

# The Betrothal and Marriage Service

The Priest begins the Service intoning: "Blessed is our God always, now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen".

He then recites the Litany in which he beseeches the Lord for the salvation of the Bride and Groom; to send down upon them perfect and peaceful love; to preserve them in steadfastness of faith; to bless them with a blameless life; to grant them an honourable marriage. He concludes the Litany glorifying God: "For to You belong all glory, honour and worship, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".

Two more prayers are recited asking God to set a unity upon the Couple which cannot be broken; a blessing of peace; oneness of mind; a spirit of truth and love.

Through tradition and usage, every Orthodox betrothal is a double ring Ceremony. The Priest takes the Rings and with them makes the sign of the Cross on the forehead of the Groom saying: "The servant of God ... (groom) is betrothed to the servant of God ... (bride) in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen" (three times).

The same procedure is repeated making the sign of the Cross over the Bride's forehead, signifying the equality of man and woman in the eyes of God. At the conclusion, the Rings are placed on the fourth finger of the couple's right hands.

The paranympchos or koumbaros (the Best Man), steps forward and, crossing his hands first, takes the Rings and exchanges them, over and under, on the same fingers, three times.

The Priest then recites a prayer beseeching God ... "to bless this putting on of rings with a heavenly blessing and that an Angel of the Lord will go before these Your servants all the days of their life". Here ends the Betrothal Service.

The Marriage Service is called "stepsis" in Greek, meaning crowning.

In the Orthodox Church each wedding is a form of Coronation Service, as conducted for kings and queens. Since the Bride and Groom are regarded as part of the "royal family" of God, they are crowned king and queen of their own dominion - their new fellowship and family.

The Crowns are a sign of the bond between the Bride and Groom and represent the glory and honour which God bestows upon the couple who have observed His Commandments.

After the chanting of three verses from Psalm 127, the Priest commences the Service by intoning: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages".

He then recites a series of petitions and three long prayers beseeching the Lord to "bless this marriage, granting to Your servants long life, purity, mutual love in the bond of peace, enduring prosperity, the blessing of children and the unfading crown of glory".

### **The Joining of the Hands.**

The Priest then beseeches God "to unite the bridal couple in concord and crown them in one flesh". At this point the right hands of the Bride and Groom are joined by the Priest. They remain joined throughout the remainder of the Service symbolizing the "oneness" of the couple.

### **The Crowning.**

The Crowning Ceremony is the climax of the Marriage Service. Crowns are a symbol of victory for those who "have fought the good fight" of the Christian life and "have kept the faith".

The Priest, therefore, takes the Crowns and, making the sign of the Cross on the Groom's forehead, exclaims: "The servant of God ... (groom) is crowned to the servant of God ... (bride) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen" (three times).

Similarly, signifying equality once again and making the sign of the Cross on the Bride's forehead, the Priest exclaims: "the servant of God ... (bride) is crowned to the servant of God ... (groom) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen" (three times).

The Best Man then exchanges the Crowns three times while the Priest and the Chanter sing: "Lord our God, crown them in glory and honour".

### **The Bible Readings.**

With the Crowns now placed on their heads of the Bride and Groom uniting them as Husband and Wife, the Epistle is read from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 5:20-33...

"Brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ give thanks for all things to God the Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the Church, and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water by the word, so that he might present her to Himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives, as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, as

Christ does the church, because we are members of His body, of his flesh and of his bones. For this reason, 'a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. This is a great mystery, and I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you love his wife as his very self, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

The Gospel is then read from John 2:1-11

"At that time, there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with His disciples. When the gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what has this to do with me and with you? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever He tells you.' Now, six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification each holding about forty litres. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the steward of the feast'. So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now'. This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."

### **The Common Cup.**

That Jesus chose a wedding to enact his first miracle is the most profound indication of the dignity attributed to the union of man and woman by God.

Since the changing of water into wine at Cana, Jesus continues to change the 'water' of ordinary relationships into the 'wine' of Sacramental marriage.

In remembrance of Christ's first miracle, therefore, a cup of wine is shared by the Bride and Groom as a sign of unity with each other and with Christ.

This is not Holy Communion. Rather, it is a symbol of the "common cup of life", a sign denoting the mutual sharing of joy and sorrow; a token of harmony.

The Priest offers three sips of the cup, firstly to the Groom then to the Bride.

### **The Dance of Isaiah.**

Centuries before Christ, it was revealed to the Prophet Isaiah that, at some time in the future, the Invisible God would assume our human nature, and be born of a Virgin, in order to demonstrate the magnitude of His Love for humanity. Isaiah rejoiced at this revelation and "danced" with joy.

In like manner, the Priest leads the Bride and Groom in procession around the ceremonial table, three times, followed by the Best Man together with the bridal party.

The procession, a symbolic dance for the joy of God's presence, is conducted in a circular fashion with the Holy Gospel on the table, forming the centre of the circle.

This highlights the Church's prayerful desire that the life of the couple will revolve around the Infallible and secure Word of God.

During the Procession, the Priest and the Chanter sing the Hymn "Rejoice, Isaiah, the Virgin has conceived and has brought forth a son, the Emmanuel, both God and Man: Dayspring is His name. As we magnify Him we call the Virgin Blessed". The second and third Hymns remind the newlyweds of the virtuous lives of the Saints and Martyrs whose faith and sacrifice they are called to emulate.

### **Removal of the Crowns.**

Following the procession, the Priest places his hand on the Groom's head saying "May you be magnified, O Bridegroom, like Abraham, and be blessed like Isaac and be fruitful like Jacob as you go in peace, fulfilling in righteousness the Commandments of God".

Likewise, placing his hand on the Bride's head, the Priest says: "And you, O Bride, may you be magnified like Sarah and rejoice like Rebecca and be fruitful like Rachel, rejoicing in your own husband and observing the limits of the law, for so God is well pleased".

During the ensuing prayer, the priest removes the Crowns from the newlyweds' heads praying:

"O God, our God, Who when You were present in Cana of Galilee blessed the marriage there, bless also these Your servants who have been joined together by Your providence in the fellowship of Marriage; bless their comings in and their goings out; make their lives fruitful for good; take their Crowns unto Your kingdom and preserve them blameless, guileless and unstained unto the ages of ages. Amen".

### **Conclusion.**

The Service closes with the benediction "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers have mercy upon us, Lord Jesus Christ our God, and save us. Amen".

Before congratulating the Newlyweds, the Priest takes the Holy Gospel and separates their right hands with it, thus signifying that nothing and no one, except the Word of God alone, that forgives and unites and strengthens, should come between the new couple.

The newlyweds are then congratulated by the Priest, the Best Man, the members of the Bridal Party, the parents, the immediate relatives, then all the invited guests, or as the Bride and Groom may request.