



SESSION 1

A NEW
CREATION

REBORN

YOU, YOUR CHILD, AND THE HEART OF BAPTISM

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Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver
August, 2015

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Print Production/Graphic Design: Ann Diaz, Brenda Kraft, Jane Myers, Devin Schadt

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our Sunday Visitor



Production of this project was made possible with the generous support of the *Our Sunday Visitor Institute*.

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6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310
Greenwood Village, CO 80111
Information: 303-937-4420
Formed.org

Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 978-0-9966768-0-9

A NEW CREATION

SESSION OVERVIEW



LEADER: READ THIS OVERVIEW IN ADVANCE TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE SESSION.

This session illustrates how Baptism is not an empty ritual or mere symbol, but rather an essential part of God's plan of salvation for all mankind. Baptism is a sacrament—a visible sign with real, spiritual effects. Through it we enter the family of God, the Church, and are purified from our sins and reborn in the Holy Spirit. Baptism confers an indelible seal on the new Christian, marking him or her as belonging to Christ, and it can be neither reversed nor repeated. Nothing can remove the mark of Baptism.

To better understand Baptism, we must go all the way back to creation. From the very first verses of Scripture, water is presented as a life-giving part of God's activity. The disobedience, or sin, of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden introduces death to mankind and the world. Adam and Eve lose their supernatural life, their union with God, and are marked by their sin; the effect of this "original sin" is passed onto every human to follow. We are, in essence, born to die—both physically and spiritually. The story could have ended there, but Scripture shows us how God began working to bring all of humanity back into union with him—back to life, spiritually. Baptism is a vital component of how God does this.

In the Old Testament, Baptism is prefigured in the flood, which washes the earth clean for Noah and his family to make a fresh start. The crossing of the Red Sea in Israel's exodus from Egypt is the greatest foreshadowing of Baptism in the Old Testament: Israel passes from slavery to freedom through the waters of the sea, just as the Christian passes from slavery to sin into new life in Christ in the waters of Baptism. Baptism is also prefigured in Israel's crossing of the Jordan River at the end of the 40 years in the desert. In passing through the waters of the Jordan, Israel enters into her inheritance: the Promised Land. The waters of Baptism open up the way for the Christian to receive the promised inheritance of eternal life.

The foreshadowing of the Old Testament is fulfilled when Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River. By submitting to the Baptism of John, even though he was without sin, Jesus set the example for the Church. When Christ descended into the waters of the Jordan, he blessed the waters of Baptism and identified himself with fallen humankind to redeem us.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and proclaimed his identity for all to hear: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Just as the sonship of Jesus was revealed, so our Baptism makes us sons and daughters of God.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Recognize that Baptism is more than just a symbol or ancient tradition—it is an essential part of God's plan for salvation
- Understand the Old Testament background for Baptism and how the Old Testament types reach fulfillment in Christ's Baptism in the Jordan
- Appreciate that our Baptism is a participating in both the death and resurrection of Christ



The Baptism of Christ / Digital Image © 2015 Museum Associates / LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, NY

STEP 1 OPENING PRAYER

▶ LEADER: BEGIN THIS SESSION BY LEADING THE OPENING PRAYER, WHICH IS ALSO FOUND IN THE PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE, ON PAGE 6.

O God, whose Son, baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan, was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and, as he hung upon the Cross, gave forth water from his side along with blood, and after his Resurrection, commanded his disciples: 'Go forth, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' look now, we pray, upon the face of your Church and graciously unseal for her the fountain of Baptism. May this water receive by the Holy Spirit the grace of your Only Begotten Son, so that human nature, created in your image and washed clean through the Sacrament of Baptism from all the squalor of the life of old, may be found worthy to rise to the life of newborn children through water and the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the cleansing waters of Baptism. In this sacrament we are initiated into the story of salvation and we are sealed as your children. May we always cherish the precious gift of your grace and our place in your plan of salvation. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—From the Blessing and Invocation of God over Baptismal Water, Rite of Baptism, new translation of the Roman Missal





INTRODUCTION OF THE SESSION



LEADER: READ ALOUD OR PUT INTO YOUR OWN WORDS THE FOLLOWING INTRODUCTION, WHICH IS ALSO INCLUDED IN THE PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE.

If you made a list of the most important moments and experiences in your life so far, what would you include? Maybe key events like graduations, places you've been, people you've met, new jobs, getting married, or the birth of a child, etc. Few of us would think to include our birth—though obviously without that crucial moment, nothing else could follow.

What about your *spiritual* birth? In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Your spiritual birth happens in the Sacrament of Baptism, which is the first sacrament a Christian receives. It is the access point for the other sacraments and for the very kingdom of God.

"Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: 'Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.'"
—CCC 1213

In this first session we will introduce the monumental significance of Baptism, the first of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. The *Catechism* tells us that "the sacraments confer the grace that they signify" (CCC 1127). This means that Baptism is not just a symbol of cleansing and rebirth; it actually bestows those graces on the one being baptized. This session will walk us through the story of salvation history to show how Baptism was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. New creation, cleansing from sin, a fresh start, freedom from slavery—each of these facets of Baptism is prefigured in the Old Testament.

FLYING HIGHER

"Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism."
—CCC 1277





VIDEO



LEADER: INTRODUCE AND SHOW THE FIRST VIDEO EPISODE, WHICH WILL LAST ABOUT 38 MINUTES.

Most of us think of Baptism as something that began with Jesus and the Early Church. Is that accurate? What if the importance of Baptism can be found *before* Jesus' Baptism? Let's watch to find out...

VIDEO OUTLINE— A NEW CREATION

I. To understand Baptism we have to start at the beginning of Scripture

- A. Creation starts with the Holy Spirit moving over the water—connection between life-giving water and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life
- B. Adam and Eve's sin brings death into the story—original sin means we are born without supernatural life
- C. The story of salvation is the story of everything God has done to bring his people back into union with him
- D. God again uses water to give humanity a fresh start with Noah and his family
- E. Moses is drawn from the waters of the Nile as an infant, and he draws Israel out of slavery in Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea—this is a type of Baptism (CCC 1221)

- F. Ezekiel 36:25-26: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you."
- G. John the Baptist's Baptism of repentance, Jesus makes the waters holy
- H. Jesus sees his crucifixion as a kind of Baptism; Paul sees our Baptism as a participation in Christ's death

II. Baptism is an essential part of God's plan to save us

- A. Baptism is a visible action with invisible power, meaning, and grace
- B. Not just an ancient symbol but frees us from sin and brings about a new creation in Christ

STEP 4

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION



Parents should be seated with their child's godparents.

Read the following questions aloud one at a time, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the response in italics below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

Keep a brisk pacing for these discussions (moving along, but not rushed). When you notice the discussion of one question wrapping up, move on to the next one.

1. Have you ever attended a Baptism? What details do you remember about the Baptism?

- *Personal responses.*

2. Which type of Baptism in the Old Testament caught your attention the most? Why? Did any of those types of Baptism come as a surprise to you? Explain?

- *For example, a particular type of baptism may have caught a participant's attention because it was new to them, or because that Old Testament story already holds a special significance. Types of baptism found in the Old Testament include: newness of life (creation, flood, Exodus), bringing death to sin (flood, Exodus), freeing us from slavery (Exodus), starting our journey to the Promised Land of heaven (Exodus), etc.*

3. Ezekiel 36:25–26 says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you." What do you think it means to have a new heart and a new spirit through Baptism?

- *The baptized Christian is a new creation. He or she belongs to Christ and has received the Holy Spirit. The heart is new because it is washed clean of sin; the spirit is new because the Spirit of God now dwells with the Christian.*

4. Why do you desire Baptism for your child or godchild? What is your deepest desire for your child or godchild in Baptism?

- *Personal responses. Some may desire Baptism because they want the sacramental grace for their child. Some may not understand the deeper significance yet but see it as an important tradition to keep.*

FLYING HIGHER

"Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace since it is given even to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water; anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship." —St Gregory of Nazianzus



STEP 5

PARENT/GODPARENT PROMISE



LEADER: DIRECT THE PARENTS AND GODPARENTS TO THE FOLLOWING REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOUND ON PAGE 9 IN THEIR PARTICIPANT'S GUIDES.

TO THE PARENT

Just as God saved his people Israel from slavery in Egypt by the waters of the Red Sea, God wants to give your child a life of freedom in him through the waters of Baptism. By seeking Baptism for your child, you are God's instrument leading him or her to freedom and new life, as Moses led the Israelites. It is God who saves, but as a parent choosing Baptism for your child you have a unique and precious role to play, both now and after the Baptism.

Consider the following prayer from the Rite of Baptism:

Almighty God

you sent your only Son to rescue us from slavery of sin,
and to give us the freedom only your sons and daughters
enjoy. We now pray for this child

who will have to face the world with its temptations,
and fight the devil in all his cunning.

Your Son died and rose again to save us.

By his victory over sin and death,
cleanse this child from the stain of original sin.

Strengthen him (her) with the grace of Christ,
and watch over him (her) at every step in life's journey.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Saint Augustine being baptized by Saint Ambrose of Milan / Scala / Art Resource, NY

The prayer uses the imagery of the Exodus to describe the spiritual reality of Baptism: freedom from slavery followed by a challenging journey. The prayer asks God to strengthen the child and watch over him or her throughout the journey of life. You are the first answer to that prayer. You are the first means by which God will protect and guide your child.

What will you do to help your child walk in the freedom of his or her identity as God's child?

How will you help him or her resist the temptations of the world and the devil's cunning?

How can you start fulfilling this mission even now?

TO THE GODPARENT

In the Exodus, God saved his people Israel from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land with many signs and wonders. He also used many human leaders to teach and guide his people. Moses led the people and gave them God's law. Moses' brother Aaron led the people in worship as High Priest. Moses' sister Miriam led the people in praising God as a prophetess. At God's command, Moses appointed 70 elders to help him govern the people in the wilderness.

By agreeing to be a godparent, you are answering the call to guide and protect the newly Baptized as God's chosen leaders guided the Israelites during the Exodus.

Consider the following prayer from the Rite of Baptism:

Almighty God

you sent your only Son to rescue us from slavery of sin,
and to give us the freedom only your sons and daughters enjoy.

We now pray for this child
who will have to face the world with its temptations,
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Your Son died and rose again to save us.

By his victory over sin and death,
cleanse this child from the stain of original sin.

Strengthen him (her) with the grace of Christ,
and watch over him (her) at every step in life's journey.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The prayer makes it clear that although the newly baptized child will immediately enter into the freedom of the sons and daughters of God that freedom is not without challenges and temptations. It is your mission as godparent to be an instrument of God in strengthening and supporting your godchild, watching over him or her "at every step in life's journey."

What will you do to help your godchild walk in the freedom of his or her identity as God's child? How will you help him or her resist the temptations of the world and the devil's cunning? How can you start fulfilling this mission even now?

FLYING HIGHER

"Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte 'a new creature,' an adopted son of God, who has become a 'partaker of the divine nature,' member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit."

—CCC 1265



STEP 6

WRAP-UP & CLOSING PRAYER

▶ LEADER: REVIEW THE KEY POINTS OF THIS SESSION TOGETHER.

Participants should leave this session with an understanding of how Baptism is essential to God's plan of salvation: it remedies the consequences of Adam and Even's sin, which we call original sin—the loss of supernatural life and union with God—and makes us children of God. Participants should also come away with an understanding of how creation, the flood, and the Exodus foreshadowed Baptism. Finally, participants should recognize that Baptism is a participation in Christ's death and resurrection: in Baptism we die to sin and are raised to new life in Christ.

▶ CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank you for the gift of our own Baptism.
Thank you for the gift of your grace,
for the forgiveness of our sins,
and for making us sons and daughters of the Father.
May we always strive to live fully in the freedom
you have given us in Baptism,
to reject sin and evil,
and to keep our eyes fixed on the hope of eternal life.
Strengthen us against the temptations
and difficulties of this journey,
and help us support and encourage those around us.
Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Benedict XVI. "Chapter One: The Baptism of Jesus" in *Jesus of Nazareth*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1217–1228

St. Ambrose baptizes St. Augustine / Scala /
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NOTES

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