament of penance, where believers confess their sins to a priest and receive absolution.
4. **Marriage:** The sacrament of marriage blesses the union of a man and woman. The ceremony includes the exchange of rings, the crowning of the couple, and the sharing of a common cup to symbolize their unity.
5. **Holy Unction (Anointing of the Sick):** This sacrament involves anointing the sick with oil for physical and spiritual healing.

More info: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-Orthodoxy/The-sacraments>

Places of Worship: Greek Orthodox churches are distinct in their architecture, often featuring domes and ornate interiors. The most famous is the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, originally built as a cathedral in 537 CE. Inside, icons and frescoes depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary, and saints adorn the walls. The church building itself is considered a sacred space where heaven meets earth.

Leadership and Clergy: The Greek Orthodox Church has a hierarchical leadership structure, with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople considered the "first among equals" among bishops. The clergy includes bishops, priests, and deacons. Bishops oversee dioceses to ensure doctrinal purity and order, while priests lead local parishes, administer sacraments, and offer pastoral care. Deacons assist in liturgical functions and church ministries. Clergy undergo extensive theological education before ordination. Monks and nuns also dedicated their lives to prayer, contemplation, and service, while living in monasteries under an abbot or abbess.

Holy Days and Festivals: The Greek Orthodox liturgical calendar is filled with numerous holy days and festivals. The most significant is Pascha (Easter) that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other major feasts include Christmas (the Nativity of Christ), Epiphany (the Baptism of Christ), and Pentecost (the descent of the Holy Spirit). These celebrations are marked by special services, prayers, and community gatherings.

More info: <https://www.greekboston.com/religion/feasts-orthodox-church/>

Symbols and Icons: Icons play a crucial role in Greek Orthodox worship, with icons serving as "windows to heaven" that facilitate a deeper connection with the divine. These religious images depict Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, and biblical scenes. They are not merely decorative but are considered windows to the divine to aid believers in prayer and contemplation. Greek Orthodox families and parishioners typically have an icon alter in a corner of their homes. The cross is another vital symbol that represents the sacrifice of Christ and His victory over death. These sacred images are venerated through acts such as kissing, lighting candles, and offering prayers, while the cross is frequently used in blessings and is central to the faith's teachings.

More info: <https://stpaulsirvine.org/icons/#:~:text=The%20icons%20found%20in%20Orthodox,14%3A8%2D12>