

My story is not complicated. I came to the Orthodox Church for love. I stay for love. I grew up a generic evangelical protestant, raised by faithful parents and grandparents. As a child church was a family affair; my paternal grandfather was the pastor, my father led the singing, my mother played the piano, and my maternal grandparents taught Sunday school. It is from these people, their example, the old hymns and revival tunes we sang, and the Bible stories I memorized that I inherited the seeds of Christian life. As I grew older however, I began to wonder: Why did we worship the way we worshipped? What connected us to previous generations of Christians? To whom were we accountable to for what we taught and practiced, and why? These and other questions rattled around in my head, but, this being the era before Wikipedia made research so easy, they remained largely unanswered for a long time. Despite my questions and misgivings, I remained active in protestant churches throughout most of my college years and into early adulthood. I served in Churches as a musician and worship/youth leader. However, as time went on my questions became more persistent and diminished my desire to continue participating. About the time I stepped down from the last position I ever held in a protestant church and wondered what was next, I began courting a girl named Sunny who was a catechumen in the Orthodox Church. I fell in love with Sunny very quickly, and since I was not obligated elsewhere she invited me to come and worship with her. I agreed to try it out; mostly because I didn't want church attendance to complicate our relationship. At first I didn't understand anything. Sunny was attending the local Greek Orthodox Church and in addition to the unfamiliarity of the various movements and rituals of a liturgical service was added the complication that about 50% of it was in Greek. All I could appreciate at first was the reverence of the service and the sense of holiness which came through almost palpably in the way the priest served. I began to meet with the priest, a faithful man, and over a period of months I began to understand more of what was going on. But the increased intelligibility merely put my mind at ease. It wasn't really what brought me in to the Church. How did that happen? I don't know exactly how it happened, but I do remember *when* it happened. I was standing in Church one morning and, unexpectedly, my heart jumped in sort of the same way does when you see someone you love after a long absence. I was surprised. All those weeks while I was standing in the nave like a dullard God had been doing something through the hymns and prayers of the services of which I was unaware. Where before there had been nothing, now there was real devotion. At that moment I knew I loved the Church. That love has remained across the intervening years even though the shiny has rubbed off, or, perhaps I should say, human frailty, my own most of all, has sometimes obscured the Church's beauty. In spite of this, I am undeterred. I love the Church and serving Her is the greatest privilege of my very privileged life. For me Orthodoxy is at its root an experience of God which is cultivated and articulated through the worship and teaching of the Church. I came for love of a girl. I stay for love of the Church. I am blessed by the grace of God to be able to say without hesitation or equivocation that I have seen the True Light; I have received the Heavenly Spirit; I have found the True Faith; worshipping the Undivided Trinity, Who has saved me. Glory to God!