



The morning of Maundy Thursday is often the time of Holy Week chosen for the Blessing of Oils that will be used throughout the coming year. Clergy and others gather with their bishop at the cathedral for the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the Blessing of Oils which will be distributed to each parish representative near the end of the service. This service is sometimes referred to as the "Chrism Eucharist" since chrism is the name given to the olive oil mixed with balsam essence that is used for baptisms. The essence gives the oil a rich, dark colour. Oil for the Sick is also consecrated by the bishop during this service. There is no essence added to this oil and so it retains its typical golden hue.

The ceremonial use of olive oil began thousands of years ago for, among other uses, the anointing of monarchs and priests. Thus, early baptismal rituals (from the time of Jesus' resurrection) in Syria and Egypt anointed the head of the person about to be baptized as a symbol of his or her entry into the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Just as in the story of David, who was anointed king by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13), the Spirit of the Lord is believed to descend upon the anointed one. This anointing of the head is a reflection of the moment when, after Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on his head in the form of a dove and revealed him as the Messiah-King. Before long, in many places, a whole body anointing was added to the baptismal ceremony. This anointing was for the purpose of protection and healing and therefore was preceded by prayers sanctifying the oil and investing it with the power of healing.

By the second half of the fourth century, a whole body anointing before the immersions in water had become standard throughout the Church. Most regions followed the immersions in water with an anointing of the head as well. Today, in comparison, we use a very modest amount of oil to trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized. However, liturgical scholars and specialists consider it best practice to lavishly anoint the person by pouring oil over the head or by pouring it into the hand of the Presider who then smears it onto the person's forehead and face, following this with the sign of the cross.

The Oil for the Sick is used with prayer and the laying on of hands for the healing of body, mind, and soul. For more information, see p.551-2 of the [Canadian Book of Alternative Services](#).