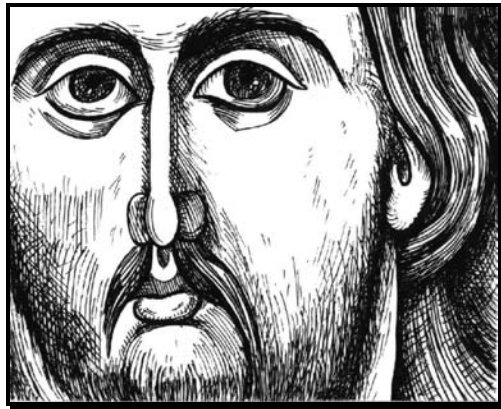


## BACK TO BASICS



### *What is the Orthodox Church?*

**Saint George Coptic Orthodox Church**  
San Jose, CA  
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### ***The Orthodox Church in America***

Orthodoxy has existed in America for nearly two centuries, but it still remains little known. Some consider it an exotic, eastern version of Roman Catholicism, while others associate it with Greek and Middle Eastern festivals. Most may be totally unaware of its existence. Still, many are finding their true spiritual home in the Orthodox Church, and those who have been raised in the Church are rediscovering Orthodoxy's rich treasures.

What is the reason for this spiritual revival in the Orthodox faith? It is clear that people are finding in Orthodoxy the fullest expression of Christianity and the fullness of the Apostolic Faith. Some are tired of new religious leaders and the latest fads. They are looking for a Church with deep, historical roots. They are looking for a faith that does not change like the weather and are searching for genuine worship and a real encounter with God. Finally, many are looking for a religion that makes a real difference in their lives; a religion that sanctifies them and brings them face-to-face with our Lord Jesus Christ. They are not just looking for an interesting theological system, but a new way of life.

**What is the Orthodox Church?** The Orthodox Church is the original Christian Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ upon the foundation of the Apostles, Himself being the chief Cornerstone, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

The claim of the Orthodox Church to be the one and only *true* Church is based on four factors.

### ***1) Historical Continuity***

The Orthodox Church traces her history to the first century Church founded by Christ Himself. The Church is a historical and living community. The Orthodox Church is not an antique to be viewed through glass cases, remaining untouched. We are called to experience the history of the Church through her life, events, and saints. For instance, our Lord's Resurrection was not just a historical event that only served as the foundation of the Church at that time. The Resurrection is something we can live daily as the Lord offers us victory over our sins.

The Orthodox Church of today does not *imitate* the original Christian community; she *is* that community. The historical continuity of the Orthodox Church, therefore, is the first pillar of her claim to be the one, authentic Church of Christ. The Orthodox Church is not just similar to the New Testament Church in practice and structure, but she claims an organic unity with the early Church.

### ***2) Apostolic Doctrine***

Historical continuity by itself, however, is not enough to ensure that such a community is the true Church. The Orthodox Church is the true Church of Christ, not only because she can trace her history uninterruptedly back to the New Testament, but also because she has faithfully maintained the authentic teaching of the Apostles, neither adding to nor subtracting from it.

The Church is apostolic because she teaches and lives what the apostles taught and can trace her existence directly back to them. Saint Mark the Apostle preached in

Egypt and founded the Church in Alexandria, which has existed since that time as the Coptic Orthodox Church. Since the first century, there has been an uninterrupted line of patriarchs, who are successors to Saint Mark.

Thus, the Orthodox Church maintains the faith that was handed down by Christ Himself to the Apostles and to their successors from generation to generation.

### 3) *Right Worship*

The word *Orthodox* comes from two words: *Ortho* meaning “straight” or “correct” and *doxa* meaning “glory” or “worship”. Thus, the worship of God has remained consistent and true as expressed in the Orthodox Christian life.

The proper worship of God must be rooted in a proper understanding of Who He is. A flawed understanding of God will inevitably lead to improper worship. Holy tradition and the apostolic doctrine of the Orthodox Church give us a clear and correct picture of Who God is based on a proper interpretation of the Holy Bible, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

When God gave the Law to Moses for the people of Israel, He not only gave the Ten Commandments as an ethical guide, but He also gave very specific instruction as to how He was to be worshipped. The early Church, which consisted primarily of Jews, adopted the basic forms of worship with appropriate changes to the liturgy and service.

At the heart of Orthodox worship is her liturgical life. The focus of the Orthodox liturgy is the Eucharist, the holy sacrament in which the members of the Church partake of the Body and Blood of Christ. The

Eucharist was established by Christ Himself when He said to His Apostles, “*Take, eat; this is My body*” and “*Drink of it all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*” (*Mark 14:22; Matthew 26:27-28*).

Therefore, at the center of Orthodox worship, we find our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself.

### 4) *True Sanctity*

Historical continuity, apostolic doctrine, and right worship are central to the claim of the Orthodox Church to be the authentic Church of Christ. These elements mean little, however, if lives are not changed; if men and women are not conformed to the image of Christ.

Since the first century, the Orthodox Church has produced a countless number of saints. Saints are not simply nice, moral people. It is not necessary to be a Christian in order to be a moral person. A saint is one whose life has been totally transformed by the grace of the Holy Trinity into the likeness of the Son of God. A saint is one who has attained, insofar as it is possible in this life, the likeness of God within himself. He is the living embodiment of the history, doctrine, worship, and ethical life of the Church.

We are all called to be saints and to be perfect, just as our Father in heaven is perfect. We are all called to reach for and achieve our potential in Christ.

The Orthodox Church invites all to her in the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. She calls the sinners to repent. She invites the sick to receive healing from the True Physician. She invites all to experience the love of the Lord and accept salvation

through Him and through the sacramental life of the Church. In this way, all people are called to renew their lives in God and achieve true holiness and sanctity.

### *Conclusion*

The Orthodox Christian bases his faith neither on abstract theories, nor on his own limited, individual experience, but on the corporate experience of the Church. The Orthodox Church is not a historical church, placed in a museum, as something to be admired for her antiquity. The Orthodox Church is a living, dynamic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Church is not just a building, but a congregation of believing people; people in whom Christ dwells and who dwell in Christ’s Body. All the Church’s traditions, teachings, and rituals point to our Lord Jesus Christ as the heart of her existence.

We ask God to preserve us in His Body, the Church. Let us desire to meet our Lord and express our Christian faith to its fullest through the Orthodox Church’s historical continuity, apostolic doctrine, right worship, and true sanctity.



### *Reference:*

Carlton, Clark. *The Faith: Understanding Orthodox Christianity*. Regina Orthodox Press, October 2001.