

**Questions and answers
about our faith and mission**

Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission

Madison, Wisconsin

An ancient church for modern society



WELCOME!

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Welcome to a different Christianity.

Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission may be different from any other church you have attended. While some of our members have been Orthodox Christians all their lives, many others are converts - and when we first attended Orthodox services, we felt a little awkward! This booklet tells you a little about our service, our mission, our faith, and our church as a whole. And if you have any questions, don't be afraid to ask!

WHAT IS "ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY?"



Simply put, Orthodox Christianity is the most ancient expression of Christianity, kept alive to the present.

Orthodoxy is one of the three main divisions of Christianity (the other two are Roman Catholic and Protestant). In the United States, Orthodoxy is not as common as other forms of Christianity, but there are almost 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

Orthodox clergy are ordained in Apostolic Succession, that is, connected to the Apostles through an unbroken laying on of hands. Our liturgies and traditions are based on the oldest extant teachings of Jesus Christ and His chosen Apostles.

Neither "liberal" nor "conservative" in the common use of those terms, Orthodox theology predates many of the current issues dividing churches that follow a variety of interpretations of scripture. Much of our faith is based on oral traditions that continue in the Orthodox Church.

What is going on at this service?

If you are visiting our Sunday service, you will experience a form of worship that dates back to before the Fifth Century. Following our traditions is optional for visitors but embraced by the faithful; you are never expected to do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

At the beginning.... The atmosphere of an Orthodox service is meant to be awe-filled and meditative. Before the service, people are silent or speak in hushed tones (there is plenty of opportunity to visit after the service!) Most people will be wearing their "Sunday best" to separate the church experience from other parts of their lives like work and play. Married couples may sit together, but men and women usually sit separately, as they did in the early church. We remove our shoes to signify that we stand on holy ground when we worship.

Why do women cover their heads? Many women choose to wear head coverings out of respect for Middle Eastern and East Indian tradition. It is preferred, but not required.

Why do people stand during much of the service?

Orthodox customarily stand as a way to be more fully engaged in the worship process. Metaphysically speaking, our heads are closer to the source of Light when we are standing. Seats and pews are a more "modern" addition to churches - some Orthodox churches have no seats at all! If you are uncomfortable standing for a period of time, you may certainly be seated.

Why does the priest face the same direction as the congregation? The priest faces East, like the other worshippers, for most of the service as a reminder that we are all equal before God. Catholic priests used to do this before

Vatican II, and some Jewish rabbis still do.

Why is the service chanted? The liturgy is sung (chanted) by the priest and the people, just as it was for hundreds of years before modern times. The liturgy is the same each time except for rotated Scripture readings. Orthodox liturgies have always been chanted in the language of the people (in this case, English). (See glossary on last page)

What do the symbols mean? Orthodox worship is very rich in symbolism because it is believed that symbols speak directly to the heart. *Incense* symbolizes the rising or prayer to Lord and is referred to many times in the Scriptures. Similarly, *candles* are lit during prayers to symbolize the eternal soul (the 12 candles represent the Apostles). *The curtain* symbolizes the sky separating heaven and earth, and its opening denotes the opening of heaven. *The bells* symbolize the flutterings of the wings of angels. Virtually everything in the

chapel (colors, materials, numbers of things) has at least one symbolic meaning, and often layers of meaning.



What is the importance of holy pictures (icons)?

Icons are considered "windows into heaven." They are *not* worshipped, but they are held in high honor for what they represent. Most icons have a flat appearance to emphasize the fact that they are not intended to be graven images. Colors, shapes, and subjects have layers of meaning and can be highly symbolic.

Who may take communion (Eucharist)? We believe that the bread and wine are the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, so partaking in Holy Communion is not to be taken lightly. One must be a baptized Orthodox Christian and should arrive in a fasting state, having been granted absolution before the service, to partake. If there are questions, please

What are the basic beliefs of Orthodox Christians?

People have disagreed over the interpretations of scriptures and events since the earliest beginnings of the Church. However, it was accepted that certain beliefs had to be held in common, so it could be generally understood what a "Christian" was. During the first three Ecumenical councils, the Canon of Scriptures and credal formulas were developed. Our faith is confessed in the Nicene (or Apostles') Creed, developed by 381 AD:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and all that is, seen and unseen.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one being with the Father;
by whom all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,
who proceeds from the Father.

With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church;
We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. AMEN.V

Does the Orthodox Church follow the Bible? It is more accurate to say the Bible was developed around the needs of the early (Orthodox) church. The Holy Scriptures were always supplemented by tradition and oral teachings. Therefore Orthodox interpretation of the Bible are often different from newer interpretations.

The Bible as we know it today was assembled over several hundred years and has undergone countless translations since then. The Orthodox regard the Holy Scriptures as inspired by God, but acknowledges that mankind has had much to do with their development over time. We understand that Scripture can be at once historic, symbolic, and allegorical, and that it can be open to various interpretation and layers of meaning.

Within Orthodoxy, there are spectrums of thought and belief. Faith is valued, but so is reason. Therefore, the Orthodox Church does not normally take "official" positions on political or scientific issues.

What does the Orthodox Church believe about Jesus Christ? We believe that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully man, and we affirm His saving grace as Lord and Savior. He is one person of the Trinity (one God in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). As it says in the Creed, we believe that Jesus Christ died, descended into hell, and rose again. When we say that Christ died "for" us, what we are actually saying is that he did so *"on our behalf:"*

"Hell is not a point in space, but in the soul. It is the place where God is not. (And yet God is everywhere!) If Christ truly 'descended into hell,' that means he descended into the depths of the absence of God. Totally, unreservedly, he identifies himself with all man's anguish and alienation. He assumed it into himself, and by assuming it he healed it ... Christ offers us, not a way (a)round suffering, but a way *through* it; not a substitution, but saving companionship." -Bishop Kallistos Ware, *"The Orthodox Way"*

Are the Orthodox "Born Again?" For the Orthodox, the sacrament of baptism has always been the mystery of the "New Birth" and entrance into the Church. Looking at the question in this way, the answer is certainly yes. But the meaning of the question differs depending on what is meant by it and who is doing the asking.

The Orthodox affirm that God created the world and "saw it was good," and created humankind in his image. In the myth of Adam and Eve, the Orthodox acknowledge that humankind and nature became "fallen" - it was no longer perfect. However, Orthodoxy has never accepted the concept of the "total depravity of man." During the Fourth Century, Augustine of Hippo developed a theology of Original Sin that stated that all of humankind inherited a sinful nature from Adam, but Augustine's works were not well known in the East, where Orthodoxy developed. As a result, this theology has had little impact on Orthodox thought.

The Orthodox believe that humankind suffers consequences from sin (which is, literally, "missing the mark"), but not that humankind or the world is inherently evil. Because we are human, we are likely to make mistakes and make poor choices, causing separation from God. Jesus Christ is God come to man, so that man might come to God.

So, what does all this have to do with being "Born Again?" The "born again" movement - a relatively new theology - is based on the belief that humankind is, essentially, damned from birth. Unless an individual says the correct words to be "saved," he or she will be rejected. In Orthodoxy, our merciful Lord has already "opened the gates of hell." Because of Christ, the world is already transformed.

Salvation, we believe, is a lifelong process of ever growing closer to God, rather than a one-time event.

Are you the same as the Greek and Russian Orthodox?

Although there are divisions within the Orthodox Church based on geographical developments, the Orthodox Church is one church, with the same history and theology.

Holy Transfiguration is part of the Mission Society of St. Gregorios of India, founded by Metropolitan Thomas Mar Makarios. It is a mission of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, which was founded by St. Thomas in India (52 AD). The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India has 1.2 million members worldwide today, most living in Kerala, India.

Our church is one of the "Oriental" Orthodox Churches, along with the Armenian Church, the Coptic (Egyptian) Church, the Eritrean Church, the Ethiopian Church, and the Syrian (Antiochian) Church. Today the term "Oriental" is something of a misnomer, applied by the Western world to distinguish the Eastern churches from the further-Eastern Churches. Actually all churches east of Rome (i.e., all Orthodox churches including the Byzantine Orthodox Churches such as Greek and Russian) are Eastern.



Apparent theological differences between Byzantine and Oriental churches revolve around semantics regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. The Oriental churches are sometimes mistakenly called Monophysite (literally, "one nature") but in reality, most of these churches have always accepted Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine. Many of the faithful on both sides are working toward full unity of the Oriental and Byzantine Orthodox Churches.

How can this be "an ancient church for modern society?" Isn't it just old-fashioned? Although Orthodoxy deals in ancient truths, they are timeless truths nonetheless. Origen, a Church Father who lived around 250 AD, believed that Christians could recognize truth wherever they found it; this is still true today as our world seems to be getting smaller and more complex.

Demographics show that in the United States, "mainline" churches are losing membership while newer Christian movements seem to be thriving. At the same time, converts to these churches often report feeling disenchanted after a period of time; others feel uncomfortable with exclusivistic or fundamentalist approaches to the Bible and to Christianity.

Some turn to New Age practices, looking for options that seem mystical and affirming. Sacred Earth traditions are attractive to those for whom nature is very important; others turn to Eastern traditions like Buddhism for their meditative and introspective qualities.



Still others drop out of "organized" religion altogether, because from what they've experienced, it does not seem to hold a place for them. No one is perfect, but some religious people are very judgemental of others. For too many, religion has seemed to be a source of confusion and pain. For people who feel they have been hurt in the name of religion, it may seem as if

God has abandoned them, and "church" no longer seems like a safe place to be.

The spiritual nourishment one receives from attending our ancient services provides the fuel needed for dealing with life today. Orthodoxy does not require modern worshippers to turn their backs on the world, but rather to embrace love and

life as God has always intended. The intellectual, mystical, and emotional elements that many find missing in other faiths can be found within Orthodoxy.

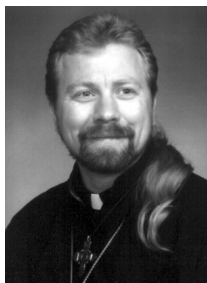
Why be Orthodox? There is a joke, especially among converts, that "Orthodoxy ain't for wimps." Its theology offers no simplistic, black-and-white answers; the faithful fast and attend long church services that aren't entertaining by today's standards. But there are many reasons you might find a home at Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission. Among them:

A belief in a mystical inclusiveness with all mankind, and respect for those of other faith traditions. It is often said that we Orthodox "know where the Holy Spirit is, but not where it is not." In other words, Orthodoxy does not judge those outside of Orthodoxy. Our bishop and our priest are very involved in interfaith activities.

Access to Christian meditation, mystical instruction, and healing services. Many who have left Christianity to pursue Eastern mysticism don't realize that many of these traditions have been maintained in Orthodoxy.

Freedom to reason both spiritually and intellectually. The Orthodox don't have a single authority figure that tells us what we must accept or be "kicked out." If you read a variety of materials by Orthodox, you will find a spectrum of thought.

A tradition of contemplative prayer, and faith in a merciful God. Orthodox frequently say "Kyrie Eleison" (literally, Lord have mercy") during the Divine Liturgy. The word "mercy" in English is the translation of the Greek work "Eleos," which has the same root as the old Greek word for olive oil, once used as a healing salve for wounds. So when we say "Lord, have Mercy," we aren't so much begging forgiveness from a vengeful God. Instead, we are asking God to soothe and comfort us.



Who is the pastor?

Very Rev. Fr. John-Brian Paprock is the third American priest in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. He is finishing a Master of Theology degree in Comparative Religion after studying in Madison and in New York City. Fr. John-Brian has provided much service to the Greater Madison area through the years, as a chaplain at area hospitals; a founder of the Madison Area Interfaith Network; president of Madison Urban Ministry; and founder of Inroads, a program for spiritual recovery and renewal.

Fr. John-Brian is also a certified pastoral counselor, and is qualified to provide counseling for adult children of dysfunctional families, child safety and protection, grief work, mental health issues, and alcohol and drug abuse. He is also a writer, artist, and photographer. His wife, Teresa, is a writer and works in public relations, and his son, Christopher, attends elementary school.

Fr. John-Brian and Holy Transfiguration are under the direct supervision of His Eminence Metropolitan Thomas Mar Makarios, Senior Metropolitan of the American Diocese, and Metropolitan of the Diocese of Canada and Europe. Our Catholicos (presiding bishop) is His Holiness Moran Baselios Marthoma Matthews II, Catholicos of India and all the East, with his headquarters in Kerala, India.

A Brief Glossary

Our liturgy has been translated from the Malenkara, Syrian, and Aramaic, and contains some words that are not in English. Here are some terms you may hear during the service, or that you may hear spoken by members.

Achen - *Priest or Father*

Barekmor - *Bless me, Lord*

Kochamma - *Wife of the Priest*

Kurielaison - *Lord have mercy. (In Greek, Kyrie Eleison).*

Qurbana - *The service at which we celebrate the Eucharist. There is no direct translation, but some meanings include offering, dedication, and sacrifice.*

Stomen Kalos - *Let us stand well*

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