

The White Garment, the Shining Garment, the Royal Robe, the Garment of Immortality:¹

- The rubrics mention that the catechumen is clothed with the robe of righteousness. But whose righteousness? The chant that follows answers saying: the robe of Light, *"I am the Light of the world"* (John 8:12), Jesus Christ, who closed himself with the light as with a garment (remember transfiguration).
- This is not the garment that we should strive for as it is explained. We are already clothed with it immediately after our triple immersion in the water. Our life should be a witness to this light for we are the light that it should not be hidden (Matthew 5:14). Our life is to keep this robe pure and undefiled.
- The catechumen was unvested. His rejection of sins and corruption. He is now vested with glory and light, which is symbolized by the white garment. It is like the nudity of Adam and Eve. They were unashamed of their nudity because it was covered with the glory and the light of uncorrupted creation. Man was created in the image and after the likeness of the Trinity (Genesis 1:26).
- This robe signifies the return of man to its glory and childhood (genesis).
- With this robe, the catechumen is "set apart" once again to his highest calling as God's intended him to be prior to his rejection of this role; this robe of light and glory.
- The robe has many meanings in the Bible stories and hence is the meaning of its usage:
 1. His role as a king (II Samuel 6:14) as wearing the Linen Ephod: *"Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod."*
 2. His role as a priest (Exodus 28) as the vestments of Aaron.
 3. His role as a prophet (II Kings: 2:14) as the mantle of Elijah: *"Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, 'Where is the LORD God of Elijah?' And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over."*
 4. His role as a son of God (Luke 15: 22-24): *"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.'²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."*
 5. His role as a participant in the kingdom (Matthew 22: 11):¹¹ *"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.¹² He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless."*
- So, the catechumen is vested in this white garment in order to be anointed to his high calling as a child of God, as a light, who was purified and renewed by the New Adam so that he may be come with the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit a king and a priest: *"has made us kings and priests"* (Rev 1:6) and who poured on us the grace of the spirit that we may prophesize (acts 2:

¹ Most of references and the order of this explanation were taken from Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, 1995.

These notes should be read along with the prayers of the Sacrament of Baptism.

18). As such, we become as St Peter says: “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people* (1 Peter 2:9).”

THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISMATION

- Nowadays in the Orthodox tradition (and some other eastern traditions) Chrismation is still following the immersion in the water and putting of the White Robe as it was in the First Church. Thus is the prerequisite of the catechumen prior to their paschal celebration.
- Always consider that in the Orthodox Rite, we celebrate three sacraments at the celebration what is called “Baptism.” Baptism = Immersion in the water, chrismation = the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist = the thanksgiving; the offering of oneself to the altar of God.
- Also remember that each act is a sacrament by itself. It is like you are ascending from glory to glory; Exorcism, Renunciation of Satan, Allegiance to Christ, the prayers of Water, oil and the prayer of the Priest to Himself, Immersion into water and the White Robe; A route from nudity and slavery to be clothed with Christ and kingship; from darkness to glory and honor.
- The sacrament of Chrismation is the fulfillment of the Immersion in the water as the Eucharist is the fulfillment of Chrismation. Each sacrament fulfills the other.
- Hence is the non separation of time between the three sacraments as in the Western Theology tradition, or rejection as in the protestant tradition.
- The orthodox theology always goes hand by hand with its liturgical rubrics. Once this theology is separated from the liturgy it risks reductionism and hence, the lost of its meaning.
- The Grace that is received at the immersion in the water is the clothing of Christ. It is the grace of dying and resurrecting with Christ; the grace of regeneration, purification, and renewal = becoming like the New Adam.

The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit:

- This is the baptism of water and spirit. The rubrics say it clearly. The catechumen is purified by the water and is sanctified by the Spirit, and thus is the illumination.
- The three stages in the life of each Christian according to the Holy Fathers: Purification, sanctification and deification (*Theosis*). The catechumen receives them all at once, one after the other. His life, therefore, is to progress in his three stages.
- We are mistaken if we define Chrismation as the sacrament which bestows on the newly baptized the gifts of the Holy Spirit; the grace which is necessary for his life. Chrismation is not the means of grace, but grace itself for the newly baptized, through Chrismation, is sealed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. As such, the anointment of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.
- Chrismation is the personal Pentecost. The whole body is anointed with the Holy Chrism.

- The immersion into water and the clothing of the White Robe are the preparation for the sealing as the stamping, as the signature.
- In Chrismation the newly baptized receives Christ's anointment. Christ is the Anointed one. Therefore, he/she is given participation in Christ's life because Christ has the Spirit as His Life, and as such, the catechumen is been given the sign to act as king, priest and prophet.
- *Al Masih*, Christ, in Arabic means the anointed who wipes. This word is sprung from the word *Masaha*= *wiping* = *cleaning* = *sweeping* = *surveying the land*. In His humility and obedience, Christ cleansed and surveyed the creation from the sin.

1. **The Role of a King:**

- Man was created in God's image. God is the King of kings and He gave man the power and authority to *"subdue the earth and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over everything living thing that moves upon the earth"* (Genesis 1:27-28).
- At the fall, man becomes the slave of creation.
- Christ as a king² in His Crucifixion and Resurrection redeems man as king of the creation. Man has to manage and rule this creation. This creation is man's kingdom.
- The role of the newly baptized is in imitation of His Anointed King who so loved the world as He gave Himself for the world *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).
- So Man in order to be the king of this world he has to love the world as Christ loved it. He has to be crucified unto this corrupted world. Christ on the Cross saved the world and made it a New Creation and by *"whom [the Cross] the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world"* (Gal 6:14).
- Therefore, the newly baptized, and each person, saves the world by accepting the world as God's gift and by rejecting its wickedness. This is our everyday baptism.
- Through the Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit the newly baptized will not be equipped with supra natural power or authority, but rather it ignites the Image of God in him/her. And thus, he/she uses the wisdom of God, the wisdom of beyond the earthly, to manage the New Creation.

2. **The Role of a Priest**

² "hail, the king of Jews" (Matthew 27:29); "This is Jesus the king of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37); "He is the king of Israel" (Matthew 27:42); "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38)

- Christ reveals the true meaning of priesthood in His Incarnation; His self-offering to God for the salvation of man. Man refused to self-offer to God and chose to become a consumer; to eat. He used the world for himself and to offer it to God; to sacrifice his needs for God.
- At the fall, man distorted this priestly image and at Chrismation he is anointed with the Chrism of priesthood; he is restored to his high calling of self-offering to God. And as such, he sanctifies the world.
- By offering himself, throughout his life and through his allegiance to Christ, the newly baptized uses his function as a royal priest, for he has given, through Chrismation, his kingship and priestly anointment. He becomes the mediator between the creation and God, and as the king of creation he offers what is given to him to the One who offered it to him in order to sanctify it.

3. ***The Role of a Prophet:***

- The word EAT and the action of eating has made Man lose his role as king, as priest and as a prophet. 1- Man has listened to the snake. He ate from the fruit and made her overpower him and have dominion over him. 2- Man ate from the fruit instead of offering it to God as God requested and then he lost his role as offerer and as a priest. And 3- Man ate from the fruit and as such, he acquired the wisdom of knowing good and bad, which led him to lose his role as a prophet. He lost the wisdom of God.
- The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit restores man to his capability to listen to God, to become the mediator between God and man as Christ was the Word of God.
- The prophet is not the one who foretells future, but he is the one who tells what God dictated and revealed to him in various ways. Through Chrismation, the newly baptized is anointed with the seal of the Word.
- In the Old Testament, God used specific people for this role because of sin, but through Christ this sin is overpowered.

Through love, every Christian fulfills his triune role. When he loves he is a king who is in control over everything and all enemies and adversaries. He is a priest who is offering freely his very self as an oblation of Thanksgiving to God's altar. And finally he is a prophet because he is distributing God's love.

The Procession:

- The procession around the font signifies the procession towards the kingdom of God that is now opened for the entry of the newly baptized who is sealed in the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

- This procession was made by those who are robed with the Garments of Immortality, in the Early Church, from the baptistery to the church with candles as receiving the light from the Light that darkness will not overshadow.
- Now, the doors that were shut after the catechumen exit from the church at the announcement of ‘the Doors, the Doors, let us attend’ is made wide open for them after their confession who is the King of Glory.³
- This procession was made with the song of Entry “you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, alleluia.”⁴
- The newly baptized receives the fulfillment of his desire at the end of this procession. He participates in the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Immortal Bread. He partakes in the banquet that, in the past, was not permissible for him.

The Eighth Day, Ablution and Tonsure:

- The New Week, the Bright Week,⁵ was in the Early Church, for those who are newly illumined, a time to learn about the Mystagogia, the post baptismal catechesis.
- The neophytes tasted and saw how the Lord is good. Therefore, they are capable now to learn about this mystery of Immortality, the experience of the Church.
- The Eighth Day is the Day that is beyond time. The Seventh is when God rested from His creative work, it is known as the completion of time in the created time. The 8th day is the Day of the beyond time (the Heavenly Kingdom), but still lived in this time (the earthly kingdom), like the Church who is “in this world” but from “not of this world.” It is like this double mystery of the function of the Church; the life in the Church in the present time “Pentecost” and the time that will come “Eschatology.” It is the “Epiphany” of the Eternal life in this world. The experience of the New Life as truly not of this world; the experience of the things that the “eye has not seen, the ear has not heard...”
- Ablution and tonsure are the remaining two rites marking the conclusion of the baptismal liturgy. Hence, it signifies this return from the 8th Day of the Kingdom of God (out of this world) to the 7th Day which is in this world signaling the beginning of the New Life that was received as Grace and was lived through the experiencing of seeing and tasting to the military mission of the neophyte against the Evil of this world.

³ Check the Rush Service of the Paschal Service.

⁴ In the Paschal Liturgy the Trisagion Chant “holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal” is replaced by the baptismal chant.

⁵ In this week, the Paschal liturgy is repeated every day with the change of tone on each day.

- The Ablution (the washing off the Holy Chrism) is carried out after a prayer for protection, help, courage and endurance is said while the neophyte is bowing your head like the soldier who is going to be installed and commissioned by his general to fight the enemy.
- The White Garment and the Holy Chrism are removed for there is no need for them anymore as external signs because the neophyte has already put on the very Christ Himself on him and the very Holy Spirit is been abided in him. The neophyte is now a king, a priest and a prophet of the “not of this world” who is sent to this “in this world.” The external signs are of no effect because only his faithfulness and obedience to his high calling will sustain him. He is the combatant, the witness (*martyria*), of the things that he experienced, have seen and tasted.
- The last rite that remained is that of the tonsure, the symbol of obedience and sacrifice. The hair is a symbol of pride, strength and beauty, and the first thing that the neophyte fulfills his role as a king, priest and prophet is to give something that he owns, his pride. a) As a king, he is in control by offering his hair (the worldly beauty, strength and pride) to God who created him in His Image. As such, he is recognizing the heavenly beauty, the greatness of the Lord and His glory. b) As a priest his free offering becomes a sacrifice, a thanksgiving. And c) as a prophet, he becomes lenient towards the Word of God in order to proclaim it to the others.
- ...And the combat to keep the White Garment (the New Man) purified begins as a progressive process towards *Theosis*. Every moment becomes for him a moment for salvation or condemnation.

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