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emony has two parts: Betrothal and Crowning. The Betrothal is an agreement or promise to marry, which is symbolized by the exchange of rings. In ancient times it was a separate service. Today it directly precedes the Crowning in the Marriage ceremony. The rubric books (service instructions) say that the exchange of rings is to take place in the Narthex.

After the betrothal the priest leads the couple in procession into the Nave while chanting Psalm 128: "Blessed are they who walk in the way of the Lord." This begins the actual Sacrament of Marriage (Crowning). The crown is a sign of the glory and honor that God bestows on the couple. This is a blessing and confirmation by God of an earthly pledge, not a verification of a legal agreement.

The adoption of non-Orthodox customs into the Marriage ceremony raises the larger question: How much of American religious tradition, can be absorbed into Orthodox liturgical worship? This is a very difficult and controversial issue. The church in its history has adopted and blessed many cultural traditions, such as the date of Christmas, numerology, Greek philosophy, iconography, and in modern times in America, fellowship, Sunday school, and pews.

The Orthodox Church is about Faith and Truth. If a custom, tradition, or practice does not deter but actually enhances the Gospel and evangelism, then it is permitted. The decision to do this, however, must be made by our Diocesan Bishop, who is the teacher who is "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). ("Dividing" in this case means

# Pictures from the Convention



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# Christmas in Greece

<http://www.santas.net/greekchristmas.htm>

**St. Nicholas** is important in Greece as the patron saint of sailors. According to Greek tradition, his clothes are drenched with brine, his beard drips with seawater, and his face is covered with perspiration because he has been working hard against the waves to reach sinking ships and rescue them from the angry sea. Greek ships never leave port without some sort of St. Nicholas icon on board.

On Christmas Eve small boys to the beating of drums and the tinkling of triangles usually sing carols. They go from house to house and are given dried figs, almonds, walnuts and lots of sweets or sometimes small gifts.

After 40 days of fasting, the Christmas feast is looked forward to with great anticipation by adults and children alike. Pigs are slaughtered and on almost every table are loaves of **christopsomo** or “**Christ Bread**”. This bread is made in large sweet loaves of various shapes and the crusts are engraved and decorated in some way that reflects the family’s profession.

Christmas trees are not commonly used in Greece. In almost every home the main symbol of the season is a shallow wooden bowl with a piece of wire is suspended across the rim; from that hangs a sprig of basil wrapped around a wooden cross. A small amount of water is kept in the bowl to keep the basil alive and fresh. Once a day, a family member, usually the mother, dips the cross and basil into some holy water and uses it to sprinkle water in each room of the house. This ritual is believed to keep the **Killantzaroi** away from the house.

There is a tradition **kallikantzeri**, where the mischievous goblins appear from the earth during the 12 days of Christmas.

At Christmas very few presents are given to each other. Instead, small gifts are given to hospitals and orphanages.

Priests sometimes go from house to house sprinkling holy water around to get rid of the bad spirits who may be hiding in people’s houses.

In most Greek homes an evergreen tree is decorated with tinsel and a star placed on top. Gifts are exchanged on January 1st, **St Basil’s Day**.

On Christmas Eve, groups of people gather around the holiday table. Figs, dried on rooftops are served with the spicy golden **Chrisopsomo** bread.

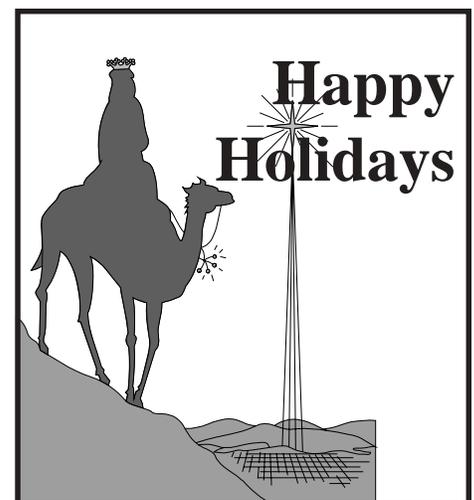
As people are they greet one another by saying **Hronia polla** or many happy years. The table filled with food may include such dishes as **kourambiethes**, a Greek nut cookie.

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expounding the truth).

On occasion our Bishop does make concessions for the good of the couple and family. For example, Saturday weddings are not permitted according to the canons. The Sabbath day in Church tradition is dedicated to the departed. It is the day of rest, mourning, and preparation for Sunday. Saturday is the day of the Old Covenant, which prepared Israel for the coming of Christ. Weddings are joyful celebrations and one of the sacraments of the Kingdom.

In American society weddings generally take place on Saturday. In addition, sometimes one of the marriage partners is non-Orthodox. Thus, the bishop will allow a Saturday wedding with his personal dispensation, providing that the wedding begins in the early afternoon. Then the wedding will not conflict with Vespers which is the Sabbath day service. As the Orthodox Church begins to evangelize America, it will become more and more important to, as St. Paul said, remain firm in the traditions which have been handed down (2 Thessalonians 2:15). The only way to do this is to raise questions about non-Orthodox practices so that the Holy Spirit will guide us to all Truth (John 16:13).



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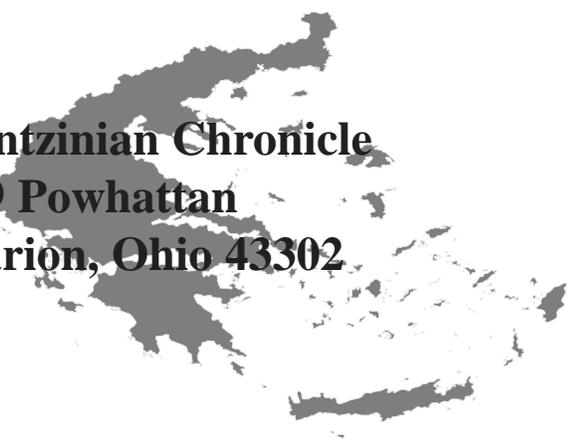
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