



CATHOLIC  
Faith Explorers™

Materials to enrich your faith and learn how the teachings of the Catholic Church apply to real life.

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## The Best Day of My Life

If someone were to ask us to name the best day of our lives, most of us would cite the day we got married, the day our children were born, or some other special day we remember fondly. But how many of us would say “The best day of my life was the day I was baptized?” How many of us really think of our baptismal “birthday” as the most significant day in our lives?

Yet what could be more important than receiving the sacrament that Jesus said was necessary for our salvation? What could be more momentous than the day that we were “born again” as sons and daughters of God—the day we came to life spiritually, receiving as a gift not only the right but the ability to call the all-powerful Creator of the universe “Abba” or “Daddy?” What could be more profound than the day when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us and we became “partakers in the divine nature?” **Yet sadly, many of us have been baptized without ever coming to understand its reality and meaning, and we, in turn, baptize our children with our eyes still veiled to the eternal significance of this sacred ritual.**

Do we understand why we need to be baptized? Do we comprehend what it “does” to us, and the eternal impact that this “bath of rebirth” has upon us? Could we explain to a curious onlooker what “happens” to us when we are baptized, and that although we look exactly the same, we are in reality dramatically different creatures after Baptism? If we are like many Catholics, we must honestly answer “no.”

In *Living Water* we will:

- examine the origin, purpose, and significance of the sacrament of Baptism,
- find out how this holy sacrament was instituted by Jesus as the means through which we are incorporated into his family, the Church,
- learn about the permanent effect that Baptism has upon our souls, and how it heals us of sin and empowers us to live a Christian life,
- review the Rite of Baptism itself, and consider the deeper meaning of the words, symbols, and gestures with which we are so familiar.

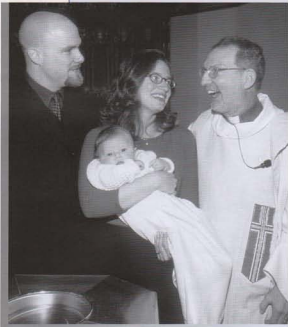
*Living Water* will enhance your appreciation of the awesome gift God has given us in his Church, Baptism, and all the sacraments. We pray that your faith will be deepened, and that—

[T]he eyes of your hearts [will be] enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you . . . and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe. **Ephesians 1:18–19**

John 3:5

2 Corinthians 5:17

2 Peter 1:4



## The Significance of Baptism

To begin to understand the significance of Baptism, we must first recognize that Jesus felt Baptism was so important that the command to baptize others was included in the last words he said to the eleven disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

### Jesus said we must be born anew.

In his well-known conversation with the Jewish ruler Nicodemus, Jesus declared that one must be “born anew” to see the kingdom of God. Confused as to his meaning, Nicodemus questions, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4). But Jesus instructs him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The sacrament of Baptism is precisely the new birth Jesus was referring to, and Jesus’ parting words affirm that Baptism is central to the mission of the apostles.

### Why do we need to be born again?

This probably would have been our next question if we were conversing with Jesus. Why on earth do we *need* to be reborn if we are already alive? This question can only be answered with the help of what we call “Revelation,” that is, what God has communicated to mankind over time about his plan of salvation for us.

### The reality of sin

The Bible, which is God’s revealed word, tells us that we are all born sinful due to the “original sin” of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

St. Paul speaks of this sin when he says: “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Romans 5:12).

In the beginning, man and woman were “fit” for life with God. In other words, Adam and Eve were created by God with the personal familiarity, holiness, integrity, and superabundance of grace necessary to live forever in his presence. Though God created them in a state of intimate love and friendship with him, as beloved children made in his own image and likeness, Adam and Eve freely chose to disobey their heavenly Father, committing what is known as “original sin.”

John 3:3

CCC 1257

CCC 386–89

CCC 396–409



Genesis 1–3

## The absence of something

Original sin is not so much a thing as the absence of something. Tragically, when our first parents chose to sin against God, they lost the gift of divine nature, leaving them to live in a lesser state of existence than originally bestowed upon them by God. Their nature “fell” from a god-like state to a corrupted state, and they began to sin all the more. Worse yet, they began to experience separation from God, suffering, and physical and spiritual death, instead of the eternal life full of happiness, holiness, intimacy, and peace that God had planned for them. Sadly, they no longer interacted with God as tenderly loved children, but they began to believe that God “had it out for them,” cowering in fear and shame in his presence.

## Our inheritance from Adam and Eve

When Adam and Eve alienated themselves from God, they infected the whole human race with sin. As a result, we are all born with the stain or birth defect of “original sin” on our souls. We come into the world separated from God and prone to do evil, instead of loving God above all else, enjoying divine friendship, and doing what is good for us and pleasing to him. St. Paul vividly describes our struggle with sin when he exclaims: “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . Now if I do what I do not want . . . it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Romans 7:15, 17).

## “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” Romans 5:20

God in his great love and mercy did not leave us without hope. Even as the story of human sin unfolds in **Genesis 3**, God announces a Redeemer, a Savior who will come to restore man’s loving relationship with his heavenly Father and enable him to overcome sin and its consequences.

Jesus Christ is revealed as the long-awaited Redeemer, “the new Adam,” whose obedient self-offering on the Cross would reverse the disobedience of Adam and Eve, bringing the possibility of new life and a restored relationship with God to the whole human race.

CCC 374–79

Genesis 3:8–10

Romans 7:13–20

Genesis 3:15–24  
CCC 1008

Romans 5:15–19  
CCC 410–12



## If new life is available, how do I get it?

Though the Apostle Paul clearly teaches that Christ died to give everyone the possibility of eternal life, the question still remains: “How do I get it?” What means did God establish for us to access the victory Christ won through his death and resurrection, so that we, like Jesus, can overcome death and live eternally with

God? How do we find, once again, a relationship of friendship and kinship with the Father, so we can claim the family inheritance of heaven? Let’s go back to Nicodemus and his encounter with Jesus.

**S**T. JUSTIN MARTYR, a martyr and avid defender of the apostolic faith, elaborated on the Church’s understanding of Baptism in his *First Apology*, written between A.D. 148–155: “**Then they are brought by us to where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated (reborn). For in the name of God, the Father . . . and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ said, ‘Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’**”

Ephesians 2:1

physically alive, we are spiritually “dead” due to sin. In other words, though we are alive on a natural or human level, we have ceased to possess the supernatural life within us that God intended for his children—the life that enables mere human beings to interact with their Creator as divine sons and daughters, spirit to Spirit.

CCC 1250  
Ephesians 1:4

God alone can restore us to the supernatural life, and it is precisely this act of restoration that the God-man, Jesus Christ, came to accomplish for us. In short, Baptism is the only way we can become who we were intended to be before the foundation of the world.

### Baptism is the gateway to life.

The sacrament of Baptism was established by Christ as the means through which we are brought to life by God, wherein we become “one” with Jesus and receive the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of divine life through the Holy Spirit who comes to live within us. The Church has believed for 2,000 years that Baptism is “the gateway to life in the Spirit,” and it has always understood Jesus’ words to Nicodemus as a direct reference to Baptism. Just as we passed through the waters of our mother’s womb to receive natural birth, so must we pass through the waters of Baptism to receive supernatural rebirth. This fundamental truth of the Christian faith is repeatedly affirmed by Jesus’, as well as through the Apostles’, own record of the role of Baptism in the early Church.

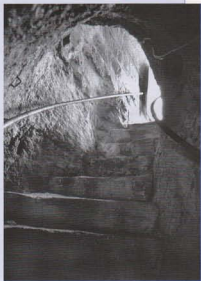
### Spiritual rebirth

While Nicodemus expresses confusion as to how he could be “born again,” Jesus makes it clear that he is speaking of a different kind of birth, not merely earthly birth in human flesh, but supernatural rebirth, given through “water and Spirit” (John 3:6–12). Such rebirth is absolutely necessary for all people, because Revelation tells us that although we enter the world

### Bible Search

#### Look up specific biblical references about the importance of Baptism:

- John 3:5
- Acts 2:38
- Mark 16:15–16
- Acts 9:10–18
- Matthew 28:19–20
- Acts 16:30–33



CCC 1265, 1213



## Why did Jesus choose water?

### Water symbolizes cleansing.

Jesus did not choose a meaningless symbol when instituting the sacrament of Baptism. Instead, he chose a familiar ritual that held great symbolism for his followers—the practice of washing oneself in water to signify spiritual cleansing. “Baptism,” which comes from a Greek word meaning to “dip,” “immerse,” or “plunge,” was practiced among various ancient peoples including the Jews, and always in connection with the belief that the ritual of washing oneself in water symbolized the cleansing of personal faults and spiritual impurities. Additionally, water has always been and remains a source of life and fruitfulness. Its association with the life-giving spirit of God goes back to the dawn of creation when God called forth the created realm through water and the Word.

### The ordinary made extraordinary.

Through his words, and through his death and resurrection, Jesus infused a mere symbol of purification with extraordinary power, changing ordinary water to “living water” (John 4:10) that communicates eternal life to those washed in it. St. Paul affirms the saving power of Baptism to his disciple Titus, whom he instructs by letter: “[H]e saved us . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. This saying is sure.” (Titus 3:5–8).

### Jesus’ public ministry began with Baptism.

Jesus, the sinless God-man who needed neither repentance nor forgiveness, initiated his public ministry and demonstrated the importance of Baptism by submitting himself to the Baptism of John. He did this to:

- allow himself to be numbered among sinners,
- accept and inaugurate his mission as God’s suffering Servant,
- open the heavens that were once closed by Adam’s sin,
- set an example of Baptism, which he would later teach as the means of being “born anew,” and
- sanctify the waters to be used in the sacrament of Baptism.

### Sacrament

**A**N OUTWARD SIGN instituted by Christ to communicate grace. In the sacraments, God makes use of his creation, taking ordinary matter and infusing it with his power, making it a conduit of grace.

CCC 1218

Genesis 1:2, 6

2 Peter 3:5–6

John 1:1–4

John 4:1–26



CCC 535

### Bible Search

#### Scriptural references for the Baptism of Jesus.

- Matthew 3:13–17
- Luke 3:15–22
- Mark 1:4–11
- John 1:19–34

## The Effects of Baptism

Baptism offers amazing grace—the forgiveness of our sins and the free and undeserved gift of eternal life won for us by Jesus Christ. Its power depends entirely on the death and resurrection of Christ, and upon his Word that faith and Baptism open the door to his heavenly kingdom.

Mark 16:16

Though the principle effects of Baptism are the forgiveness of sin (including original sin and all personal sin) and new birth in the Holy Spirit, Baptism has many radical consequences for us. Scripture reveals that when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, we become members of Christ's living Body on earth<sup>1</sup>—completely new creatures with new natures, adopted children of God who possess new powers and new rights! Let's look at these many incredible effects.

CCC 798, 1262–67

### ■ Baptism restores communion with God.

Sin and death ruled over the human race until God sent his only Son to die on the Cross, taking upon himself “the sin of the world” (John 1:29) and overcoming death by rising from the dead. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus ushered in a new era for mankind—an era that restored us to the possibility of communion with God and freedom from the dominion of death. Christ's redemptive act repaired the damage done by sin; opening the way for people to once again live as the Father's own sons and daughters, both now and for all eternity.

CCC 654

We access Jesus' “repair work” through faith and Baptism, which Scripture reveals unites us to Christ's death and resurrection in so real a way that we, like our Lord, die and rise again to new life, overcoming sin and death through the victorious death and resurrection of Christ.

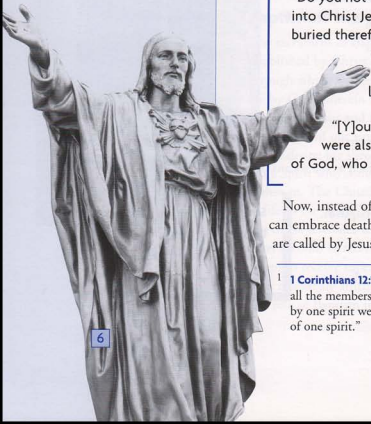
CCC 1010–11

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:3–4

“[Y]ou were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” Colossians 2:12

Now, instead of fearing death as a “curse” to be avoided at all costs, we can embrace death as a blessing—the blessed threshold through which we are called by Jesus to enter our true home, heaven.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12–13: “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 by one spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one spirit.”



## ■ We become adopted children of God.

When we respond in faith to Jesus Christ and receive the sacrament of Baptism, not only are we unafraid of death, we are restored to the life God always desired for us, regaining the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and the gift of sonship originally enjoyed by Adam and Eve. Regaining our status as the Father's divine children means that we are on a "first name basis" with God, and we therefore have the right to address him in the most familiar of terms as "Daddy."<sup>2</sup>

St. Paul tells us about this marvelous reality when he writes: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of sonship [through which] we cry *Abba, Father!*" (Romans 8:14–15). As God's sons and daughters, we also begin to "bear the family resemblance," imagining God in holiness and love as we wait to claim our family inheritance, heaven.

## ■ It brings us into the life of the Blessed Trinity.

According to Christ's instructions, we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our Savior issued this command because he desires that we bear his *family name*—the name of the Holy Trinity, in whose name we become God's own people and possession.

The eternal God consists of three Divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and receiving the sign of these Persons (the sign of the Cross) signifies our belief in their existence and union, as well our understanding that we are birthed into their extended family by our Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The innermost mystery of the Divine Family is precisely the *familial love* shared among them—a love exchange between the Eternal Father and his only begotten Son that is so great that it literally overflows into a Third Person, the Holy Spirit. When we are baptized, we are granted more than a "name only" association with the Trinity; we are impregnated with the Spirit of their **love**, who comes to live within us to enable us to behave as God's family members. That means that we can now put our unwavering **faith** in God's promises, **hope** in heaven as our true home, and most importantly, love with the very love of God.

**A**ROUND A.D. 189 St. Irenaeus, who was a disciple of St. Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of the beloved Apostle St. John, wrote about the gift of divine sonship in his work titled *Against Heresies*: "**For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word, and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God**" (CCC 460).

CCC 1265

Ephesians 4:30  
2 Corinthians 1:22

CCC 1235, 1239

## Theological Virtues

**G**IFTS INFUSED into the soul by God at Baptism that supernaturally empower us to behave as God's children are:

- **faith**
- **hope**
- **love**—"the greatest of which is love"  
(1 Corinthians 13:13).

CCC 1266, 1812–29

<sup>2</sup> "Abba" is the Hebrew word for "Daddy," and it is the name we are instructed to call God in the New Covenant.