

Expectations of Baptism

It is clear that the meaning of infant Baptism is connected to the meaning of adult Baptism. A child is received into the Church in the same way that an adult is received, and with the same expectation that he or she will be an active member of the Church. Any person, whether infant or adult, is helped to grow in his or her faith and commitment to Christ by participating in the life of the Christian community.

SYMBOLS IN THE RITE OF BAPTISM

- Water—life, refreshment, renewal, cleansing
- Immersion—dying and rising, being renewed, refreshed, cleansed
- Sign of the cross—referring to the crucifixion of Jesus, it signifies that the one who receives it is a follower of Christ
- Anointing with oil (chrism)—life, strengthening, salvation
- White robe—new life, new beginning
- Candle—Christ, the light of the world; the spiritual illumination received from Christ through the Christian community (from parents and other Christian adults) and from taking the words of Jesus to heart; it also refers to how Christians are to be “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14)

The primary meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism is immersion into Christ's death and resurrection to new life in Christ, which is why some Protestant churches and some Catholic parishes prefer the symbolism of full immersion to the pouring of water. A secondary meaning of Baptism is the washing away of original sin and, for adults, the personal sin and guilt of their lives up to this moment when they begin to live in a community that reflects the forgiveness and compassion of God.

For children, in particular, the primary meaning of Baptism is the most important. Through Baptism, new Christians are symbolically immersed in the community of faith and the life of God. Through Baptism, children are welcomed into the faith community of their own family (the domestic Church), their local parish, and the universal Church. Baptism is the beginning of their learning how to live the way that Jesus lived and wants his followers to live.

WHAT THE CATECHISM SAYS

The word *baptism* comes from the Greek word *baptizein*, which means to plunge or immerse. In Baptism the person being baptized is buried in Christ's death and reborn in his resurrection.

... when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:12

Thus the newly baptized person is a new creation:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

2 Corinthians 5:17

See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1214.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

The life of God in one sense is a mystery, but in another sense there is nothing mysterious about it at all. The life of God is the life that Jesus lived and still lives in the Church. It is the way of life that Jesus revealed by trusting in his Father, by caring and reaching out to others, by healing their hurts and forgiving their sins. It is a life that is animated by God's Spirit of love and sharing, self-giving and fairness, openness and honesty, fidelity and unity. It is our life as adopted children of God, members of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit, incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church.

In the end, the life of God is the life of Jesus living in us. It means, to put it starkly, a life of death and resurrection. It means dying to ourselves and living for others, as Jesus did. It means dying to sin and selfishness and being raised to a new level of loving and caring. It means new birth, new growth, and new life. Baptism marks the beginning of that new life of discipleship.

WHAT THE CATECHISM SAYS

Christ is our high priest and mediator. Our Baptism in Christ "gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers." Through Baptism, we are consecrated by the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be a new people and to take part in Christ's priestly vocation. According to our own vocations, we are called to participate in Christ's mission to bring the good news of salvation to all the world.

See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #s 784, 1268, 1546.

Taken from the book Sacraments by Joseph Martos

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