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# Doing Rite!™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

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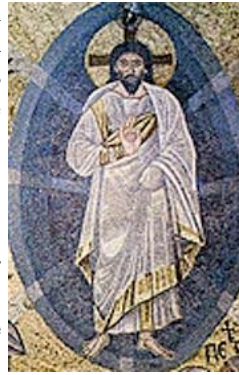
RCIA

## Baptism Preparation

Are you ready for Baptism Preparation? Unless you have never been baptized and are inquiring about baptism, are a parent expecting a child, the parent of an infant, or will soon be a godparent, perhaps this sounds like a strange question. If you don't fit into one of the above categories, you probably are thinking, "Why would I be interested in Baptism Preparation?"

But what if I told you that not only **will** you be participating in Baptism Preparation this year, but you will be doing so **every day for six weeks**? I am referring to the season of Lent. Lent is about preparing for baptism. During Lent those who will be initiated at the Easter Vigil enter their final, intense period of preparation for celebrating the Easter Sacraments. And those of us already baptized prepare not only to accompany these "Elect" on their journey to the font, but we prepare ourselves to renew our own Baptismal Promises at Easter.

So, in essence, we can look at Lent as our yearly period of Baptism Preparation. It is a wonderful opportunity to take our faith inventory as individuals, as families, as a parish community, as the Body of Christ. Have we lived up to our Baptismal Promises? How have we served as "priest, prophet and king" this past year? How have we lived as a new creation, clothed in Christ? Have we let Christ's light shine through us to all those we have encountered? Have we listened attentively to the Word of God and let this Word form our lives? Have we sung God's praises to the best of our ability?



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

## RCIA

- \* The RCIA, or the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, is the process in the Church for initiating persons of catechetical age.
- \* The RCIA is a gradual process of conversion which takes place in the midst of the community of faith.



## Baptism's Symbols and Movements



As a prelude to this issue of *Doing Rite!™*, you may want to first read the issue of *Doing Rite!™* focusing on baptism. (This can be accessed on the Sacrament page of [www.instituteforchristianformation.org](http://www.instituteforchristianformation.org).) This focused on the places where the Rite of Baptism unfolds: the doors/entrance of church, the ambo, the font, and the altar. The symbols of Baptism - water, oil, white garment, and light - were also featured. And in

that issue, we also looked at recalling our baptism, and at our identity as the Priesthood of the Baptized. These are all essential components of Baptism Preparation.

Recall your baptism in a special way each time you walk through the doors of church, listen to the Word of God proclaimed at the ambo, bless yourself with holy water at the font, and come to the Table of the Lord to celebrate the Eucharist.

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# RCIA

This issue *Doing Rite!*<sup>™</sup>, focuses on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, or the RCIA.

The first point to note is that the RCIA is a *process*, not a *program*. It is a process which respects the unique spiritual journey of each person as he/she responds to God's invitation and gift of faith. God's timing is not necessarily our timing, and we cannot force the conversion process into a

neat calendar beginning in September and concluding in May.

Another important point is that the RCIA is not a *class*. Rather it is a process which takes place in the midst of the community of faith. The Rite itself clearly states that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized (RCIA, paragraph 9).

The RCIA is also normative for sacramental preparation and catechesis, in that it celebrates initiation in the proper order: baptism,

then confirmation and then Eucharist.

And the RCIA also respects the dignity of baptism by making a clear distinction between those who are preparing for baptism and those who have been baptized in another Christian denomination, and therefore are already part of the Church.

Anyone of catechetical age (seven years) or older who has not been baptized is to be initiated via the RCIA process.



## The Catechumenate

The process of initiation technically begins with the Catechumenate, but there is a preceding time of inquiry, called the Period of Evangelization and Pre-catechumenate. This inquiry period is a time when an individual first inquires about faith and is introduced to the Gospel. This period may be very short for one person, and of some length for another.

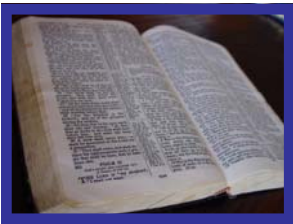
When the inquirer has expressed intent to live a Chris-

tian life, and the community accepts this, this step is marked by a rite: The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. (A catechumen is someone preparing for baptism.) In this rite, the person is lavishly signed with the cross. The catechumen is now bound to the Christian community, with the rights and responsibilities of a Christian.

The catechumen is now in

the Period of the Catechumenate, a time of formation in the Christian life. The liturgical year guides this process, with celebrations of the Word being crucial.

If there are catechumens present at Sunday Mass, you will note that they are "dismissed" (Rite of Dismissal) following the homily. During dismissal, they are breaking open the Word, while the baptized celebrate the Eucharist.



## Purification and Enlightenment

The next period of the RCIA process is the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. This is the time in the process which directly precedes the actual celebration of initiation. This period usually occurs during Lent, as the normal time for initiation is Easter.

The time of Purification and Enlightenment is a deeply spiritual experience. You might think of it as a spiritual retreat.

The catechumenate comes to a conclusion and the Period of Purification and Enlightenment begins with the Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names. At this rite, the catechumen affirms the decision to move forward to celebrate the sacraments of initiation. Based on the testimony and witness of godparents and catechists, the Church approves this decision. In other words, the Church, as the Body of Christ, "elects" this person to move forward to receive the sacraments of

initiation. God has elected this person, and the Church acts on God's behalf. As a tangible sign of this commitment, the catechumen enrolls his/her name in the Book of the Elect. The catechumen is now one of "the Elect."

The solemn nature of this step is noted in that it is the bishop or his delegate who presides at this rite. The Rite of Election may include all catechumens from the diocese gathered together at the Cathedral, a wonderful symbol of the local Church.

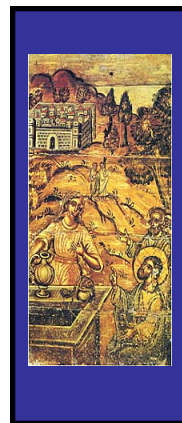
## The Scrutinies

As the time of immediate preparation to celebrate the sacraments of initiation, the Period of Purification and Enlightenment is a deeply spiritual time of conversion. There are rites prescribed for this period, which include the scrutinies and the presentations. The scrutinies should normally take place in Mass on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent. The normative Gospels for these Sundays are the Gospels from Lectionary Cycle A: the Woman at the Well, the Man Born Blind, and the Raising of Lazarus.

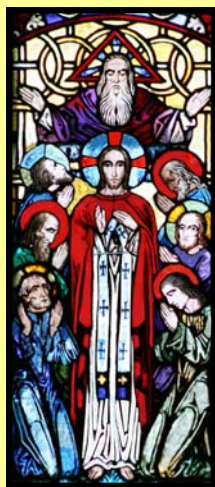
The scrutinies serve to bring to light and purify all that is still weak and sinful in the hearts of the Elect, and to enlighten and strengthen all that is good. On the day each scrutiny is celebrated, after the homily the Elect and their godparents are called forward. The assembly and the Elect pray in silence. Then intercessions for the Elect are prayed. The rite continues with the celebrant saying a prayer of exorcism and laying hands on the Elect. The Elect are then dismissed prior to the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Gospels of Cycle A are normative for the scrutinies because in the Gospel of the Woman at the Well, it is Christ himself who is the living water. In the Gospel of the Man Born Blind, it is Christ who is the Light of the World. And in the Gospel of the Raising of Lazarus, it is Christ who is the resurrection and the life.

While the scrutinies are for the Elect, they also serve to strengthen all the faithful who join in the prayers.



## The Creed and the Lord's Prayer



The Presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are also rites which are normally celebrated during the period of Purification and Enlightenment, in immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. Perhaps we do not often consciously think about it, but both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer belong to the faithful - the baptized.

In the third week of Lent, following the celebration of the first scrutiny, the faithful present, or entrust, the Creed - the central beliefs of our faith - to the Elect. The Elect will then memorize the Creed and recite it prior to the profession of faith on the day of their baptism.

The second Presentation is the Presenta-

tion of the Lord's Prayer. From very ancient times, this has been the prayer which has rightfully belonged to those who by virtue of their baptism are the "adopted" sons and daughters of God. The faithful normally present the Lord's Prayer to the Elect during the fifth week of Lent, following the celebration of the third scrutiny. At the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, once the Elect have been baptized and confirmed, they will join with the rest of the assembly in praying the Lord's Prayer as they join in the celebration of the Eucharist for the first time.

The Presentations also serve as a crucial reminder to all of the faithful as to the importance of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer for the Christian life.

## Living Our Baptism: Mystagogia

Following the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, the sacraments of initiation - baptism, confirmation and Eucharist - are celebrated. This usually takes place at the Easter Vigil. Once initiated, the neophytes as they are now called, are the newest members of Christ's Body, the Church. They now embark upon the final period of the RCIA process, the period of post-baptismal catechesis

or mystagogia. Mystagogia comes from the Greek word for the sacraments. Mystagogia is the time for the neophytes to more fully delve into the mystery of the sacraments.

There is much talk these days about the importance of liturgical catechesis. Yet the Church has always taught about the powerful "instruction" the faithful receive from celebrating

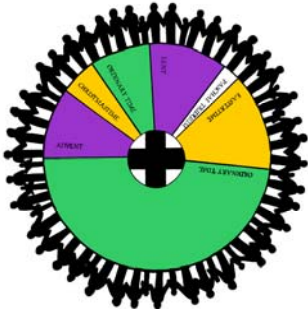
the liturgy of the Church. As the ancient Church knew so well, it is only in celebrating the sacraments that we can then begin to reflect upon and "unpack" what we are experiencing.

For that reason, it seems we - all the faithful - are on a life-long journey of mystagogia. For when, this side of the grave, can anyone of us say we now fully understand the mystery of Christ?



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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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## The Icon of the Baptism of Christ

In our Roman Catholic Liturgical Calendar, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is the final day of the Christmas Season. Orthodox Christians celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, or Theophany, on January 6th - the traditional date for Epiphany. The Blessing of Water is of great importance in the Orthodox Church on this day. Perhaps you recall seeing news coverage of young Greek men diving into the waters in places such as Tarpon Springs to retrieve the cross the Bishop has thrown into the water.



**Theophany of the Lord**  
Iconographer: George the Cretan  
16th Century Icon; Location:  
Dionysiou Monastery, Mt. Athos

We are baptized with water. Either we are immersed in the water, or it is poured over us. We recall our baptism with the sprinkling of water, and by blessing ourselves with holy water.

The icon of the Baptism of Christ tells an interesting story. Notice that Christ is in the center of the icon. Everything revolves around him. He is standing in the Jordan River, his right hand extended in blessing. He is wearing a white loincloth, his baptismal garment.

Notice the motion of the water. Psalm 114:3 refers to the sea beholding and fleeing and the Jordan turning back. Water is life-giving, but the swirling, murky waters also are frightening and hold death. Christ descends into the waters conquering the evil lurking there.

Below John the Baptist there is a tree, and beneath the tree there is an axe. This is a reference to John's preaching. (See Matthew 3:10.)

The icon is also very Trinitarian. Above Christ's head you can see the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove, and above that at the top of the icon, the opening in the heavens where God descends. And note that from that opening there are three rays of light - three for the Trinity.

In the icon, the mountains are singing the praises of God. May we do the same!