

What Does Orthodox Mean?: The Doctrine, Worship and Values of the Church

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The word "orthodox" means "right belief" or "right praise."

The "Orthodox Church" is also known as the "Eastern Orthodox Church."

Orthodox Doctrine

In the years after Jesus's Resurrection, apostles and missionaries traveled throughout the known world spreading the Gospel. Soon five major locations were established as centers for the faith: Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople. In the year 1054 the Roman church broke from this united Church, and five hundred years later Protestant churches began breaking away from Rome. But the original Church has remained united in the Apostolic Faith since the first century. This is Orthodoxy.

One of the tasks of the early Church was defining, and defending, orthodox theology against the battering waves of heresies. These heresies often appeared in disputes over the nature of the Trinity, or how Jesus could be both God and Man. Church Councils were called to search the Scriptures and put into words the common faith, forming a bedrock of certainty that could stand for all ages. From this time, the Church has been called "Orthodox," which means "right belief" or "right praise." The Nicene Creed (see reverse) originated at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, and is the central Orthodox statement of faith, a preeminent example of the work of the Councils. Built on the foundation of Christ and His Apostles, nothing has been added to our faith, and nothing can be added. It is complete.

Orthodox Worship

Orthodox churches still use forms of worship that were practiced in the first centuries. Our worship is based to a great extent on passages from Scripture. We sing most of the service, joining our voices in simple harmony to ancient melodies.

Our worship is focused on God, not on our own enjoyment, fulfillment, or fellowship. We come into the presence of God with awe, aware of our fallenness and His great mercy. We seek forgiveness and rejoice in the great gift of salvation so freely given. Orthodox worship is filled with repentance, gratitude, and unending praise.

We try, as best we can, to make our worship beautiful. The example of Scripture shows us that God's design for tabernacle worship (Exodus 25, 26) included gold, silver, precious stones, blue and purple cloth, embroidery, incense, bells, and anointing oil. Likewise, in Saint John's vision of heavenly worship (Revelation 4) there are precious stones, gold, thrones, crowns, white robes, crystal, and incense. From the beginning to the end of Scripture, worship is offered with as much beauty as possible. While a new mission's finances may call for simple appointments, our hearts come to worship seeking to pour out at the feet of Christ all the precious ointment we possess.

A common misconception is that awe-filled, beautiful worship must be rigid, formal, and cold. Orthodox worship shatters that stereotype. The liturgy is not a performance, but an opportunity to come together as a family of faith before our beloved Father. True Orthodox worship is comfortable, warm, and joyful. It could be nothing less in His heavenly presence.

Orthodox Values

Values that are usually termed "Judeo-Christian" have never left Orthodoxy. We believe that sexual expression is a treasured gift, one to be exercised only within marriage. Persons with homosexual or other extramarital sexual impulses are welcomed as fellow servants of God, receiving loving support as they make an offering to God of their chastity. Marriage is a commitment for life. Divorce is a very grave action, and remarriage after divorce a concession to human weakness, undertaken with repentance.

Orthodoxy has stood against abortion since the earliest days of the church. The *Didache* (circa A.D. 110) states, "Do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant." In the midst of a culture which freely practiced abortion, infanticide, and the exposure of infants, early Christians were a consistent voice against violence, as the Orthodox Church continues to be today.

Caring for the poor and disadvantaged has always been a concern for the Orthodox. The strong sermons of Saint John Chrysostom, written in the fourth century, bear witness to the importance of this Christian responsibility. The Church continues to see its mission in light of the whole person, body and soul.

Orthodox believers are right, left, and center on many issues. But where Scripture and the witness of the early Church guide us, there is no controversy. We uphold and obey God's will.