

## Basic Traditions of the Orthodox Faithful in the Lord's House

### *Upon Entering the Church*

**W**henever an Orthodox Christian enters the House of the Lord – the Church – he or she makes the Sign of the Cross, venerates the icons in the narthex (vestibule), and lights a candle.

**H**e or she then enters the nave – or sanctuary – and sits, stands, or kneels to pray. If a service is in progress, the faithful join and participate in worshipping God for His greatness, thanking Him for His goodness, and beseeching Him for His abundant mercy.

**S**ometimes the faithful enter the sanctuary and go straight up to the front of the church to light a candle, which is usually placed in one of the two *manouália* (candelabra). They may also bring flowers to place before the icons of the Lord, the Virgin Mary, and the saints.

### *Behavior in Church*

**O**ne of the characteristics of Orthodox worship is its seeming informality. Despite the fact that the services are ancient and liturgical – and therefore very structured in their format – the faithful regard the Orthodox Church and its services with a familial love.

**T**he faithful may arrive at church during a service, and perhaps only remain for a few minutes to light a candle and offer a few prayers. They may sometimes come and go, especially to take care of small children.

### *When is it Not Appropriate to Enter the Church?*

**D**espite the informal atmosphere of the Orthodox Church, the faithful are very reverent and respectful of sacred things and of one another. When the Holy Gospel is being read, during the sermon, and at the Great Entrance it is appropriate to wait in the narthex, or at the back of the church.

### *Standing, Sitting, and kneeling During the Services*

**T**he Orthodox faithful stand to worship. This is the normal posture before God when praying to Him, worshipping Him, and thanking Him.

**T**he faithful may sit during the readings from the Old Testament and the Epistles, as well as during the sermon. Traditionally there have not been pews in Orthodox churches, although seats or benches were provided at the sides for the elderly or those needing to sit.

**T**he Orthodox faithful kneel during the invocation of the Holy Spirit over the Gifts of bread and wine, when the priest prays that these be changed into the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This posture reflects deep reverence and most profound awe at the mystery taking place upon the Holy Altar.

### *The Sign of the Cross*

**T**he Sign of the Cross is the most common liturgical and prayer gesture of an Orthodox Christian. Our Lord died for our sins upon the Cross, destroying death by His own death, and thereby granting us eternal life.

**T**he faithful wear a cross around their neck in remembrance of this saving act. They also make the Sign of the Cross as a brief prayer whenever hearing joyful news, sad news, passing by the church, etc. They also make the Sign of the Cross whenever the name of the Holy Trinity is mentioned in prayer: “The Father the Son and the Holy Spirit.”