

A Visitor's Guide to Orthodox Worship

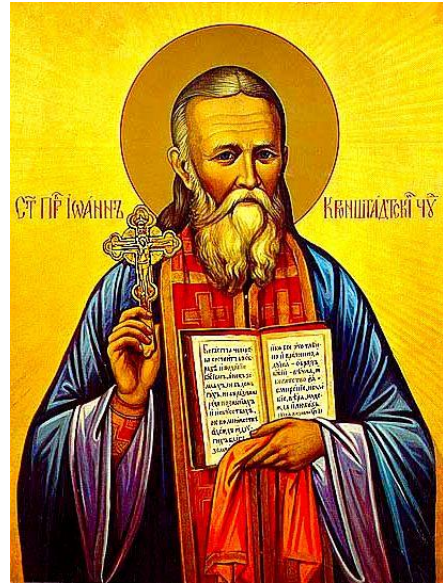
St John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church
Lincoln, NE



Welcome to St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church!

We are a parish under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church in America and the Diocese of Chicago and the Midwest. Our congregation draws people from a wide variety of backgrounds, but all are united in the desire to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a family-like community that seeks to worship Christ "in Spirit and in Truth."

All services are in English to facilitate full understanding and participation in the traditional Orthodox services. The Orthodox Church is sometimes called "the Ancient Church" because she can genuinely trace her history and teachings back to the Apostles. We invite you to join with us and experience "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 1:3)



What is the Orthodox Church?

Christians of the Eastern Churches call themselves Orthodox. This description comes to us from the fifth century and means true worship. To bless, praise, and glorify God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the fundamental purpose of the Church. All her activities are directed toward this goal.

It is not unusual for titles such as Greek, Russian and Serbian, etc., to be used in describing Orthodox Churches. These designations refer to the national roots of a particular parish. However, a typical Orthodox parish is comprised of many different nationalities. In addition, Orthodoxy has established missions to evangelize peoples throughout the world.

What We Believe

Our beliefs are well summed up by the ancient Nicene Creed which was written in the fourth century:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by Whom all things were made; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man; And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried; and arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures; And ascended into the heavens, and sits at the right hand of the Father; And shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life; Who proceeds from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets. In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, I confess one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead. And the life of the world to come. Amen

Our Worship

Our beliefs are expressed in the worship of the Church and the spirituality of our members.

Since Worship is so important to Orthodoxy, the best introduction to the Orthodox Church is for the non-Orthodox to attend the Divine Liturgy. It is in worship that the distinctive flavor, rich traditions, and living faith of Orthodoxy are truly experienced.

Worship in the Orthodox Church is expressed in four principal ways:

- The Eucharist, which is the most important worship experience of Orthodoxy, means thanksgiving. It is known in the Orthodox Church as the Divine Liturgy. The origin of the Eucharist is found in the Last Supper at which Christ instructed His disciples to offer bread and wine in His memory. The Eucharist is the most distinctive event of Orthodox worship. In it the Church gathers to remember and celebrate the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, and thereby, participates in the mystery of Salvation through partaking of His life-giving Body and Blood.
- The Sacraments affirm God's presence and action in the important events of our Christian lives. All the major Sacraments are closely related to the Eucharist. These are: Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Marriage, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the sick.
- Special Services and Blessings, which also affirm God's presence and action in all the events, needs and tasks of our life.
- The Daily Offices are the services of prayer which take place at appointed hours during the day.

Spirituality

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Ps 51:10)

The Orthodox Church proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Greek language, the word for Gospel is Evangelion which means literally "the good news." The good news of Orthodox Christianity is a proclamation of God's unbounded and sacrificial love for mankind, as well as the revelation of our true destiny. Reflecting on the joyous message of the Gospel, Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote in the fourth century that, "The good news is that man is no longer an outcast nor expelled from God's Kingdom; but that he is again a son, again God's subject".

The fundamental goal of each and every person is to share in the life of God. We have been created by God to live in fellowship with Him. The descent of God in the Person of Jesus Christ has made possible the human ascent to the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's task is to incorporate us into the life of the Holy Trinity. However, the Spirit always recognizes our human freedom and invites our active cooperation in perfecting the "image and likeness of God" with which each of us is created.

Our participation in the life of the Holy Trinity takes place within the Church. For the Orthodox, the Church is the meeting place between God and His people. The Holy Spirit and the Church are organically linked. In the second century, Saint Irenaeus reminded us of this by saying, "Where the Church is there is the Spirit, and where the Spirit is there is the Church." The Holy Spirit moves through the life of the Church to reveal our common humanity in Christ and to unite us with the Father. We acquire the Holy Spirit through our celebration of the Eucharist and the reception of Holy Communion, through our

participation in the Sacraments, through our discipline of daily prayer, and through living a Christ-like life.

The Individual and The Church

Orthodoxy believes that each person has an intrinsic value and importance in virtue of his or her unique relationship to God. A human being is never seen as being totally depraved. The “image of God” which can be distorted by sin, can never be eradicated. Through the life of the Church, there is always the opportunity for fulfillment. When the Sacraments are administered, they are always offered to the individual by name. This action not only reminds us of the dignity of each person but also emphasizes the responsibility each person has for his or her relationship to God.

While Orthodoxy recognizes the value of the person, it does not believe that we are meant to be isolated or self-sufficient. Each person is called to be a member of the Church.

Beauty and the Church

The Orthodox Church believes that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The Creator is present through His handiwork. This means that the material world, being valuable and good, is an important means through which God expresses Himself. The Orthodox Church affirms this conviction through her extensive use of material creation not only for the embellishment of her places of worship, but also in the materials used for worship. For example, when the bread and wine - “the first fruits of creation” - are offered in the Eucharist, they are also a symbolic offering of all creation to God its Creator. Since there is no hesitation in using the gifts of creation, the interior of an Orthodox church is very beautiful. Designed to create an atmosphere which is special, the building is filled with a feeling of joy and an appreciation of God’s bounty. Orthodoxy recognizes that beauty is an important dimension of human life. Through iconography and church appointments, the beauty of creation becomes a very important means of praising God. The divine gifts of the material world are shaped and fashioned by human hands into an expression of beauty which glorifies the Creator. As the pious woman poured her most precious oil on the feet of Our Lord, Orthodoxy seeks always to offer to God what is best and most beautiful.

The Church Interior

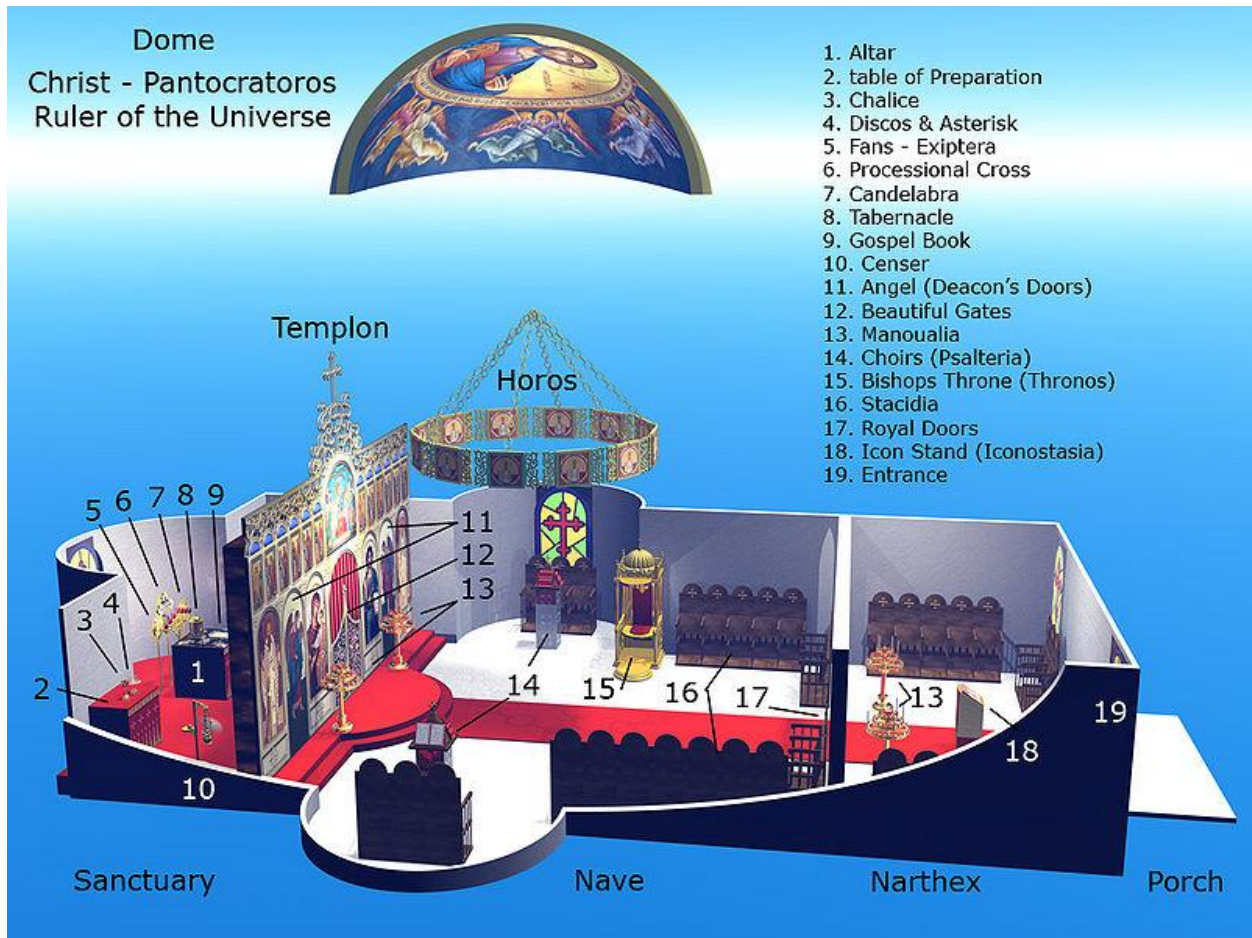
The interior of the church is both the background and the setting for Orthodox worship. The art and architecture are designed to contribute to the total experience of worship, which involves one’s intellect, feelings, and senses. The Eucharist and the other sacrament take place in God’s midst, and they bear witness to His presence and actions. Therefore there is a very strong feeling that the church is the House of God and the place where His glory dwells.

Traditionally and historically, the church is constructed in the form of a cross and is divided into three areas: the narthex, the nave, and the sanctuary.

- The narthex is the entrance area. Centuries ago this area was the place where catechumens (unbaptized learners) and penitents remained during parts of the services. In many Orthodox parishes, the narthex is the area where the faithful make an offering, receive a candle, and offer a personal prayer before joining the congregation.
- The nave is the large center area of the church. Here the faithful gather for worship. Our parish follows the ancient tradition of having an open nave with few seats.

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- The sanctuary is considered the most sacred part of the church, and the area reserved for the clergy and their assistants. It contains the Holy Table (or altar) and is separated from the nave by the icon screen, or Iconostasis. This division serves to remind us we often find ourselves separated from God, through sin. However, during the Divine Liturgy, when we have access to the Eucharist, we are reminded that, through Christ, heaven and earth are united and that through Him, we have access to the Father. We enter the Holy of Holies, and the scene becomes one of Heaven on earth. It should be noted that not all services take place within the sanctuary. Many are celebrated in the center of the nave, in the midst of the congregation. In so doing, Orthodoxy emphasizes the fact that the worship of the Church is offered by, and for all the people



<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/diagram-interior-russian-orthodox-church-2008>

What You See

The Holy Table or Altar is the heart and focal point of the Orthodox Church. It is here that Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine are offered to the Father as Christ commanded us to do. The altar, which is usually square in shape, stands away from the wall and is richly adorned. A tabernacle, with reserved Holy Communion for the sick or dying, is set upon the Altar, together with candles. When the Divine Liturgy is not being celebrated, the Book of Gospels rests on the Altar. Behind the Altar is a large cross and icon of Christ's Resurrection.

The Iconostasis is the panel of icons which separates the sanctuary from the nave. The origin of this very distinctive part of an Orthodox church is the ancient custom of placing icons on a low wall before the sanctuary. In time, the icons became fixed on a standing wall, hence the term iconostas.

The Iconostasis has three entrances which are used during services. There is a Deacon Door on either side and the center entrance which is called the Royal Doors or Beautiful Gates. A curtain usually conceals the Altar when services are not being celebrated. On the right-hand side of the Iconostasis are always the icons of Christ and St. John the Baptist. On the left-hand side are always the icons of the Theotokos (Mother of our Lord) and the patron saint or event to which the church is dedicated.

An icon is a holy image which is the distinctive art form of the Orthodox Church. Icons depict such figures as Christ, Mary His Mother, the Saints and Angels. They may also portray events from the Scriptures or the history of the Church, such as Christmas, Easter, etc.

Icons occupy a very prominent place in Orthodox worship and theology. The icon is not simply decorative, inspirational, or educational. The icon is like a window which links heaven and earth. When we worship we do so as part of the Church which includes the living and the departed. We never lose contact with those who are with the Lord in glory. This belief is expressed every time one venerates an icon or places a candle before it.

Etiquette When Visiting an Orthodox Church

As our church is a house of worship of God, we ask that our visitors act respectfully, that is, act in a manner that is not disruptive, vulgar or careless. Please follow these minimal rules while in our church so that the worship experience will be a good one for you and everyone present.

Please feel free to:

Enter the nave and stand in worship with us

Venerate the icons at the times when the priest is not performing any part of the service in the nave

Share our fellowship dinner after the liturgy

After liturgy, question our priest or any of us about the beliefs and customs of the Orthodox Church

During worship:

Please face the sanctuary and altar

Turn off cell phones

When the priest censes the nave, please step aside until he passes

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When there is a procession, please step out of the way

Please refrain from:

Entering the altar area, even if the altar doors are open

Taking communion if you are not Orthodox and have not spoken with our priest about receiving

Loud talking or excessive whispered conversation inside the nave during the services

Cell phone conversations inside the church

Unruly or vulgar behavior and speech

Moving small icons and oil lamps from their shelves

Proper Dress

We also show our respect for God and His house by dressing nicely and within the bounds of common decency. We ask visitors not to appear in clothing that is distracting to worship, vulgar or disrespectful. Many adult women normally wear a head covering when in church. Do not wear see-through clothing or low-cut tops. No shorts are to be worn in church.

Other Things to Know

After someone has received communion, they may bring you a small piece of bread to share. This is not the Eucharist, but is referred to as Prosphora which is blessed bread. You are welcome to accept this piece of bread from them as this is a way that we welcome visitors and share our faith with them.

At the end of the service, we line up to receive a blessing from the priest and receive Prosphora from him. All visitors are welcome to come forward and receive a blessing and Prosphora. During this time the priest will hold a cross in his hand and extend bread to you with his other hand. Receive the bread with open palms and kiss the cross as he presents it to you.

Please know that as you enter the nave that you are entering a serious time of worship. Some people may not be as outgoing as you might expect during services so please do not be offended. The narthex or foyer is a good place for a quick meet and greet before church, but we would prefer that you come downstairs after the service. We typically share a meal and you are welcome to join us for lunch or just a cup of coffee!

God Bless You! See you soon!

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Special thanks to St Basil the Great Orthodox Church in St Louis, MO for the use of much of the information in this guide.

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www.stjohnofkronstadtchurch.org