

Defending the Faith



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June 2017

Is Infant Baptism Wrong?

In a country where only 0.5% percent of Christians are Eastern Orthodox, it is common for many to have never even heard of Orthodoxy. As an Orthodox Christian, myself, I find that those who have heard of us, often misunderstand our beliefs and practices. One of those practices is infant baptism.

Many of those who follow certain Protestant denominations, particularly the Baptists and Evangelicals, do not baptize until a child is of “age.” There are different practices when it comes to deciding when a child should be baptized; some say 12, others 16 years of age, and there are still other practices. How can we determine how old a child must be to be baptized? Children mature at different rates. These denominations believe that infant baptism is not Biblical. They may even quote several scriptures (Acts 10; 16:11-15; 16:25-34) that describe whole households being baptized, yet they claim that those baptisms did not include infants, even though the passages do not specify “except infants.” The scriptures themselves are ambiguous on that issue. However, there are also no examples of children being baptized once they have matured out of infancy, nor are there any passages discussing an appropriate age to be baptized. Is an infant or young child considered saved, even though they have not been baptized?

Another objection to infants being baptized is that they have not inherited sin and therefore do not need to be cleansed of sin. Christ, who was the only human who never sinned, was baptized. A third objection to infant baptism stems from the idea that children do not understand. They are not capable of believing and cannot repent. The verse often quoted is “*The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned*” (Mark 16:16). Can a young child or infant believe?

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child (John the Baptist) leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy” (Luke 1:41-44)

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How could John understand that he was in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ? Even in the womb, he responded with joy. There is a spiritual understanding that cannot be expressed by an infant or a child, but can be comprehended by the heart through the Holy Spirit.

To Orthodox Christians, baptism is the dying to an old way of life and being born again into a new way of life. When we are immersed in the water, we participate in Christ's death, and when we rise out of the water, we participate in His resurrection. We are born into our new life. It is a new beginning, being dedicated to Christ. *"Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:4). We become part of the Christian family, a son or daughter of God. Infants or young children may not fully be able to express their understanding that they belong to an earthly family, but their hearts' comprehend by participating in family life and by feeling a sense of belonging. In the same way, infants fully participate in their Christian life by belonging to God's family.

In the Old Testament, God commanded Abraham and his descendants to circumcise all the males in their households at eight-days-old. Circumcision was a covenant made between God and the Israelites. If one was not circumcised, he *"shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant"* (Genesis 17:14). Paul explains that baptism is the new circumcision:

"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11-12; NIV).

When Orthodox Christians are baptized, at the same time, they also receive their first communion and participate in chrismation as a full-fledged member of the Church. Through these sacraments, they receive the "power of God." Through Holy Communion, the child is sealed in the faith, receiving the body and blood of Christ. Through chrismation the child is anointed with oil to receive the Holy Spirit. In the Orthodox faith, each sacrament is not only symbolic, but there is also a mystical reality. When a person is baptized they receive the Holy Spirit to enable them to live in mystical union with God. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and dwells in the infant or child who was baptized. At what point do we want our child to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

I have heard some parents say that they would like to wait and let the child decide for himself when he is of age. Do these parents plan to teach their children nothing about the faith, so they can decide for themselves? Do they not make decisions for their children on a daily basis, what they will eat, and what they will wear? Will they allow their child to decide, if they wish to go to school? As faithful Orthodox Christians, we raise our children in the faith. No one else can teach a child the Christian faith like his parents. Children learn their faith

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cont'd

from our example. They learn when they go to church. We read Bible stories to them and explain the faith appropriate to each age level.

By baptizing our children as infants, Orthodox believe that not only are children learning their faith from a very young age, but they also receive all the blessings and benefits of being a child of God. This includes God's protection. They begin to learn to love God through the Holy Spirit within them, who will speak to their hearts and teach them. If baptism is more than just a symbolic ceremony, if it holds the key to life with the Holy Spirit, why should a child be made to wait? All of us, children or adults, can change our minds and choose to reject God at any point in our lives. However, this is not a reason to withhold the fullness of the faith and its blessings from our children. John the Baptist knew Christ from the womb. Spiritually, all things are possible for God.

As hard as it is to believe, our God came into this reality and visited us. He came in person to offer us an incomprehensible love and nothing more! It is up to each and every one of us to make the decision to accept His love or reject it. And what does He ask of us in return? He only asks us to love Him and to love our neighbors. God asks us to share His love with others through our own actions.

Remember, Christ said, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"* (Matthew 7:7-8). God answers seeking hearts.

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author

Brief Addendum to My Autobiography

In looking back on the last few years of my life, I realized that God had blessed me beyond what I could have imagined. My youthful dreams have all come true. I became a teacher, a principal, I earned my Master's Degree, I now work with at-risk youth as a counselor, and amazingly, I wrote a book! I am humbled by the path He now has me traveling. My journey toward perfection has taken a few unexpected turns! In writing my book, God has revealed Himself to me in a way I never would have fathomed. My relationship with Him has deepened. Not only that, but now He has me writing a monthly newsletter to "defend the faith" and a blog! I am not sure what He has planned for me next, but I trust it will be amazing!

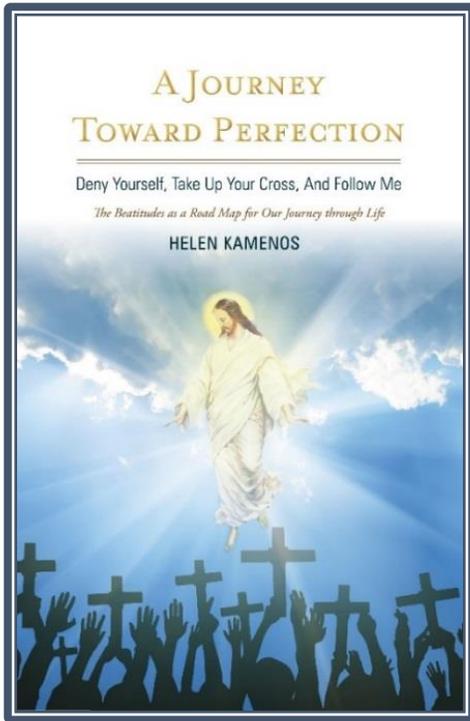
If you would like to visit my blog, go to: <https://plus.google.com/116159014424445968003>

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Experience God's True Presence In Your Life



Unlike any other book on Christianity that you have read, *A Journey Toward Perfection* leads you on a journey to experience God. It reveals a path toward developing an intimate personal relationship with God. God's love for us extends beyond His one act of sacrifice on the cross. To fully comprehend God's love for us, it is necessary for us to understand Jesus, God's beloved son, who left His throne of glory to live among us, to become vulnerable like us. To fathom God's love for us, it is essential for us to experience His journey through life, what He endured and suffered, by walking in His footsteps, by traveling life's journey as He did. As we embark on this journey, we learn how to endure and overcome the trials and tribulations of our lives. We learn how to cultivate a relationship with God, communicating with Him in a two-way dialogue, not only speaking to God, but also being attuned to His voice.

Christ gave us a road map to follow through the Beatitudes. By following this path toward Christ, God is revealed to us in an unprecedented way and becomes a beacon in our lives. Two thousand years ago, Christ ignited a fire, which changed the world. Take the *Journey Toward Perfection* and be transformed. By knowing the love of God, you will undergo a metamorphosis. You will become the butterfly that God always meant for you to be.

"I truly was blown away by *A Journey Toward Perfection*...It's a very good study tool and is also enjoyable reading in its own right." (Mary C. Blowers - reviewer for Readers' Favorite)

"This book was written with a pure heart and soul. You can feel Helen Kamenos' love for Jesus in her words and how much she wants everyone to feel as close to Him as she does. It was exciting to read her words because she was excited to tell us what she thought...It was a wonderful experience." (Rabia Tanveer - reviewer for Readers' Favorite)

"An uplifting book for all those who seek the love of Christ. The book leads readers into a deeper relationship with God and reiterates the power of God's love." (Mamta Madhavan - reviewer for Readers' Favorite)

"It reinforced and gave a new perspective to lessons I learned and absorbed at my mother's knee... The book is beautifully written, logically organized, and will definitely help you on your personal journey." (Ray Simmons – reviewer for Readers' Favorite)

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Pentacost - June 4



On Sunday, June 4, we will celebrate the birth of the Church. Christ's Church was founded on Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. Before ascending into heaven, Christ had given the eleven disciples instructions to remain in Jerusalem and *"wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now"* (Acts 1 4-5). They were to wait until they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. The disciples chose Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot. On the day of Pentecost, the twelve Apostles were gathered.

"And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 2:3-4).

According to Acts, after witnessing this event and hearing Peter and the other Apostles speaking in all of their own languages, languages that the Apostles did not know prior

to receiving the Holy Spirit, those in the crowd *"were cut to the heart"* (Acts 2:37), repented, and about three thousand were baptized and became followers of Christ. From these humble beginnings, Christianity spread across the globe to include billions who call themselves Christians today. We are grateful for the twelve Apostles and Paul of Tarsus, who began a ministry of spreading the gospel or "Good News" throughout the known world.

To receive **Defending the Faith** each month, sign up at: www.helenkamenos.com

Forward this to your family and friends, so they can sign up, too!