

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY

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IT TAKES A PARISH

*“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again, until Christ is formed in you”
(Galatians 4:19)*

The glory of the baptismal and Chrismation sacraments glows from the illumination of the faces of all who are witness to the blessed event. Nobody there is blasé, bored or unaffected by the celebration of one of those *“many who have been baptized, have put on Christ,”* as we sing during the three-time encirclement of the font. Smiles on all faces. Good wishes for the beaming parents. Now onto photographs, the meal and back to normal life. So complete – or is it?

The newly baptized has been washed in the blessed water and anointed with the Holy Spirit. Is that the end or just the beginning of life in Christ? Indeed, the second birth is a ceremonial drowning to any sin inherited by the disobedience of our original ancestors Adam and Eve, and a new pure and sacred inauguration into a life of saintliness. We all can understand and confirm that spiritual truth; but do we realize that the growth into the fullness of that blessed life is not only the child's responsibility, but that of all who are taking part in the purification process: Parents, siblings, godparents, grandparents, extended family and friends, and certainly the priest himself. Out of the womb and exposed to the world we live in, which we understand, sometimes defend, explain, excuse and justify, yet which has strayed from the Christian ethos of the past. Those of us over fifty years of age can recall a society that preferred matters of sexuality discussed and experienced behind closed doors; what this society calls “honest,” we prefer to label embarrassing, even shameful. Those born in these times need not always be told [certainly warned] about aberrant behavior. They'll find out soon enough in a society calling itself “For Adults Only,” but which closes the gap between adults and children all too soon. There is so much to be avoided, and with the vigilance and support of all true Christians, it can be done. Christ is still with us, and more important, *in us*, and in our children. But we all need to make that evident.

We are born alone, we die alone, but in between we are part of the family of Christ called the Church. The neophyte Christian is destined to be confronted by a society with morals, behavior and challenges quite apart from the values and life style proclaimed by the Church and its clergy. Of course, there is an abundance of hope expressed through the baptism – the exorcism of Satan and all his cohorts at the entrance of the Church, the rejection of all darkness and division, turning to source of light and wisdom, yet like the experience of our Lord Himself in the wilderness, Satan left Him only for a time – his presence and perseverance to be continued. And Satan will not be far from one born into Christ.

All those who love the newly-baptized child are encouraged to imitate St. Paul in the above quotation. To take responsibility for the infant's spiritual development, encouraging her in all ways helpful and holy as she grows and increases in the fullness of Christ. The beloved apostle was addressing gentiles who were in danger of falling backward into the sinful ways that they knew all too well. He lets them know that by having brought them to Christ in holy baptism, he feels like a pregnant woman in whose womb an infant was being developed. So too, our newly born babies are out into our world; yet if we think of the Church as a mother incubating us all as we develop into the total image of our Lord, we cannot shirk our accountability for the progress of those newly baptized as well as for all whom we call sisters and brothers in Christ.

Father Vladimir Berzonsky