

# Baptism

## Frequently Asked Questions



### **Why should I have my child baptized?**

Parents have their children baptized for many reasons, including family tradition, the desire to transmit religious and moral values to their child, or an opportunity for family and friends to welcome a new child into the family. All of these are very good reasons for baptism. The primary reason to get your child baptized, however, is to introduce them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and the family of the Church. Baptism introduces a person to the amazing love God has for each one of us. God proved his love by sending his son Jesus into this world to die on the cross and to rise again from the dead to free us from our sins and to empower us to live a new life of faith, hope, and love. Baptism is the normal way that people are introduced to this new life of Jesus Christ. Jesus' last words to his disciples were an invitation to baptism: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

### **Why is baptism necessary?**

All of us are probably aware of the reality of evil and sin in the world and in our own choices. Baptism washes a person free from all their sins by the power of Jesus' death and resurrection. While it is easy to see why an adult would need to be forgiven their sins, it is perhaps harder to understand why an infant would need to be baptized. Even though a small baby is not capable of sinning on their own, our faith teaches us that we are born separated from God because of original sin. The first sin of our first parents Adam and Eve and the personal sins of all human beings have an effect on our world and on all who are born into it. All of us can see within ourselves evidence of our fallen human nature, wounded by sin. We experience in human relationships tendencies to selfishness, greed, lust, anger, and envy. Because of sin, we choose to cut ourselves off from God's love and heaven is closed to us. The ultimate result of sin is death.

### **How is the problem of sin solved?**

Although sin is a reality, it is not the most important or powerful reality of our lives. As St. Paul says, "wherever sin abounds, God's love and grace abound all the more." Jesus, the Son of God, freely chose to take on our human nature and to take on the punishment of sin himself, by dying on the cross, in order to destroy sin and death forever. Through baptism, we share in this mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death. We were indeed buried with him in baptism into

death, so just as Christ was raised by the glory of God the Father, we too might live a new life.” Baptism is the normal way in which a person comes to share in the salvation Jesus won for us.



### **What do Catholics believe baptism does?**

In addition to introducing a person to the mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection and taking away all sins, baptism makes us an adopted son or daughter of God and makes us worthy to live with God forever in heaven. Baptism introduces a person into the life and family of the Church, including the life of the other sacraments. Above all baptism is the start of a relationship with Jesus Christ, who empowers us to live our lives as God created us to live them, to love and to be loved, to know, love, and serve God, and to be happy with him forever in heaven.

### **Why does baptism involve water?**

The word *Baptism* simply means “to wash in water.” Water is a very powerful symbol. Water is necessary for life; without water, a person usually dies within a week. Water is used for cleaning and purifying, it is a symbol of birth (think of a mother’s water breaking) and also of death (think of a deadly Tsunami). The Bible makes use of this powerful symbol of water, for example, in the story of Noah’s Ark, where a flood of water puts an end to sin and makes a new beginning for what is good. The story of the Israelites escaping slavery in Egypt and entering the Promised Land by passing through the water of the Red Sea, looks forward to baptism. Jesus himself was baptized at the beginning of his ministry in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, not because he had any sin, but because he wanted to show us the importance of baptism. When Jesus died on the cross, a soldier pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out, reminding us that baptism brings us the saving effects of the cross. When a person is baptized in water, all of this symbolism is involved. But baptism, like all the sacraments, is more than just a nice symbol. The sacraments, because they are established by Jesus Christ, actually have the power to bring about what they symbolize. For example, baptism actually washes us from sin, actually brings us new birth, actually allows us to share in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### **What else happens at a baptism?**

At the beginning of the service, the parents are asked what name they wish to give their child (give his or her full name) and what they ask of God’s Church for their child (the parents simply respond: “baptism”). After the parents and godparents promise to bring their child up in the practice of the faith, the child is welcomed into the church with the sign of the cross traced on

his or her forehead by the priest, the parents, and the godparents. A Scripture reading and prayers are then read. The water to be used in baptism is blessed, and, right before the actual baptism, the parents and godparents renew the promises they made in their own baptism by rejecting sin and Satan and professing their belief in God and in Jesus Christ (simply respond “I do” to each question). During the baptism, your child will be anointed with oil. This happens once before the actual baptism as a preparation and once immediately after the baptism, when the child is anointed with the sacred chrism (a special mix of oil and perfume). In the Bible, three special kinds of people were anointed with this type of oil: priests, prophets, and kings. Your child is anointed in the same way to signify that, like Jesus, he or she is called to be a priest (to sanctify others and to offer prayers and sacrifices to God), a prophet (to proclaim the truth of God’s love), and a king (to conquer the devil and to bring about God’s kingdom by serving others). Your child will then be given a baptismal candle (the candle is handed to one of the godparents) which is lit from the large Easter candle, which is blessed at Easter each year. This is a sign that your child has been enlightened by Jesus Christ, the light of the world, and shares in the light of his resurrection. At the end of the service, your child is brought on his or her first tour of the church, making stops at the pulpit, the altar, and the statue of Mary.

### **How should our child be dressed for baptism?**

Infants and small children are traditionally dressed in white as a sign that the child has been washed clean of sin. As St. Paul says, a person who has been baptized has been “clothed in Christ and become a new creation.” Some families have special baptismal gowns that are handed down and some clothing stores sell special baptismal attire, but any nice white clothing will do.

### **What about Godparents?**

The Church requires that all children to be baptized have at least one Godparent of either sex. One Godparent of each sex may also be chosen. A godparent serves as an example of faith to inspire the child and promises to help the parents in their responsibility of bringing the child up in the practice of the faith. Because of this, a godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic (baptized and confirmed) and must be living a life in harmony with the role to be undertaken (they should be a regularly practicing Catholic and if married, should have been married in the Church.) A baptized non-Catholic may serve as a Christian witness to baptism along with a qualified Godparent.

### **Is there a fee for baptisms?**

The Church does not charge a fee for baptisms. We believe that it is very important that baptism remain free and available for anyone who asks for it. Many families choose to make a donation to the parish on the occasion of their child’s baptism, and such gifts are thankfully accepted.

### **What happens after the baptism?**

Feel free to take pictures in the church. When you are done at the church, we encourage you to have a party at home with family and friends. The gift of your child and the new life he or she has received in baptism is something to celebrate! After your child has been baptized, his or her

name and baptism information will be inscribed in our parish baptismal record and a certificate will be sent to your home soon after the baptism. Baptism certificates are available upon request at anytime during the life of the child. Certificates may be needed for proof of baptism when the child receives First Communion, is confirmed as a teenager, and at the time of marriage.