



# BAPTISM: THE FIRST STEP ON THE WAY

Read the essay below, then talk with your parents about Baptism.

As we have learned, Jesus' whole life gives us a model to follow. He allowed Himself to be baptized in order to point us toward the first step on the way to Heaven: Baptism. When we are baptized as Christians, all our sins are forgiven, including Original Sin, and God makes us His adopted children, restoring our inheritance as partakers in His divine life. We are no longer the lost descendants of Adam; we are children of God and part of His Church.

## Why Baptism?

Because Original Sin had damaged our nature so much, human beings would have to be made new. Jesus tells us in John 3:5, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." And nothing can be reborn without dying. For us to become a child of God, we have to die, too – not physically, of course, but spiritually. In the waters of Baptism, God gives us a spiritual death and rebirth. The word *baptize* even means "to plunge."

It is not only in Baptism that God has used water to make corrupted things new. The waters of Baptism are foreshadowed in the Old Testament stories we learned about in November. For example, in the Great Flood, God used water to flood the sinful world and make it new. He parted the waters of the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape from slavery and begin new lives as God's Chosen People. They had to cross the River Jordan before entering the Promised Land.

In Baptism, God also uses water to make corrupt things new: us. We are freed from the stain of Original Sin and are remade as children of God. This truth was revealed in Christ's own Baptism, detailed in the Gospels. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and the voice of God the Father spoke: "This is my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased." Even though we can't see it, this same thing happens at every Baptism. The Holy Spirit pours down, and the Father rejoices in His beloved child.

### Why Is Baptism Necessary?

But if Jesus restored our inheritance by dying on the Cross and rising again, why is there still a need for Baptism? Because Original Sin is real, and Jesus Himself gave us this Sacrament to forgive it. And He tells us clearly that Baptism is not just a suggestion: it is a requirement. He allowed Himself to be baptized, and before He ascended into Heaven, He commanded the Apostles to baptize people “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” For more than 2,000 years, Christians have administered this Sacrament, using the same words Jesus commanded his Apostles to use.

Like all the Sacraments, Baptism actually brings about what it represents – in this case, spiritual death and rebirth; forgiveness of sin, and the possibility of Heaven. That is one reason we baptize babies. There is no reason we should withhold God’s saving grace. And in case of necessity, anyone with

the right intention can baptize another person who wishes for it.

### Why Is There Still Sin?

So if Baptism forgives Original Sin and makes us children of God, why is there still evil and suffering in the world? And why do we still find it so hard to avoid sin?

Because Baptism *forgives* sin – it doesn’t *remove* it. We still live in a world that is broken, and our nature is still weak and wounded. Baptism makes it possible for us to go to Heaven, but we still need to cooperate with grace and live as children of God. That’s why even after we are baptized, it’s so important to spend time with God in prayer, to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and to strive to obey God’s commands.

Sin is the cause of death, yet Jesus had no sin: He gave himself freely up to death to make it possible for us to be united with God in Heaven for eternity.