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Doing Rite!™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

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Baptism

Baptism

In our Church Year, Lent is a time of immediate preparation for baptism for those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil, and a time for all those already baptized to prepare to renew our baptismal promises at Easter. Easter and Baptism go hand-in-hand. What we celebrate in the Paschal Mystery - the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into Spirit-filled Glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ - we celebrate in a profound way in our own lives as Christians. Think about the Easter Vigil when we hear the wonderful readings from the Hebrew Scriptures recalling salvation history. Then we sing the Gloria, the lights in church are turned on, and we hear that marvelous reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans (Romans 6:3-11). Here Saint Paul tells us that through baptism we died with Christ so that we might rise to new life in him. What do you think this means?

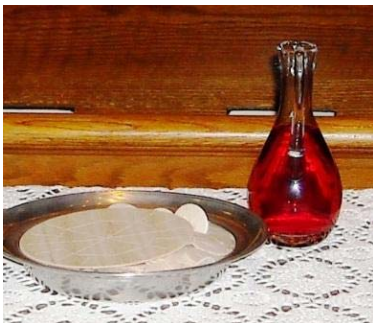


Resurrection (Detail)
14th Century, Macedonian
Iconographer:
Manuel Panselinos
Protaton Church at Karyes,
Mount Athos

In Baptism we are “reborn” - we take on a new life in Christ. Baptism is our birth as Christians. We are initiated into the Body of Christ. We enter the Church. We die to sin and rise to new life. We now live in and for Jesus Christ.

Baptism is the first sacrament we celebrate, and it is celebrated only once. While we spend our entire lives recalling and living our baptism, once validly baptized, we are never “re-baptized.” Just as the Hebrew people “passed over” from slavery to freedom, and Jesus “passed over” from death to new life, so to in baptism do we celebrate our “passover” as we experience the Paschal Mystery in our own lives.

Christian Initiation



Of the seven sacraments in our Catholic Church, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are the three Sacraments of Initiation. And initiation is just that - initiation, a beginning.

At the Easter Vigil, at parishes throughout the world, people are initiated into the Church on this holy night. Many persons of catechetical age are

baptized, then confirmed, and finally join us at the Table of the Lord in the Eucharist.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is normative for initiation. This issue of “*Doing Rite!*” will not focus on all the periods and rites of the RCIA process, but will look more closely at the Rite of Baptism for Children.

Baptism

- * Baptism is the first sacrament a Christian celebrates. It is a sacrament of initiation. We become part of the Body of Christ and the Priesthood of the Faithful.
- * In Baptism we die and rise with Christ. We die to sin, and rise to new life in Christ.
- * In celebrating baptism, we begin at the entrance of church, move to the ambo, then to the font, and conclude around the altar.
- * The symbols of baptism are water, chrism (holy oil), white garment, and light/candle.



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A Pilgrim People

We are a pilgrim people, and many of our rituals and devotions in our Church help to make this clear. Think for a moment about the Stations of the Cross, a devotion familiar to most Catholic Christians. Perhaps as recently as this past Lent or Holy Week you walked into a church to pray the Stations of the Cross. Perhaps this was prayed outdoors.

When praying the Stations of the Cross, how did you get from one Station to the next? There was movement. You walked from Station to Station, just as Jesus walked carrying his cross to the site of his crucifixion.

The Rite of Baptism also calls for movement, or a “pilgrimage”, if you will. The Rite of Baptism begins at the doors of church, then we move to the ambo, next we

process to the font for the actual baptism, and finally we find ourselves gathered around the altar.

Our movement, or procession, is not just for the sake of getting from one place to the next. Rather each of our stops along the way is filled with meaning. We will reflect on each of these movements in the baptismal liturgy in this issue of *“Doing Rite!”*



The Doors of Church



As Baptism is the first sacrament celebrated, and as it is through baptism that we are born into the Body of Christ and become part of the Church, it is very symbolic for baptism to begin at the entrance to the parish church, with the Reception of the Children. In this scenario, the presider and accompanying ministers go to the doors of the church

where the parents and godparents are waiting with the child/children to be baptized. Here the presider asks the parents what name they have given their child, and what they ask of God's Church for their child. Parents are asked if they understand their responsibility in asking baptism for their child, and godparents are asked if they are ready to

help the parents in this mission.

Then, for the first time, the presider traces the Sign of the Cross on the child's forehead, and parents, and godparents (and perhaps others in the assembly) are invited to do the same. The child has been welcomed into the Christian community and claimed for Christ.

The Ambo



From the doors of church, we move to the ambo. The ambo is the Table of the Word of God. It is from the ambo that we hear Scripture proclaimed. The second part of the baptismal liturgy is the Liturgy of the Word. If baptism is taking place during Mass, the Liturgy of the Word proceeds as usual at Mass. If baptism is taking place outside of Mass, those assembled for the baptism might move from the doors of the church where the child has been received to the ambo, where the Word of God will be proclaimed.

If the baptism takes place outside of Mass, there is at least one passage from Scripture proclaimed. However, there may be more than one passage, i.e., a selection from the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) or New Testament (Christian Scriptures), a Responsorial Psalm, the Gospel acclamation, and the Gospel. The Rite of Baptism provides suggested readings.

Following the proclamation of Scripture, there is a homily. This is followed by the intercessions, or the Prayer of the Faithful, which is followed by the Litany of Saints. (In some parishes, this litany is chanted during the procession to the font.)

There is a prayer of exorcism (recall that we die to sin in baptism), and the anointing before baptism, which is an anointing on the breast with the oil of catechumens.

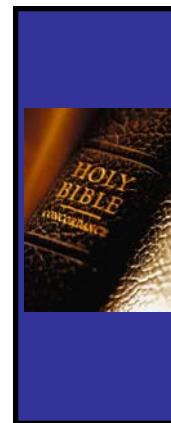
Our Judeo-Christian Family Tree

We will take a brief “time out” here to look a bit more closely at two aspects of the baptismal liturgy which we just mentioned: the proclamation of Scripture and the Litany of the Saints.

The proclamation of Scripture is an important part of every sacramental celebration in our Catholic Church. There is to be the proclamation of Scripture at the celebration of each of our seven sacraments. Yet, too often, we don't put this into proper perspective. Chances are, when you think of baptism, the proclamation of Scripture may not come readily to mind.

Yet Scripture is so very important. In baptism we become part of the Body of Christ, adopted sons and daughters of God. In baptism we die to sin and rise to new life with Christ. In baptism, as in all our sacramental celebrations, we encounter Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. In the Word of God (Scripture) we encounter the Word of God (Jesus Christ).

Think back again to the Easter Vigil and the wonderful proclamation of Scripture heard there. We begin at the beginning, hearing about creation, and then hear stories of such people as Abraham and Isaac and Moses. These aren't just names from the past - they are part of our Judeo-Christian family tree! In baptism we become part of God's family, and these are our ancestors in faith.



The Communion of Saints



Continuing our reflection above, the second point we will ponder for a moment is the Litany of Saints. The Litany of Saints is part of the Rite of Baptism. Later in this rite, at the font, in the profession of faith, we will assert that we believe in the communion of saints. We profess this same thing in the Apostles' Creed.

When we are baptized, we join this communion of saints. The communion of saints is our faith family - it is the family of all the redeemed, both living and dead. So we are not only talking here about Saints with whom we might be

familiar, such as John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene, but **all** the Faithful. Think how powerful that is - we are part of one family of faith, which includes not only Saints Peter and Paul, but our own grandparents and great-grandparents, the people sitting in the next pew, the Baptist family who lives down the street, and those who are redeemed, both living and dead, from every country in the world! What a wonderful “family” this is in which we are initiated at baptism, spanning the centuries and the globe. What names from your family tree will be included in your own personal “litany of saints?”

The Font

In the Rite of Baptism, from the ambo we move to the font, where the celebration of the sacrament of baptism takes place.

There is a Blessing and Invocation of God over the Baptismal Water. Next there is the renunciation of sin and profession of faith, which we often refer to as our “baptismal vows” or “promises.” In the case of infant baptism, the presider addresses the parents

and godparents, who renew their own baptismal promises. Sometimes the presider invites all the baptized to renew their baptismal promises at this time. Parents are then asked if it is their will to have their child baptized in the faith of the church. When they respond affirmatively, the child is baptized.

The child is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy

Spirit, as he/she is either immersed three times in the water, or has water poured over his/her head three times. Immersion is the first and preferred option, as it is a better symbol of dying and rising. Being immersed in the water is like being immersed in the tomb - in the waters of baptism, we die and rise with Christ. The very word “baptize” comes from the Greek word “*baptizein*”, which means “to dip.”



Anointing with Chrism

While still at the font, four “explanatory” rites follow the actual baptism. The first of these is the post-baptismal anointing, or the anointing with chrism. Chrism is a perfumed oil - it is the “smell of a Christian”.

In the Catholic Church, there are three holy oils - the oil of the sick, the oil of catechumens (a catechumen is someone preparing for baptism), and the sacred chrism.

Recall that in the case of infant baptism, the child was anointed on the breast with the oil of catechumens earlier in this rite. This pre-baptismal anointing accompanied the Prayer of Exorcism.

Now the newly baptized is anointed on the crown of the head with the sacred chrism. In essence, the newly baptized is anointed Priest, Prophet, and King. Recall how in the Hebrew Scriptures oil was

used to consecrate those chosen (see for example, 1 Samuel 10:1 and 1 Samuel 16:13).

In baptism, we become Christian. You could, in fact, say we become Christ. The word *chrism* sounds a lot like the word *Christ*. The Greek word “*Christos*” and the Hebrew word “*Messiah*” both mean the same thing - “*the anointed one*.” In baptism, **we** become the “anointed ones”, **we** become “Christos.” We become Christ for one another.



White Garment

The second explanatory rite is the clothing with the white garment. The presider states that the newly baptized has become a new creation clothed in Christ. The white garment is the outward sign of our Christian dignity. We are told to bring this garment unstained into heaven. (In other words, live a life without sin.)

White is a sign of purity. In the Book of Revelation, those in heaven are clothed in white (i.e., Revelation 4:4; 7:9). For an infant, the baptismal garment might be a small garment with symbols of baptism that fits over the head of the infant and lays much like a bib. For an older child or an adult, it might be a full-length garment. Sometimes parents provide their own baptismal garment for the child. Dressed simply as the rite begins, the child is stripped for baptism by immersion, then clothed in a white garment the parent has provided.

It is said that in older days, the baptismal garment, even for a child, was adult-sized, knowing that it takes a lifetime to grow into our baptism!



Light of Christ

Recall that at the Easter Vigil, we begin by gathering outside around the new Easter Fire. The Paschal (Easter) Candle is then prepared and lighted from this fire. All the baptized then light our candles from the Paschal Candle, and process into the darkened church with the Light of Christ leading the way. Christ is the Light of the World. In John 8:12, Jesus tells us this, himself.

In the Rite of Baptism, after the newly baptized is clothed in a white garment, he/she receives a baptismal candle which is lighted from the Paschal Candle. This is the third explanatory rite. As baptized Christians, we are to walk always as children of the light. We are called to bring the Light of Christ to a world darkened by sin and division. This is the mission of the Church - to be Light to the Nations/ Light to the World. As members of the Body of Christ, this is **our** mission.

We always follow the Light of Christ. In death, the casket where our body rests will be placed in church under the Light of the Paschal Candle. And as we pray for our dead, we pray that eternal light might shine upon them!



Ephphetha

The fourth and final explanatory rite in baptism is the rite of Ephphetha, or the Prayer Over Ears and Mouth. The word “*epphetha*” means “*be opened.*” This was the word Jesus used in healing a deaf man. (See Mark 7:32-25.) In the Rite of Baptism, the celebrant touches the ears and mouth of the newly baptized. As baptized Christians we are to receive Jesus’ word and proclaim his faith to the praise and glory of God. You might say these are our “marching orders” as Christians. We are to listen faithfully and attentively to the Word of God with our ears, and we are to proclaim faith with our lips, our mouths.

Without fail, we will gather every Sunday with the Body of Christ, where at the celebration of the Eucharist we will listen to God’s Word and proclaim our faith. And at the conclusion of each Mass, we are dismissed, or sent, to proclaim faith to the world. How will others come to know Christ? Through our words and witness. How will we know what to say? By listening attentively to Jesus.

It is always good to take time to reflect upon this mission of ours. How well do we listen to the Word of God? In prayer, do we quiet ourselves to listen to the Lord speak to us, or do we do all the talking? And what is it that does come out of our mouths? Words of praise giving glory to God? Let us always listen attentively and speak wisely as members of the Body of Christ!



The Altar

Our final movement in the Rite of Baptism finds us at the altar. If baptism is taking place at Mass, this would be the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Outside of Mass, there may be a procession from the font to the altar.

Baptism is the first sacrament a Christian celebrates. Confirmation and Eucharist are the other two sacraments of Christian initiation. Once baptized, then confirmed, the Christian will come to the Table of the Lord where the Eucharist will be celebrated over and over again throughout the Christian’s lifespan. (The normative order for Christian initiation is baptism, then con-

firmation, and then Eucharist.)

Baptism anticipates the Eucharist, the font leads to the altar. We wash before we dine.

In the rite of baptism, at the altar, the entire assembly will pray the Lord’s Prayer. A blessing of mothers, then fathers, and finally a blessing of the entire assembly follows, and then the assembly is dismissed. We go into the world to bring the Light of Christ to all whom we encounter along the way! We become a living altar of sacrifice as we witness to Christ day after day, living out the pattern of death and resurrection in our daily lives.



Recalling our Baptism

While the sacrament of baptism is celebrated only once, we recall our baptism daily in many ways. On entering and leaving church, we who are baptized Christians bless ourselves with holy water from the baptismal font or holy water font, recalling our baptism. We take holy water from the baptismal font at our parish church and bring it to our homes so we can bless ourselves each

and every day recalling our baptism.

Each year at the Easter, we renew our baptismal promises. And we recall our baptism when we are sprinkled with holy water during the sprinkling rite at Mass. (When this rite is celebrated, it takes the place of the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass.)

At confirmation, we renew our baptismal promises to affirm the intricate connec-

tion between baptism and confirmation.

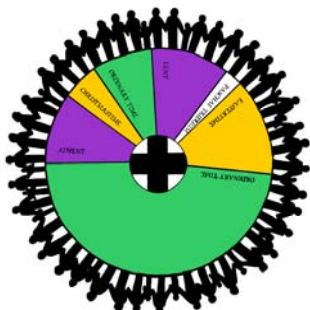
We celebrate the yearly anniversary of our baptism. Perhaps we light our baptismal candle on that day, or go to Mass, or celebrate a special prayer service in our homes.

We walk always as children of the light, recognizing our inherent dignity as sons and daughters of God, as members of the Body of Christ. Alleluia and thanks be to God!



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The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc. (ICF) is a non-profit corporation that assists the faithful – families, catechists, parishes, schools, etc. – with holistic faith formation centered on Jesus Christ revealing himself to us in Word (Scripture), Sacrament, and the Liturgical Calendar. Founded in 2004, the ICF strives to assist Catholic Christians in celebrating and handing on faith in a manner authentic to our Roman Catholic tradition.

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A Priestly People

Have you ever thought of yourself as a priest? Perhaps unless we have celebrated Holy Orders and are an ordained priest, many of us would say no. Yet if we are baptized, we are indeed priests - we are members of the priesthood of the baptized, we are a priestly people.

At baptism, anointed with chrism, we received a share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal mission of Jesus Christ.

Take some time to read and reflect upon 1 Peter 2:1-10. We are called to be a *“holy priesthood.”*

All other ministries in the Church, including the ministerial or ordained priesthood, flows out of this common vocation of the priesthood of the faithful, or the priesthood of the baptized. Think about how an ordained priest vests. The first vestment put on is an alb - a white garment - a baptismal garment, if you will.

There was a time in history, in the not too distant past, where we seemed to lose sight of this. Holiness was considered something most readily attained by ordained priests or consecrated religious. But this is so wrong. We are **all** called to holiness. We (**all** the baptized) share in Christ's priestly ministry.

Because we share in Christ's priestly ministry, we also share in the responsibilities for ministry and service which flow out of this (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #783 & 784).

Take great pride in being part of this priestly people, this holy priesthood God has called to be his own. Live out your vocation as a baptized priest each and every day.

In baptism we died with Christ, so that we might live a new life in him and with him. We have been called out of darkness into light. We are a priestly people. This is indeed Good News. Alleluia!



Mosaic Christ
6th Century
St. Catherine's Monastery,
Mt. Sinai
Heritage: Byzantine