

## The Sign of the Cross

We do not have any worship texts written by the Christians of the apostolic age. Therefore, we cannot resolve the issue whether the sign of the cross was used in the primitive Church unequivocally. Absence of definitive knowledge does not mean that we must deny the possibility for the sign of the cross to appear in the earliest Christian communities. Some researchers unambiguously state: **“The custom of making the sign of the cross begins in the Apostolic times”** (*The Comprehensive Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia*. Saint Petersburg, published by P.P. Soykin, year n/a, p. 1485). As early as Tertullian’s time, the sign of the cross has already become an established tradition among Christians. Tertullian writes in his treatise *De Corona* (ca. 211 A.D.) that we guard our forehead with the sign of the cross in all circumstances of our daily lives: when we enter a house or leave it, when we put on our clothes, when we kindle lights, when we go to bed or begin to do something.

The sign of the cross isn’t just a part of a religious ritual. First of all, it is a mighty weapon. There are many examples in the collections of sayings by the Holy Fathers and the lives of the saints of the real spiritual power that the image of the Cross possesses.

The sign of the cross was used since the beginning of Christianity. Saint John of Damascus writes, referring to the cross, **“It is given unto us as a sign, similar to the circumcision of the Israel.”** (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book 4, Chapter XI). God bequeathed to us the circumcision through Abraham (Genesis 17:10) and apparently the sign of the cross through the apostles.

### How to make the Orthodox Sign of the Cross



The motion is performed by joining the first three fingers, to symbolize the *Holy Trinity* and putting the two other fingers in the palm to symbolize the *two natures of Christ*, then touching one's forehead, below the chest, left side, then right side. Some finish with the open hand on the chest while bowing the head.

Old Rite Orthodox (also referred to as *Old Believers*) form the fingers differently as shown to the right.



