

# The Three Blessed Oils

## Used in the Early Christian Churches, East and West

*Intended for Printing with The Holy Week Rites*

Olive oil is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments on numerous occasions. Besides its benefits as both a food and a cooking oil, it was valued for its soothing and soaking properties, such as in salves for bruises and as the binder for perfumes and medicines. It became the sign of having the power of God being poured upon a prophet or a king (Samuel anointing David to be King over Israel), as well as the power of God entering into the body of a sick person (Epistle of James).

The early Christians used blessed olive oil for three different purposes. Oil was blessed by a bishop to be used for the expulsion of evil, for the healing of the sick, and for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. The **Oil of Exorcism** was used to expel the Devil or his minions in someone who was possessed or oppressed and in need of release from spiritual bondage. It was also used for those who were preparing to be baptized (Catechumens) to both keep them safe from the wiles of the Devil and just before they were baptized to ensure that they totally belonged to Christ. In the ancient baptismal liturgy the bishop asks the candidates to renounce the Devil and all his works and then were anointed with the Oil of Exorcism before they entered the baptismal pool. This is why this same oil is also known as the **Oil of Catechumens**.

The oil blessed by a bishop for the purposes of physical healing was called the **Oil of Unction** (Healing). Its original purpose was lost in the later medieval Church when it came to be seen as a preparation for death in what were called the Last Rites. Its misuse at the time of the Reformation was the reason that the Reformers eliminated it as a “superstition.”

The bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon an individual for their empowerment for ministry within the Church was the foundational reason for the **Oil of Chrism**. The bishop blessed this oil for those who had been baptized to represent that God now bestowed upon them the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was also used in the ordination rites for presbyters and bishops, to empower them with the spiritual gifts appropriate to their functions in the Church.