



## BAPTISM OF JESUS – JANUARY 10, 2021

Today we celebrate the feast of the baptism of Jesus. It's interesting to recall what I mentioned several years ago. In Africa, the baptism of a child is usually followed by a very happy reception where the whole village gets together to celebrate and the children are the center of attention. Everyone gets to eat abundantly and the one thing that everyone enjoys is rice.

As a result of this rice eating, the baptismal dress is sometimes referred to as your rice dress. And sometimes when young people are learning about baptism in school, I'm told that all they think about is the rice they will get to eat when the sacrament is celebrated.

Although the connection between baptism and rice is totally accidental, Rice can be used as a memory aid to recall the meaning of baptism. The word “RICE” can serve as an acronym and each letter reminds us of one of the important aspects of the sacrament. The sacrament through which we become members of the family of God.

R stands for Rebirth. In baptism we are born again by water and the Holy Spirit. We are cleansed from original sin and become sons and daughters of God in a very special way. That makes us brothers and sisters in the family of God.

I stands for Initiation. At baptism we are initiated or admitted into full membership in the church, the community of the children of God in the world.

C stands for Consecration. In baptism we consecrate and dedicate ourselves to seek and to spread the kingdom of God. We commit ourselves to be servants of God in the part of the world in which we live. How do we do that? It really is simple, we do it by loving God and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

And E is for Empowerment. At baptism the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and empowers us, equips us, gives us the moral strength to say no to evil and to live as God's adopted children, because that's who we are.

In our culture, rice is usually associated with weddings. In Africa, rice is associated with baptism. We sometimes think, as Americans, that the rest of the world must learn from our culture, if it wants to catch up to all things modern.

The truth is that God can teach us what we need to know, even in cultures that are not American. The conjunction of Baptism and rice in Africa is just one such example.

Do you know the date of your baptism? If a child were to ask you how you are different from someone who is not baptized, what would you say?

