# Background

The Orthodox sacrament of marriage is unique in many ways, but primarily in that the ceremony has remained almost entirely unchanged since its origination centuries ago. Another notable aspect of the Orthodox marriage is that the bride and groom do not exchange vows; instead it is their presence before Christ through the priest and the congregation that signifies their wish to be joined and to accept the lord into their new home. Finally, in the Orthodox tradition, the wedding ceremony is actually two services in one. The first, which is the briefer of the two, is the Service of Betrothal, during which the rings are exchanged. The second, the Service of Crowning, is longer and includes many prayers offered for the couple, the crowning of the bride and groom in marriage, sharing of the common cup and the celebrational procession around the table.

# The Service of Betrothal

During this first service, the priest offers petitions of prayer on behalf of the bride and groom. He then asks God’s blessings upon the rings and proceeds to bless the bride and groom with the rings. Performed three times in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the priest will start first from the groom to the bride, and then from the bride to the groom. The weaving motion between bride and groom represents their lives being entwined into one. The priest then places the wedding rings on the ring fingers of the right hands of both the bride and groom (the right hand holds special connotations in the Orthodox faith, which is why it is used during the wedding ceremony). Then the sponsor (the koumbaro or koumbara) exchanges the rings on the bride and groom three times further emphasizing the union of their lives. The service closes with a final prayer, which seals the placement of rings and emphasizes that the marriage was enacted by God Himself.

# The Service of Crowning

## The Joining of Hands

The Service of Crowning begins with the invocation of the Holy Trinity. After petitions are offered on behalf of the bride, groom and wedding company, three prayers are read which ascribe to God the institution of marriage and the preservation of His people through the ages. During this prayer the priest joins the right hands of the bride and groom to symbolize the union of the couple through the lord. Since God is the true Celebrant of every sacrament, the priest always expresses himself in the third person. He is simply God’s instrument in the service.

## The Crowning

The union of the bride and groom is completed with the Crowning. The priest takes the crowns from the altar table, blesses the bride and groom, and then places the crowns upon their heads, chanting, “O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor.” The crowns have several meanings: the first that God bestows His blessing upon His children in the form of crowns and the second, that the bride and groom mark the beginning of a new kingdom, reigning supreme under the Divine Authority of God, Who reigns over all. The sponsor exchanges the crowns over the heads of the bride and groom to seal the union. The service continues with the Epistle (Ephesians 5:20-33) and Gospel (John 2:1-11) readings. The Epistle details the responsibilities of each partner in the marriage and the Gospel recounts Christ’s first miracle at the wedding in Cana.

## The Common Cup

Following the readings and brief prayers, the common cup, containing a small portion of wine, is presented to the bride and groom. The priest blesses the cup and offers it to the newly joined husband and wife, representing their equal share in the cup of life.

## The Removal of the Crowns and the Benediction

Upon completion of the procession, the Priest faces the groom and says: “Be magnified, O Bridegroom, as Abraham, and blessed as Isaac, and increased as was Jacob. Go your way in peace, performing in righteousness the commandments of God.” After which, the priest turns to the bride and says, “And you, O Bride, be magnified as was Sarah, and rejoiced as was Rebecca, and increased as Rachel, being glad in your husband, keeping the paths of the Law, for so God is well pleased.” Then, removing their crowns, the Priest says, “Accept their crowns in Your Kingdom unsoiled and undefiled; and preserve them without offense to the ages of ages.” Finally, the priest reads a prayer of benediction and the newly married couple may depart from the Church.