# The Wedding Ceremony

To our family and friends who are not familiar with the marriage sacraments of the Greek Orthodox Church, we have provided a detailed account of what you will experience during the ceremony.

## The Rings

The rings are blessed by the priest who takes them in his hand and makes the sign of the cross over the couple’s heads saying:

“The servant of God, Jared, is betrothed to the servant of God, Erena, in the name of The Father, The Son, and of The Holy Spirit.”

The Koumbaro then exchanges the rings three times, taking the bride’s ring and placing it on the groom’s finger and vice-versa. The rings are the symbol of betrothal from the most ancient times. The exchange signifies that, in married life, the weakness of the one partner will be compensated by the strengths of the other, the imperfections of one by the perfections of the other. Individually, the newly betrothed are incomplete; together they are made perfect. Thus, the exchange of rings signifies that the spouses in marriage will constantly complement each other and be enriched by the union.

## The Candles

The wedding service begins immediately following the betrothal service. The bride and groom are handed candles which they hold throughout the service. The candles represent the lamps of the five maidens of the Bible, which, because they contained enough oil, enabled the maidens to light the way for the Bridegroom Christ, when He came in the darkness of night. The candles symbolize the spiritual willingness of the couple to receive Christ, who will bless them through this Sacrament.

## The Joining of the Hands

As the final prayer concludes, the priest invokes God to “join these servants, unite them in one mind and flesh.” He then places the right hand of the groom on the right hand of the bride. At this sacred moment, the couple is joined as husband and wife in the Greek Orthodox Church. The hands remain joined throughout the service to symbolize the “oneness” of their love.

## The Crowning

Climaxing the marriage service is the Office of the Crowning. The crowns (Stefana) signify the glory and honor of God given to the couple during the Sacrament. The bride and groom are crowned as the queen and king of their kingdom, the home, which they will rule with wisdom, justice and integrity. The crowns are joined together with a ribbon symbolizing that the two are now one.

The priest places the crowns upon their heads; blessing each partner, he says, “The servants of God Jared and Erena are crowned in the name of the Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit, Amen.” The Koumbaro exchanges the crowns three times over the heads of the groom and the bride as witness to the sealing of the union.

Some interpret the stefana as being symbols of the crowns of martyrdom, since every true marriage involves immeasurable self-sacrifice.

## The Common Cup

In the second Gospel of St. John, we read that Jesus attended and blessed the marriage at Cana of Galilee. There He changed water into wine and gave it to the newlyweds. The couple drinks blessed wine from a common cup, remembering the first miracle Jesus performed.

The common cup designates a mutual sharing of life in its fullest, a common support for every joy and sorrow experienced in life’s walk. The drinking of wine serves to impress upon the couple that, from this moment on, they will share everything in life, joys as well as sorrows, and they are to “bear one another’s burdens.”

## The Ceremonial Walk

The priest leads the couple around the table on which are placed the Gospel and the Cross, Christ’s symbols of hope and redemption. These first steps as partners are to emphasize the focus of their “life’s walk” together.

During the ceremonial walk around the table, a hymn is sung to the Holy Martyrs, reminding the newly married couple of the sacrificial love they are to have for each other in marriage, a love that seeks not its own, but is willing to sacrifice all for the one loved.

## The Blessing

The bride and groom return to their places, and the priest lifts the crowns from their heads. The marriage ceremony ends with words of blessing to the newlyweds.