

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Baptism is our entry into the body of Christ and family of God.
- Through baptism, we die to sin and rise to new life in Christ.
- Signs of the rite include water, oil, a white garment, and a lighted candle.



- How would your life change if you died to sin and lived for Christ.



Baptized Into the Body of Christ

For Christians, community has always been an essential part of life. Christ is at the center, and the community is built around him. Baptism is the way we enter that community and become members of the body of Christ, the Church. Once baptized, we share in the privileges and life of this community of believers.

Many people think of baptism as a private family affair, but being baptized connects us in a deep and eternal way with a much larger family: the family of God.

Heirs of God's Kingdom

Baptism is the sign of salvation given to us by Christ to bring us into the kingdom of God (see John 3:5). A person enters "into Christ" (Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27) at the time of baptism, and the gift of the Spirit is given at that time.

"We are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."

Romans 8:16–18

As adopted sons and daughters of God, Christians share in Jesus' own relationship with his Father—a relationship so intimate that they, like Jesus, can freely and with every confidence address the Lord of heaven as "Father."

The Sacrament of Baptism

The word baptism means "plunging." At our **baptism** we plunge into the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus called his death and resurrection a baptism: "There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50).

This is the double action of our redemption: Christ *going down into the grave* for our sins and *rising again*, glorious, triumphant, immortal. Through baptism, Christians are united with his saving death and life-giving resurrection.

Saint Paul emphasizes that baptism is the beginning of a vital union with the risen Lord. The old sinful self passes away to be born anew and conformed to Christ.

Read the following passages and reflect on what they say about being buried with Christ, dying to sin, and rising to new life in Christ:

Romans 6:4
Romans 6:9–11

Romans 6:6–7

- As a child and heir of God, what riches will you inherit through baptism?
- What responsibilities come with those riches?



Does a Protestant Have to Be Rebaptized in the Catholic Church?

The short answer is no. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* explains, "Baptism is a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been signed by it. Because of that unchangeable effect,...the rite of baptism is held in highest honor by all Christians. Once it has been validly celebrated, even if by Christians with whom we are not in full communion, it may never lawfully be repeated" (*The Rites, Volume One, General Introduction, [RCIA], 4*). Protestants wishing to join the Catholic Church are only rebaptized if there's significant doubt that they were baptized.

Baptism confers the character of Christ, making it permanent and irrevocable. As St. Paul wrote, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:1–6).

What Happens to People Who Aren't Baptized?

Catholics believe that God's mercy can supply for the lack of baptism in a way that hasn't been revealed. Catholics believe that children who aren't baptized are entrusted to the infinitely kind and powerful love of God who wants all his children to be with him in heaven. Some people once held the theory that infants who die without baptism were excluded from heaven but spent eternity in a state of natural happiness called *limbo*. This theory has never been explicitly taught by the Church.

Catholics also believe in:

- "baptism of blood" (suffering death for the Christian faith before baptism)
- "baptism of desire" (those who "through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience," (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 16).

What Happens During the Rite of Baptism?

The sacraments don't just tell us about something. They make the event happen. They are signs that work—that have effect. The sign accomplishes what it signifies.

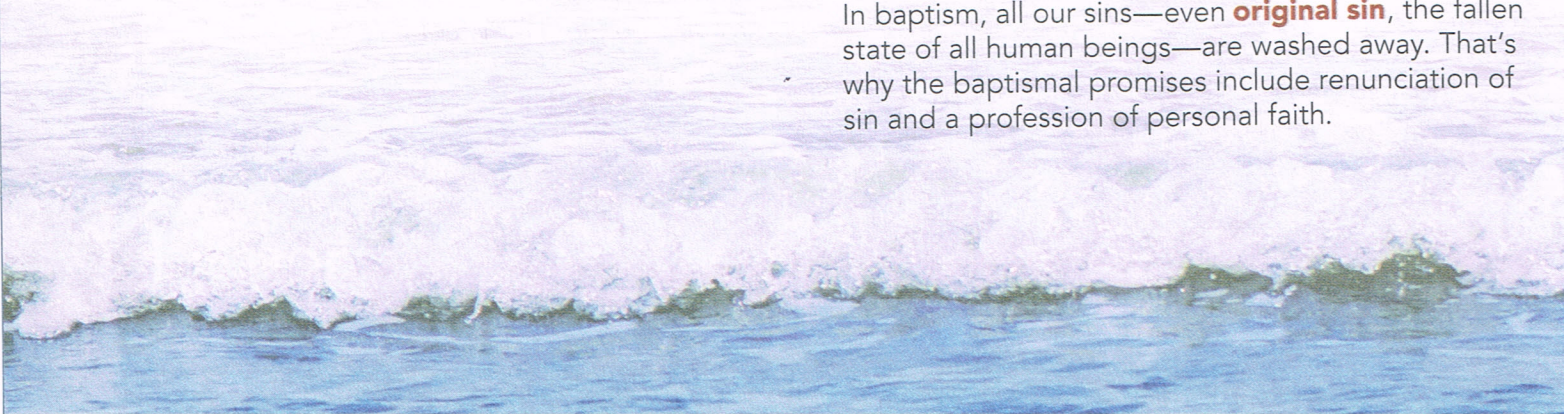
In baptism, the essential sign is the pouring of water three times on the person's head or the immersion of the candidate in water three times accompanied by the words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Why Water?

We know the importance of water for *life*. We know, too, that a person can live for weeks without food but only a few days without water to drink. Water is the main element that makes up living tissue—as much as 99 percent. No wonder our Lord chose water to represent the beginning of the new Christian life.

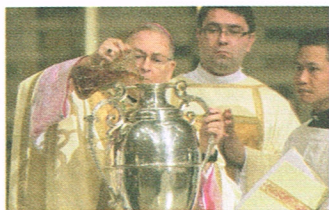
But water can remind us of *death* as well (flooding, drowning). This is another reason why our Lord chose water to represent the end of the old life and the beginning of the new Christian life.

The waters of baptism remind us that Christ has *washed us clean of sin* and reconciled us with God. In baptism, all our sins—even **original sin**, the fallen state of all human beings—are washed away. That's why the baptismal promises include renunciation of sin and a profession of personal faith.



Anointing, White Garment, and Lighted Candle

If baptism is celebrated separate from confirmation, as is the case with infants and young children, the minister anoints the newly baptized with **chrism**, olive oil mixed with balsam and consecrated by the bishop. This anointing is a sign that God has “put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment” (2 Corinthians 1:22). It’s a sign that the baptized person shares in the kingly, prophetic, and priestly mission of Christ.



After the water bath of baptism, the minister presents a white garment and a candle to the newly baptized. The *white garment* symbolizes becoming a new creation and being clothed in Christ: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27).



The candle is lit from the Easter candle, which represents the risen Christ. The *lighted candle* is a reminder that Christ, the light of the world, is their light and that they must “live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).



A Short History of Baptism

Bloody persecutions and heresies (false teachings) threatened new converts, especially those poorly instructed in the faith. The Church established the catechumenate, an extended period of preparation (sometimes lasting three or more years) to make sure candidates were sincere and well-grounded in the faith before baptism.

When Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity in AD 313, large numbers of people entered the Church. To adjust to these numbers, the Church began to drop the long catechumenate.

Until recently, adults interested in joining the Catholic Church received private instruction from a priest. After World War II, the Church in Africa addressed the need for more preparation for its new members by reviving the ancient catechumenate process.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) called for the restoration of the ancient catechumenate process for the whole Church. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* became mandatory in the United States in 1988. RCIA helps prepare those interested in joining the Catholic Church to follow Christ and integrates them into the life of the Church community.

Baptism is “the door to life and to the kingdom of God.”

RCIA, General Introduction, 3

Why Does the Church Baptize Infants?

The New Testament refers to entire households being baptized—and the Greek word for “household” includes everyone from infant to the oldest members of the family (see Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 1:16). By the second century, St. Irenaeus considered it a matter of course that infants and small children, as well as adults, should be baptized. The Church considers Jesus’ invitation to baptism to be an invitation of universal and limitless love, which applies to children as well as to adults.

“To fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized...so that they may ultimately accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized.”

Rite of Baptism for Children, 9

Baptism Is a Beginning

Baptism confers the character of Christ; it gives the baptized person a share in Christ's life and entrance into his faith community. That's why we must be baptized before we can celebrate any other sacraments.

Baptism is the beginning. The person who is plunged into the baptismal font emerges from the waters a "new creation" with a new life. This new life is the Holy Spirit making a home in us and giving us the power to know God and fulfill his plan for our lives.

"Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come."

2 Corinthians 5:17

Reflect on the questions below in your prayer journal:

- What might a new life "in Christ" mean for you?
- If you're already baptized, how are you growing in your life "in Christ"?



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