

How I became an Orthodox Christian Testimonial of Christopher Cavalier

The story of how I become an Orthodox Christian is complicated. There were many factors that influenced my path. I will try to keep things simple and focus on what led me to the Russian Orthodox Church and why I became a member.

I read a testimonial of a Greek Orthodox Christian who talked about how he believed God used his interest in learning about the Greek language and culture to lead him to the Orthodox Church. I believe God did something similar with me. Only with me, God used Russia.

It was 2019 and a very confusing and stressful time for me. The plans I had for my life had not worked out. People from my past had lied to me and used me for their own purpose. I had just lost a relationship with a woman I had grown to love. Additional problems had also arisen which added to my feelings of hopelessness. I had no sense of direction in life and my sense of purpose was gone.

A couple years earlier, the last time I was in such a dark place, I had made some Russian friends. They showed me kindness, understanding, and helped me when they could. They never asked for anything or tried to take advantage of me. Just being able to talk with them helped take my mind off my troubles. I really enjoyed learning from them about their country and culture. They became my support system during that dark time and gave me a sense of peace and happiness.

I missed the happiness and connection I had when I was with them. Needing a reason to live, I decided I would commit to learning Russian and create a network of people who would be my "Russian Family". I even prayed to God at night asking Him to help me achieve my goal.

After months of studying and making new friends in the US and Russia, my aunt recommended I go to a Russian Orthodox Church that she knew of. The church my aunt recommended was a bit far from where I was living. But I still liked the idea of



going to a Russian Church to meet people. I checked online and found one that was a bit closer and appeared to be more popular based on its reviews. The church was St. Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox Cathedral.

I went there on a day when they were having a party after the service. I stayed in the back of the church and just observed what was happening. The church was absolutely beautiful and I couldn't stop looking at everything around me. When the service was over I went with everyone to where they were having the party. I was a little concerned when I heard everyone just speaking Russian. I was okay at speaking, but not good enough to have a conversation. Luckily I heard a woman speaking English who then introduced me to a man that helped me find a table at the party. I had a great time there and returned to the church a few more times.

Then in 2020 when COVID 19 came, the church had to temporarily close. While working as a security officer at a hospital I met a Russian woman named Elena who also worked there. After introducing myself and talking a bit, I told her how just before the pandemic I had been going to a Russian church. I showed Elena some pictures of it on my phone and she told me that she attended that church. She then told me that if I came back to the church after it opened again she would introduce me to the people there.

When the church opened back up I took Elena up on her offer. I met her there and she introduced me to everyone she knew. Now instead of feeling like an outsider visiting I became a known person. I was then asked if I would be interested in joining and becoming a member. Instead of immediately declining like I normally did when asked to join a church, I decided to do my own research to learn more about Orthodox Christianity.

Despite being a Christian my whole life and attending church, I had never officially joined one. My parents had taken my siblings and me to different Protestant Churches while we were growing up. My parents themselves grew up with the Catholic Church. On a few occasions I had also attended the Catholic Church. But I never felt a special connection with either of those choices and so never officially joined.

I never could connect with the Protestant Churches because they seemed to be more focused on the entertainment of their followers than the actual worship of God. There were many times at Protestant Churches where I would be watching somebody put on some kind performance, like singing, for everyone and I would be sitting in the crowd thinking "I did not come to church to watch you have your American Idol moment". I also didn't like that Protestant Churches had so many different denominations which seemed to not only disagree, but at times be hostile with one another.

As for the Catholic Church they were always out of the question for joining. I didn't like the idea of one person like a Pope ruling over all Catholic Churches. I didn't agree with some of their rules, such as Priests can't be married. I also didn't agree with the idea of purgatory. I especially didn't like the scandals the Catholic Church itself had been involved in. Lastly, they seemed to be more focused on judging and punishing their followers for their sins instead of trying to help them heal.

If I were to summarize the differences between the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches and how they operate it would be this:

Protestant Churches are Concerts.

Catholic Churches are Courtrooms.

Orthodox Churches are Hospitals.

After doing my own research on the Orthodox Church and learning about its beliefs and history, I felt that it was the church for me.

The first thing that I liked about the Orthodox Church was its wealth of knowledge about the history of Christianity and the Church itself. For example, I never knew about the great schism and how the Catholic Church split from the Orthodox Church long before Martin Luther brought about the Protestant Reformation. I also liked the unity between all the Orthodox Churches, which the Protestant Churches failed to achieve. Lastly, I love the focus the Orthodox Church has on prayer in order to have communion with God. The Orthodox Church is filled with teachings and lessons on how to strengthen your relationship with the Lord.

In September 2020 I became an official member of the Russian Orthodox Church. After being recognized as a new member in front of everyone by Father Serge, I was told to think of everyone in the church as a family member. I now had my Russian family and Elena became my Godmother.

I've heard Father Serge refer to our church as an ark. That's how I've always thought of the Russian Orthodox Church ever since I joined it. It is a Russian ark that keeps us all together and gives us shelter from the storm and chaos of this world.