

## **Holy Sacrament of Marriage**

**The Sacrament** – The marriage service of the Greek Orthodox church is an ancient ceremony that has preserved the rich symbolism of Orthodox worship and the poetic beauty of its ancient prayers. No vows are exchanged between the couple, for the church views matrimony not as a contract, but as a holy union in which Christ is mystically present, blessing and sanctifying the union.

**The Betrothal** – The use of the rings as the symbol of betrothal dates back to ancient times. The exchange of rings signifies that in married life, the weakness of one will be compensated by the strength of the other. By themselves, the newly betrothed are incomplete, but together they are made perfect. The priest blesses the rings by making the sign of the cross with his hands over the couple's heads.

**The Candles** – The wedding service begins immediately following the betrothal service. The bride and groom are handed candles symbolizing their spiritual willingness to receive Christ, who will bless them through the sacrament of Holy matrimony.

**The Crowning** – This is the most important part of the wedding service. The crowns (stefana) are the signs of the glory and honor with which God crowns the couple during the sacrament. The bridal pair is crowned in the name of the Holy Trinity, who will exercise authority over their household.

**The Common Cup** – The reading of the epistle and the gospel follows the rite of the crowning. In remembrance of the blessing of Christ turning water to wine at the wedding of Cana and Galilee, the couple is given wine from a common cup. This cup is a symbol that they must now share everything in life - - sorrow as well as joy – and they are to bear one another's burdens.

**The Dance of Isaiah** – The husband and wife take their first steps as a married couple and their first steps in the church. The priest leads the way as they walk three times around the table that holds the gospel and cross. The circular procession symbolizes that the way of Christian living is a perfect circuit around the center of life, who is Jesus Christ our Lord.

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