# The Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the Greek Orthodox Church. It is the Sacrament during which the bride and the groom give a solemn promise before God and the Church to love each other and to be true to each other. The marriage service, as performed in the Orthodox Church, is a very beautiful service full of symbolisms. The service actually consists of two parts, the Service of the Betrothal and the Service of the Crowning.

## The Service of the Betrothal

The Betrothal consists of several beautiful prayers during which the priest asks God to grant the betrothed perfect and peaceful love, salvation and to bless them with fair children.

## Exchange of Rings

During the Betrothal, the rings are blessed over the heads of the bride and groom three times, after which they are placed on the fourth figure of the right hand. The exchange of the rings by the Koumbaros, the official sponsor of the marriage, symbolizes the unbreakable bond of Christian Marriage. Marriage is not for today or tomorrow, but forever. The Betrothal ends with a prayer that the Lord might make strong their Betrothal in faith, truth, and love and make them of one mind, and that He would grant them His heavenly blessings.

## Lighted Candles

The bride and groom are given white lighted candles to hold. The lighted candles symbolize the purity of their lives, which should shine with the light of virtue.

## The Joining of Hands

During the Service of the Crowning, three long prayers are read, asking God to grant the bride and groom a long and peaceful life, mutual love and help, happiness and health. Then the right hands of the couple are joined by the priest who calls upon God to join them into one mind and one flesh.

## The Crowning

The priest takes up the crowns and makes the sign of the cross three times each over the heads of the bride and groom, and then places the crowns on their heads. The crowns are the symbol that the newly married couple receives the grace of the Holy Spirit to be the founders of a new generation and are crowned with virtue and holiness to serve all their lives to the glory of the Almighty God.

## Bible Reading

During The Crowning, Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians (5: 20-33) concerning the mystery and holiness of the Christian Marriage and the duties and responsibilities of the husband and wife to each other is read by the Priest; and Saint John’s Gospel on Christ’s miracle at the Marriage of Cana (2: 1-12) is read by the priest to show that our Lord Jesus Christ blessed the sacred institution of Marriage.

## The Common Cup

The drinking from the “Common Cup” is the next point in the service. The priest gives to the husband and wife to drink from a cup of wine three times each. This is not Holy Communion, but it symbolizes that they now share with each other every joy and sorrow.

## The Circling of the Tables

The priest takes the bride and groom by the hand and leads them around the small table three times while three beautiful and joyous hymns are chanted. The circle symbolizes eternity. By circling around the table, the couple signifies their oath to preserve their marriage bond forever, until death shall break it. The triple circling is in honor of the Holy Trinity.

## Benediction

Finally, the Priest lifts the crowns from their heads with special words of blessing to the newlyweds, thus ending the Marriage Ceremony.