

faithhelps

By Paulette Burgess
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A Learning Companion to FAITH Magazine

What is baptism?

- The word *baptism* comes from the Greek, *baptizein*, which means “to dip or immerse.”
- Baptism is the first of the sacraments of initiation. While it is the beginning of the Christian life, conversion needs to be ongoing and lifelong.
- It is an *efficacious* sign of grace by which divine life is dispensed to us, and we become adopted children of God. That is, Christ Himself acts in the sacrament to communicate the grace that it signifies.
- How important is baptism? Scripture tells us that Jesus made baptism a condition for entering heaven (Mk 16:16, Jn 3:5), and Strong’s Concordance of the Bible tells us that *baptism* is mentioned 64 times in the New Testament!

Discussion: The symbolism of baptism

The Catholic faith is rich with symbolism. The individual Sacraments are often identified by a symbol: Baptism = water, Eucharist = bread and wine, Matrimony = inter-twined rings, etc.

Let’s look at the items used in baptism and their symbolic purpose:

Water – Cleanses original sin from our soul and allows the blessings of the Holy Spirit to flow within us.

Oil - Anointing with sacred oil gives us admittance to a common priesthood of which Jesus Christ is the High Priest. The Magi presented the newborn King with oil as a symbol of his humanity and death.

White garment – Is put on the newly baptized. It is a sign that the person has been clothed in Christ. St. Paul tells us “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Gal. 3:27

Candle or Flame – We are enlightened by Christ. Our path to Jesus is well lit and the flame of faith is in our hearts. “You are the light of the world.” Mt. 5:14

Lesson: The importance of infant baptism

Many Fundamentalists believe that baptism is only a symbolic washing to signify that a person has accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. We, as Catholics, know that Jesus would not have made baptism a condition for entering heaven if it were only symbolic.

Why do Catholics baptize babies? According to those same Fundamentalists, since an infant cannot accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior (because they do not have the use of reason) baptism is meaningless to them. However, Jesus requires baptism for entering heaven and He makes it clear that children are not to be kept from Him. That infants lack the use of reason does not prevent them from becoming part of the Church through baptism. In the Old Testament a child was brought into the Jewish faith by circumcision eight days after his birth. Just as Old Testament parents made this decision for their children, we too, confirm our beliefs for our children through infant baptism. You will find no Bible passage prohibiting infant baptism.



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Remembering Your Baptism

Discussion for teens:

The Decisions our Parents Make for Us

Let’s talk about this:

Often our parents or other adults make decisions for us.

These decisions may impact our lives, yet they do not even ask us if that is what we want. Think back through your life. What decisions have your parents/adults made for you?

Early years: Chose your religion through baptism • Decided when and where to send you to school. • Determined your bedtime. • Selected your dinner choices and whether or not you would get dessert.

Teen Years: Decides at what age you could date or receive phone calls from the opposite sex. • Sets your curfew time. • Regulates your driving privileges.

Something to think about:

• Do you feel resentful that these decisions are being made (or were made) for you? Why or why not?

• Should parents/adults have made the huge decision to determine your religion for you long before you had any say in it? Why do parents/adults think they should have the right to *control* our lives in such a manner?

• Do you think your parents invade your personal space? Do they have a right to choose who you hang out with, which movies you see or how you spend your money? Does your parent’s authority allow them the right to search through your bedroom or read personal notes left in your pockets?

• If given the choice, would you have chosen the religion you are now? If given the choice would you attend weekly Mass, would you go to a Catholic school, would you attend your church youth group?

• If baptized as an infant, a person must still affirm his or her faith later in life. Have you made a conscious decision to follow and ratify your baptismal promises? Do you recognize daily in your life that you are an adopted child of God?

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Activity: Pray a Mantra

Many eastern religions make use of a *mantra* when praying or meditating. A mantra is a simple, one-line phrase, said repeatedly, to calm our thoughts and keep us focused. Mantras can be just what we need to add depth to our own prayer life.

Since the topic has been baptism, and the symbolism is through water, think of a simple phrase that uses the images of water: **Peace is flowing like a river; Jesus, rain your love down on me; As a deer runs to water so does my soul to God;** etc.

As you begin your morning or nighttime prayers start by reciting or even singing your mantra several times. This will bring an awareness that you are in the presence of God and will clear your mind, making yourself more "prayer ready".

Spiritual Exercise: 4 Scripture Passages to Combat Spiritual Amnesia with a Strong Baptismal Identity



We have just started a new year. As Christians, our new birth into the family of God

begins with baptism. What an awesome gift it is! Through the sacrament of baptism, we are dipped into the saving grace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Original sin and any other sins are washed away and we become children of God. This identity is so important. It forever shapes and characterizes the rest of our lives.

Spiritual fitness requires we know our identity. There have been cases where people have had an accident and have lost the memory of their identity. As tragic as that is, an even greater tragedy occurs when we forget who we are in God. We develop spiritual amnesia.

Spiritual amnesia can take away our Christian joy. We forget we are God's children and feel and act more like orphans or strangers before God. Spiritual amnesia also affects our relations with others. We experience being alone, separated and alienated from those around us.

We need to remember each day who we are in God, because the world is constantly hitting us on the head hoping we will forget our real identity.

Scriptural Mediation:

Dunk yourself in the Sacred Scriptures that focus on the identity we received at our baptism. There is nothing like a good hot bath to cleanse us of dirt and grime, and give warmth to our muscles and bones. We need to take a bath in God's Word. If we allow God's Word in Sacred Scripture to penetrate us, its healing warmth and truth will revive us and wash away the false words and lies that have soiled our souls. We will be refreshed and strengthened by God. God created us and wants nothing more than for us to come to intimately know Him and to have fellowship and communion with the Most Holy Trinity.

The following are Scriptures about our baptismal identity that have truly blessed me. Read and meditate on them and consider how they apply in your life. I have included other passages that you will need to look up as well. As Catholics, we should feel right at home with Sacred Scriptures. It is one of the incredible treasures God has entrusted to us as His children.

1 *"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit itself bears witness with us that 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 8:14-17) Read Paul's letter to the Romans, Chapter 8.

2 *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."* (Galatians 4:4-7)

3 *"For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:26-29)

4 *Other Scripture passages for your reflection: Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 28:16-20; John 3:1-22; Acts Chapters 10-11; 1 Corinthians 12:12 to 13:13; Ephesians Chapter 4; 1 John 2:28 to 3:3; Revelations 5:9-13; Revelations Chapter 7; Revelations 21:5-7.*

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