

Welcome to St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church!



Called the “Eastern Orthodox,” “Greek Orthodox” Church, or simply “the Orthodox Christian Church,” it is the **oldest Christian Church in the world**, founded by Jesus Christ and with its beginnings chronicled in the New Testament. **All other Christian churches and groups can be traced historically back to it.** It has been the context of Christian living for millions of Christians for almost twenty centuries.

With roughly 250 million members worldwide, Orthodoxy is second in size only to the Roman Catholic Church. However, in spite of its size, relatively few Americans are aware that it

exists.

We have deep and lasting roots in Christian antiquity and is steeped in rich Biblical tradition.

For some first-time visitors, Orthodox worship can be very different from what they have experienced in other churches. Below are some frequently asked questions...

Why do we do things the way that we do? It’s because this is how worship was conducted in the first century Church and how history records Christians continued to worship for centuries afterward.

Orthodoxy is very much concerned with holding fast to what was received from the Apostles and passing it on faithfully from one generation to the next. The idea that the Church should fundamentally change its worship according to the tastes and culture of the world is foreign to us.

Why do you pray to saints?

To be accurate, **we pray *with* the saints, not to them.** Much the same as you would ask your friends, family or other Christians to pray for you, we ask the saints to intercede on our behalf. We don’t pray to the saints “instead” of God, just as any Christian does not ask his fellow Christians to pray for him instead of going directly to God with his concerns. Rather, we enlist Saints, along with the rest of the Church, to pray to God to hear us and have mercy on us. No saint would ever get between anyone and God. Rather, they always pray for us *to* God so that we can become one with Him just as they did.

Why are there icons everywhere?

Icons are in some sense our family album. In the same way that many people keep photo albums to help them remember people and events, **we keep the icons to remind us of people and events.** They adorn the walls of our worship spaces. Most Orthodox Christians also have an icon corner in their home.

Why do you mention Mary so much? Why is she so important? Why do you pray to her?

As the one who gave birth to God Himself in the flesh, we hold her in high reverence and respect. It only makes sense that we should love someone who literally held God inside her for nine months. She also shows us the way to become one with her divine Son—humility, love and obedience to Him.

Why is she so important? Mary stands **witness that Jesus Christ is fully human, even while being fully God.** The early Christians made a point of inserting into the Nicene Creed (AD 325) the statement that Christ was “incarnate... of the Virgin Mary” to ensure there was no confusion on this matter.

As for prayers, we pray with Mary, and ask her to intercede on our behalf, as we do with all our Saints. It’s no different than asking your own mother to pray for you. And in this case, we’re asking Jesus’ mother to pray for us.

Why do you cross yourselves?

Jesus calls us to “take up [our] cross,” and this is a visible identification with that command of our Lord. We make **the sign of the cross to remind us of Christ’s conquest of death** on the cross. Making the sign of the cross is not unique to Orthodoxy—Roman Catholics also make the sign of the cross, as do many Protestants, including Anglicans/Episcopalians and some Lutherans (including Martin Luther himself). But, the Orthodox cross themselves right to left, signifying the Eastern direction of the crucifixion, resurrection, and the awaited second coming of Christ.

Don’t you get tired of singing the same hymns or praying the same prayers every week?

Our hymns and prayers change every day. Yes, there are some hymns we sing regularly, but each day different hymns are sung to celebrate a feast, the life of a saint or some other event in the life of the Church. Like most churches, we have a large and varied hymnbook, and some of the hymns and prayers are used more than others. But because the Orthodox liturgical tradition is so vast, full immersion in it provides an almost endless variety of exploration and possibility.



Why do you use incense?

Our worship is not merely mental—we use all our senses, sight, smell, sound, taste and touch. Incense wafting upwards symbolizes our prayer rising to God in heaven. The Scriptures always depict incense when they describe worship in Heaven (Is. 6:4; Rev. 8:3-5), and incense is mentioned in the worship of God on Earth well over 100 times in the Bible. The Prophet Malachi even predicted that incense would be characteristic of Christian worship (Mal. 1:11).



Do you have to be Orthodox to be saved?

In a word, no. However, we believe that Orthodoxy represents the fullness of the faith—that is, the most complete and accurate expression possible by man. God honors truthful belief and proper faith anywhere it is found.

Then why become Orthodox? **The fullness of the faith is found here, the fullness of the truth is found here, and the fullness of worship is found here.** Simply put, why want only a sandwich when they could have a banquet?

While it may be possible to be saved outside the normal boundaries of the historic Church Jesus Christ founded—the Orthodox Church—it is not something that should be counted on. Christ never explicitly revealed any alternate paths to salvation except in His one Church.

Why do you fast so much?

To clarify, fasting doesn't mean giving up all food and water. Orthodox fasting practice, when followed strictly, means that not partaking of any animal products (i.e., no meat, dairy, eggs, etc.), nor of olive oil or wine. Fasting is one of many tools that we use to bring our bodies “under subjection” as St. Paul said (I Cor. 9:27), so that we might be pure and holy. Jesus said that when He had gone, His followers would fast. Like the early Christians, we fast so that **we may learn to control our appetite for all things that are not good and holy.** It is not about earning salvation, it is a tool to help us work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), enabling us to train and strengthen our wills so that they can be turned toward Christ. Specifically, we fast each Wednesday to commemorate the day when Jesus was betrayed and each Friday to commemorate His death on the cross. In addition, we fast during the entire Lenten period and the entire Advent period, as well as during other times during the year.

Do you believe the Eucharist is REALLY the body and blood of Christ?

The Eucharist is truly the body and blood of our Lord. But this can be apprehended only by spiritual sight, what the early Christians called the *nous*—the eyes of the soul. Without this spiritual insight, we could not understand the mystery of the Eucharist.

What do the Orthodox think about the Bible? Do you agree with *Sola Scriptura* (“the Bible alone”)?

Much of the content of Orthodox worship services consists of readings from the Scriptures, especially the Psalms. Readings from the Gospel occur at most services, along with regular readings from the Epistles. There are not now, nor have there ever been, any restrictions on the laity with regard to reading the Scriptures—they are, and always have been, encouraged to read them.



As for *Sola Scriptura*, we believe that the Scriptures are the “canon”—the measuring stick—which must be applied to all doctrine, but it is not the only source doctrine. In other words, not all doctrine is found in the Scriptures, but no Orthodox doctrine contradicts the Scriptures.

Why is this so? It's because **the Orthodox Church actually produced the Bible.** The Church also lived Christian life to the fullest for centuries before the canon of the New Testament was even recognizable (AD 367). As such, the Bible is always understood *within* the life of the Church, not above or apart from it. The Bible is the Church's book.

For more information about our parish: St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church

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All are invited to join us for Services!

Sundays
Orthros/Matins: 8:45 am
Divine Liturgy: 10:00 am
Wednesday Evening Vespers
6:15 pm
Bible Study: 7:00-8:00 pm
Saturday Evening Services
Confessions: 4:30 pm
Great Vespers: 5:30 pm