



Normally only an ordained priest or deacon can baptize Catholics, but in an emergency anyone can and should perform the ritual.



There are three forms of baptism: By **water**, by **blood** (a martyr), and by **desire** (someone who wants to be baptized but dies before it can be done).



Baptism water is usually blessed at the Easter Vigil, the night before Easter Sunday.



Members of a Jewish Kibbutz have built a baptismal site for Christians, just south of the Sea of Galilee. Anyone may use it for free.



As many as 3,000 people may have taken part in a mass baptism on the first Pentecost.



In Spanish, the word for Godmother is *Comadre*. This means almost literally, Co-Mother.

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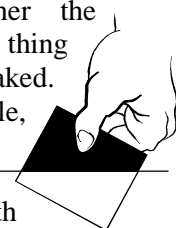
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BAPTISM: What is it?

Baptism is the central and most important step in becoming a Christian. It is a sacrament. This means simply, that it is “sign language” from God. Sign language often speaks more powerfully than any other language. It is universal. In a sacrament, God uses ordinary things like water, food, liniment and actions to speak directly to our souls. Unlike most signs, God’s signs have the power to change the people they reach.

Surprisingly, the sign language in baptism is not just water, but **dipping** or **soaking**. When you dip something into a liquid you change either the fluid or the thing that is soaked. For example, if you dip a stained piece of cloth



into bleach, it can remove the stain. We are born into a world that’s stained by indifference and greed. This is technically called “Original Sin”.

YOU JESUS

Sometimes the water is poured on us. The result is the same. We gradually become absorbed into Christ, but **we do not lose our individual identities**. We merge our lives and his. We become part of him and he becomes part of us.

Baptism is only the beginning of a life-long process of blending with Jesus. We must not only join with him physically, but also mentally and spiritually as well. Prayer, Bible reading,

and the other Sacraments are all part of the transformation.

In other words, Baptism isn’t just a ceremony. It is the start of a **life-long** work of change to join with Jesus. The final result is that we share his life and power here on earth and forever in heaven.

HOW BAPTISM STARTED

We usually think of Jesus when we talk about Baptism, but it really began long before him. (But, he changed it and give it new power!)

Centuries before Christ, the people of the Bible believed that any contact with the outside world soiled them. Before they could eat or pray they had to clean themselves. This was par-

ticularly true when they prayed on the Sabbath.

The Jewish people had to wash themselves in a ritual pool called a *mikveh*. It had to be filled with water that had **flowed** and they had to **soak** completely under the water. They also needed to have someone **witness** this ceremony. Men had to do it every Friday night, while women did it only once a month. Many religious Jews still continue this practice.

John the Baptist—Jesus’ cousin—taught that it was not necessary to do it every week. He said that one such ceremony was enough to get ready for the Savior, as long as people changed their lives afterward.

John’s baptism was just a symbol of change, it did not really have the power



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to make those changes.

Jesus added this power when he was baptized by John in the Jordan river.



“He baptized Christ, the giver of baptism, in waters made holy by the one who was baptized.”

— Preface for the Feast of Saint John the Baptist

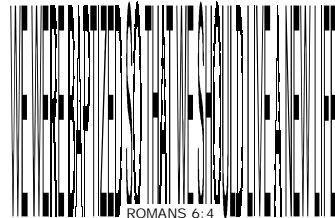
Jesus told his disciples:

“I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you.”

— Matthew 28:18-20

GOD’S BARCODE

Can you read it?



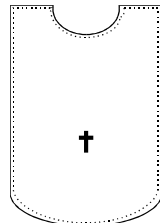
THE CEREMONY

Baptism involves more than dipping or soaking in water. The church adds other sign language to help bring out its meaning. Here is a description of infant baptism. The adult ceremony is similar.

Two of these signs are composed of “anointings” or oil rubs. Parents often use baby oil to protect an infant. It cleans the skin without drying it out and seals out germs. Before the baptism, the priest rubs oil



on the person’s neck in front and in back, making a tiny Sign of the Cross as he does this. After baptism, the priest again rubs Chrism — a mixture of oil and balsam perfume — on the baby’s head. The word “**Christ**” means “**rubbed with oil**” and so the child literally becomes a Christ.

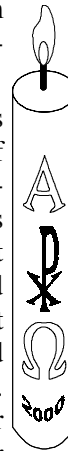


Another part of sign language is the white robe or “Christening garment” that



is placed by the priest on the child. This practice began when early Christians were completely soaked in water. They would take off their outer clothing before the ceremony and then put on new clothes afterward. Some families hand these robes down from generation to generation.

A final sign is shown by the gift of a candle to the parents. Early Christians had to meet at night in dark homes and catacombs. The night services protected them from discovery. Each worshipper brought a lamp or candle. The meetings must have had a special atmosphere with these lights shining like personal beacons of faith.



HOW TO PICK A GODPARENT

Godparents have two specific jobs: 1. Witnessing the ceremony; and 2. Protecting the child. The first role is easy to understand. Godparents literally represent God at the ceremony.

The second role takes much more involvement. It requires an on-going contact with the child.

When you pick someone to be a godparent for your child, you should have both of these tasks in mind. Will the people be able to continue a relationship with the child? Are they good role models? Will they be able to help you raise the child in faith? Would they be available to serve as sponsors at the Sacrament of Confirmation?

REMEMBERING

Who was your godfather or godmother? What was the date of your own baptism? If you don’t know or can’t remember, there is a real problem. Your baptism day should be as important as your birthday.

Your child should know this information. Here is a way you can help them.

On every anniversary of your child’s baptism, hold a little party. Invite the godparents to attend. If they can’t come, ask them to write a note or send a small congratulations card to the child. At the party share pictures of the baptism. Light the child’s baptism candle. Renew faith with the child by a simple prayer like The Apostles’ Creed, or by using the service mentioned below.

BAPTISM ON THE INTERNET

(Baptism renewal ceremony) <http://www.catholic1.com/baptism-renewal/index.html>

(Are you saved?) <http://www.binary.net/polycarp/hope.html>
(Infant Baptism) <http://www.binary.net/polycarp/baptism.html>

(Sacrament of Baptism) <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDFINFAN.TXT>