

28 THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

It can be as light as air, yet as hard as rock. Two-thirds of your entire body and three-fourths of your brain are made up of it. A trillion tons of it disappear into the air each day. Yet 75 percent of the earth is covered by it. You can't go a week without it. But too much of it can kill you.

What is it? It's water. Water makes life possible. When scientists search for life on other planets, they look for signs of water. Water makes all things grow. We live and breathe in water before we're born. After that we enjoy it when we swim, surf, soak, or sail.

Water also kills. Hurricanes and floods have destroyed entire cities. Overwatering kills plants. Drinking too much water can be fatal. People die each day from drowning. Water gives life. It also destroys life.

The waters in the Sacrament of Baptism are like that. They give us new lives. And they end our old ones. Let's look at how Baptism does this.

KEY WORDS

Original Sin
Baptism
catechumenate

The Birth of a Catholic

In the Sacrament of Baptism, new Christians are born. In Baptism, we leave our old lives behind in those waters. We are born into new lives in Christ. We become like Christ, who died on the cross. Like Christ, we are resurrected to a completely new and eternal life.

By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life. (Romans 6:4)

People don't literally die when they are baptized. So what does it mean to die and rise again in Baptism? Think about it as follows.

Have you ever thought you were really going to die? Maybe you had an awful plane ride that left you wondering if you would land safely. Many people who have near-death experiences come away from them wanting to live their lives differently. They feel as though they get a second chance at life, and they don't want to miss a second of it.

Life without Baptism may be thought of as a life lived sort of half awake. We're



What do these symbols say about what it means to be Christian?

PRAY IT!

God of Heaven and earth,
You made the waters
and filled the seas
with life.

Shower your mercy
upon me
and wash me clean
of my faults.

Refresh my spirit and
fill my thirst
that I might live each day as
your child, dead to sin
and alive for you alone.

Amen

Did You Know?

Emergency Baptism

The Church can baptize someone immediately if the person is in danger of death. Any person can baptize someone in danger of dying if no priest or deacon is available as long as that person has the intention of doing so and pours water on the person's head, while saying "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

not equipped to see all the ways God is present in our lives. But in Baptism, we are awakened. We start new lives, and we clothe ourselves with Christ. We see the world the way Christ saw it, as filled with the Father's goodness. We are able to live as Christ did by loving others. In Baptism we become sons and daughters of the Father and brothers and sisters of Christ. Like Christ, we begin to see ourselves as filled with the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, we become part of the Body of Christ, the Church, and we share in Christ's priesthood. That means we are people who, through Christ, know the Father and help others know him too.

Baptism enables us fully to become the people God created us to be. It frees us from sin and makes union with God, or salvation, possible for us. We need the Church for salvation, because it is the Church, through Christ, that baptizes.

Watermark

Water also cleans. We bathe and shower in it. We wash dishes with it. Rain cleans the air and makes everything fresh.

Baptism also washes us clean. The waters of Baptism wash away sin. It is the first sacrament we receive and the first way our sins are forgiven. Most important, it washes away **Original Sin**, the sin every human being inherits from Adam and Eve. Humans are imperfect, because to be human is to not be God. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, proved that, even when everything else is perfect, we can still make mistakes and bad choices. But Baptism removes the stain of Adam and Eve's sin from our human natures and gives us a second chance.

The waters of Baptism change our natures so completely that it leaves a new kind of mark on our souls. It leaves a permanent spiritual sign on our human natures. This sign consecrates us. That means it makes us holy. It changes us forever into adopted children of God. It sets us apart to worship him. The mark that Baptism makes on us is permanent and can never be removed. This is why Baptism cannot be repeated.

"No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:5)

Did You Know?

Infants and Baptism

From the earliest times, the Church has baptized infants in the faith of the Church with the hope that one day they will make the faith of the Church their own. God's love is a pure gift to us, which means we don't need to do anything to earn it. This is why we don't wait to baptize until people are older. Nothing we could do at any age makes us any more deserving of God's love than we already are at birth. By baptizing babies we show our trust in God's goodness even when we don't deserve it or ask for it. As members of God's family, they will learn to love and respond to God. God will love them as his own forever.

Styles of baptismal fonts vary. What type do you have at your parish?

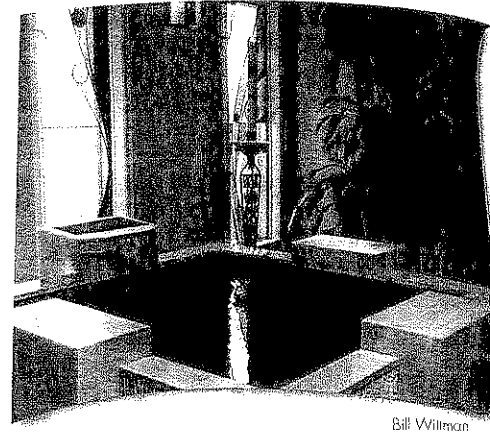


PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

Jesus was baptized in a river. Today, we use baptismal fonts. Some of the early fonts were round to imitate the shape of a womb. This showed that Baptism is like rebirth. Others were rectangular like a tomb or shaped as a cross to show our death to sin. Still others were octagonal. The number 8 has important symbolic meaning for Christians.

Our seven-day week reflects the Bible's account of seven days of Creation. Referring to an eighth day is a way of saying something is really new in creation. That new, wonderful thing is Christ's Resurrection. Fonts with eight sides symbolize this. How does your parish font look?



Bill Willman

Rite of Baptism

Ever since her beginning, the Church has been celebrating Baptism. The way the sacrament has been celebrated has changed throughout the centuries. But the primary action in the rite of Baptism has stayed the same. We immerse a person in water or pour water over his or her head, while we call upon the name of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The process for initiating a person in the Catholic Church varies according to age. Infants and young children celebrate the Rite of Baptism for Children. They are baptized and anointed with Chrism. When they get older, they will celebrate the Sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation, typically in that order. Adults and older children go through a similar process,

the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The candidates are baptized, confirmed, and given the Eucharist all at the same liturgy.

In both ways of initiation, **Baptism** is the first step to becoming united with Christ through the Church. It is the beginning of a Christian's life. Confirmation strengthens people for their new lives. The Eucharist unites them in Christ and nourishes them for their new lives in him with his

Body and Blood. Christian initiation is accomplished through these three sacraments, whether celebrated in one liturgy or several liturgies spread out over many years.

For adults, many rituals are celebrated over a long period of time leading up to their Baptisms. Their preparation is called the **catechumenate**. It is how an adult learns the Christian way of life.

Did You Know?

Baptism Without Water

Although water and the Trinitarian formula ("I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit") are essential for Baptism, God doesn't need them. If you lived an extraordinary life of faith but didn't get to be baptized, God's love could still save you. This is because the way you lived proved that God was already a huge part of your life. It showed that God had anointed you in a special way. Unbaptized people who die for the faith, adults who have begun the process for becoming baptized, and those who seek God and strive to live out values consistent with the principles that Jesus taught can be saved if they sincerely desire to know God in their lives and try to live as God would have them live.

God wants all to be saved. His love can find a way to save us even without Baptism. Therefore, when a baby dies before being baptized, or an older person dies without knowing Christ or the Gospel, we pray for their salvation and trust in God's mercy. We also trust that God's plan of salvation includes people from other religions.



Think About It!

How many different ways can you name to show how water gives life? How do you think these life-giving uses for water are related to the Church's understanding of Baptism? Are there any ways that water kills or destroys? How do you think these deadly images for water are also related to Baptism?

After Baptism, a baby learns how to be a Christian from his or her parents, godparents, and other Christians. Infants don't go through a catechumenate like adults. But their parents and godparents do spend time preparing themselves so they can be good teachers for their children as they grow.

You were probably baptized as a baby. So let's look at some of the symbols from the Rite of Baptism for Children.

Meeting at the Threshold

Stand in a doorway. It's a bit uncomfortable because it's an in-between space. You're in neither one room nor the other.

The time of your life that you're in right now might feel a little like a doorway. You're not really a child. You're not an adult either. Sometimes it might be hard to know where you fit in. Doorways are also powerful places, because they are how you move to a new space. They let you out when you feel confined. They bring you in when you feel left out.

An unbaptized person is spiritually outside the Church. But Jesus called himself the Door. Through him, we enter his family and find where we belong (see John 10:7-9). This is why the Baptism ritual begins with the celebrant going to where the parents, godparents, and child are and greeting them. This may be at the Church entrance or in specially designated seats.



The priest or deacon comes to greet a family seeking Baptism for their child. Baptism is like a door that opens to all other sacraments of the Church.

Giving Your Name

It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. (Galatians 2:20)

After being welcomed by the celebrant, the baby's parents announce to the assembly their baby's name. They also ask the Church to baptize their baby. The priest or deacon asks the parents whether they understand the responsibility that comes with their request. Baptizing their baby means they promise to bring up their baby to love Christ. They will need to teach their child what it means to follow Christ.

The parents aren't the only ones with a big responsibility. All those gathered for the Baptism are asked whether they will help the parents bring up the child in the Christian faith. If you're at a Baptism, you also share in this responsibility.

Marked with the Cross

When we enter the Church, we make the Sign of the Cross on ourselves. We do the same for those

Many people do not realize that each time they make the Sign of the Cross, the action expresses their Christian identity.



Bill Witman

who are about to be baptized. The priest or deacon and the baby's parents and godparents make the Sign of the Cross on the baby's forehead. This shows that the baby now belongs to Christ.

FUN FACT

When people rejected Satan in the early Church, they meant it. Before Baptism, they faced the west, where the sun sets. When asked if they rejected Satan, they spat in that direction, as if they were spitting into the devil's face! Then they turned toward the east, where the sun rises, and professed their faith in God.

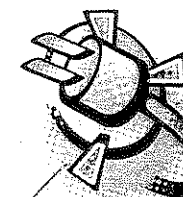
Rejecting Satan and Accepting Christ

Part of belonging to Christ means rejecting anything that isn't Christ. Just before the baby is baptized, he or she has to publicly reject Satan and accept Christ.

"Now wait a minute," you're thinking. "Babies can't talk." That's why the priest or deacon asks the parents and godparents to renew their own baptismal promises or vows, when they first rejected Satan and accepted Christ. These are the promises they will teach their child. He asks them: "Do you reject Satan, all his works, and all his empty promises?" Then he asks: "Do you believe in God the Father? in Jesus Christ? in the Holy Spirit and the holy catholic Church?"

Baptized in the Name of the Trinity

The baby is baptized in the baptismal font. The infant may be immersed in the baptismal water three times, or the minister may pour water over the baby's head three times. As he does this, he says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The words of this Trinitarian formula cannot be changed.



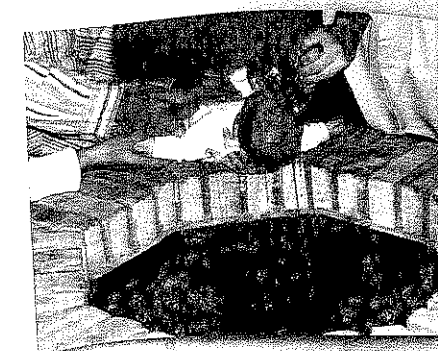
LIVE IT!

Easter is so special that we even have to wait for the heavens to be just right. It happens once a year on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the first day of spring. The Easter Vigil is a special Mass that is the start of Easter. It begins after sunset when it's dark on the night before Easter Sunday. This is the night when the Church baptizes adults.

This is one liturgy you don't want to miss. Find the date for the next Easter Vigil and plan now to participate.

Anointed with Chrism

The title *Christ* means "anointed." Therefore, in the next part of the rite, the baby's head is anointed with Chrism (See chapter 29 for more about Chrism.) This anointing shows that the baby is now part of Christ and has a new name, "Christian."



You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed . . . with the life of Christ himself. (Galatians 3:27)

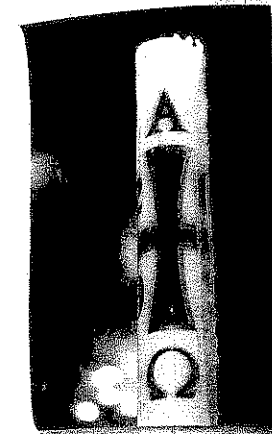
If you were baptized when you were too young to remember, ask your family to share their memories of the celebration with you.

Clothed in Christ

With all this water, the baby can get pretty wet. The baby, therefore, is given a white garment to wear. The practical act of changing the baby's clothes also takes on special meaning. This garment's color—white—symbolizes the purity of a new Christian life. Even when a baby is not baptized by immersion and doesn't get wet enough for a change of clothes, the baby is clothed in white to symbolize new life in Christ.

Christ, Our Light

The newly baptized baby is now a child of the light. He or she receives a candle lit from the Paschal candle. The baby can't hold the candle, of course. Instead, the candle is given to the baby's parents or godparents. The priest or deacon asks them to keep the flame of faith alive for the baby until the baby meets Christ in Heaven.



Flame from the Paschal candle is passed to the families of the newly baptized along with a challenge: keep the flame of faith alive.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Saint Elizabeth



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Most everything we know about Saint Elizabeth comes from the beginning of Luke's Gospel. In it, Elizabeth is married to Zechariah, a priest of the Temple in Jerusalem. She is also the cousin of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

One day as Zechariah is in the Temple, the angel Gabriel appears to him and says Elizabeth will have a son. Their child will grow up to become John the Baptist.

Elizabeth is old, so Zechariah doesn't believe Gabriel. As punishment, Gabriel takes away his voice. Sure enough, Elizabeth becomes pregnant, and poor Zechariah is mute the whole time. After John's birth, Zechariah gets his voice back.

Elizabeth is best known for being the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah even before his birth. While they were both pregnant, Mary visited Elizabeth, and John leapt in Elizabeth's womb when Mary arrived. Elizabeth announced that Mary and her unborn child were blessed. She also called Mary blessed for having believed God's promise. Elizabeth's proclamation has become part of the Hail Mary.

Elizabeth's name means "God is faithful." Her feast day is November 5.