

Baptism can be a challenging subject. The word has such a singularly religious connotation, peculiarly associated with a religious denomination and ritual, that we can lose its biblical, symbolic, and typological significance. Baptism, though, has such a central place in Christian faith that no Christian should lose sight of its significance.



Fortunately, the scriptures do more than record baptisms, including those of Jesus and, later in the Acts of the Apostles, of initiates to the new Christian faith. The scriptures also reveal baptism's typological significance, as the scriptures do with other central constructs. Indeed, the apostle Paul connects

baptisms in Christ with the Israelite's baptism into Moses in the cloud and the Red Sea. The scriptures leave no doubt that baptism involves a passage out of the slavery of sin, through a watery demise of that sin-enslaved entity, and up into a Spirit-immersed new birth in Christ. Baptism thus embodies either the whole of Christian salvation or enough of its whole to make baptism a sacrament or ordinance in nearly all Christian denominations.

Baptism's power, though, isn't solely its primacy among Christian sacramental and ritualistic practices. As a symbol carrying core Christian meaning, baptism also helps us look back to slavery and forward to the wilderness. As Christians, we need to remember that our flesh once bound us to the world's dead-end ways. We need to celebrate that Christ freed us from that bondage for the eternal life that lies ahead. Yet we also need to know that the wilderness follows our rebirth in new life through the parting of the seas. Immediately after their baptism, the Israelites wandered in Sinai's wilderness for forty years, just as Christ fasted in the wilderness for forty days. God's kingdom lies within us, but it also lies ahead. Christ is our victor, but our full redemption in Christ lies ahead. Baptism isn't simply a religious ritual. Baptism tells us of our road past and road ahead.