

And early Christian father, Hippolytus, wrote: “Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them” (The Apostolic Tradition 21:16 [A.D. 215]).

In the novel *The Life of Pi* the young child Pi finds himself curious about faith and visits many religious teachers. They each explain their beliefs and he finds himself practicing many different religions. His father who was cured of a disease by medical science demands that he should give up religious pursuits and trust in reason. His father, however, agrees that if he does have a religion he must choose one and that he should pick the most reasonable religion. He thinks about it for a moment and yells “I wish to be baptized!”

There is nothing we can do to earn God’s love or his grace. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. God incorporates us into his family as his adopted children when we are baptized. Christian parents, promising to raise their children in the practice of the faith and the love of the Lord, present their children in faith to the Church to receive baptism. Jesus taught us that we should bring our children to Him (Mark 10:13-14).

A Necessity for Salvation

Jesus himself said that you cannot enter into heaven without being baptized. The “Great Commission” is Jesus’ command to the apostles to go into the world and announce the Gospel. Its purpose is three fold: 1) bring about the conversion of every culture; 2) the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism; and 3) the transmission of everything Jesus taught.

“Baptism is necessary for salvation for those whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for the Sacrament”. The Church recognizes that it is possible that some people may never have the chance of hearing about Christ or being able to ask for baptism. “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of baptism, but he himself is not bound by His sacraments” (CCC 1257).

1. The Church has always believed that those who die for the sake of their faith before they have the chance to be baptized receive a “baptism of blood.” They are baptized by their death for the sake of Christ which brings about the same fruits as water baptism.
2. Those who show the explicit desire for baptism and the repentance of their sins but die before they can be baptized assures them salvation by the baptism of desire. It may also be that those who have no possible way of learning about Christ and follow their conscience and would have desired baptism should the Christian message have

- reached them, also may be saved.
3. Children who die before they are baptized are entrusted to the mercy of God. Jesus had a great tenderness for children. Since baptism is necessary for salvation, Christian parents should not delay in having their children baptized. Yet, it is also an affront to the mercy of God, who desires all men to be saved, to suggest that children who die due to miscarriage, violence, or some other reason would be denied eternal rest with Jesus and suffer the eternal fires of hell.

What are you Waiting For?

With the importance of baptism and the free gift of God for eternal salvation, what are you waiting for? Our evangelists would be happy to talk to you about taking the next step.

“After the foregoing instructions, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living [running] water. If you have no living water, then baptize in other water, and if you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Before baptism, let the one baptizing and the one to be baptized fast, as also any others who are able. Command the one who is to be baptized to fast beforehand for one or two days.” (Didache 7:1 [ca. A.D. 70]).

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Baptism: A New Creation



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Baptism: A New Creation

In the movie the *Last Samurai* U.S. Army captain Nathan Algren is recruited by his former commanding officer to go to Japan and train the Imperial Army in order to suppress a samurai rebellion. Algren reluctantly agrees to go for the money and is subsequently captured by the samurai when he and his soldiers are sent into battle too early. He becomes a prisoner, but one who is relatively free to move about and explore the village. He meets and befriends the leader of the rebellion, Katsunoto Moritsugu, who explains that he and his samurai oppose the westernization of their society. They want to maintain their own traditions and way of life. Algren ends up slowly integrating himself into the samurai culture, learning their martial techniques and their language. A brutal fight ensues and the Imperial Army ends up killing all of the samurai with Gatling guns. Algren is left wounded. Instead of returning to the West, Algren returns to the isolated mountain village of the samurai where he lives the rest of his life, caring for the widows and children. He is now “the last samurai.”

The movie shows the process of initiation into a new culture and family. Algren learns about the samurai, the people he was hired to fight against, and ends up fully initiated into their life. He essentially becomes a family member. This does not happen overnight or all at once. He goes through education, training, and rites of passage. He becomes curious about their way of life, becomes open to change, and finally takes on a samurai identity even though he was formally an outsider. After all, he is not even Japanese.

This is not unlike how people become Christians. None of us are God’s children by nature. Adults who decide to become Christians go through a journey that involves spending time in the community of faithful that they want to join. There is an opportunity to experience the life, activities, and worship of Christians. There are classes offered to learn what Christians believe. Through successive rites they enter more and more deeply into the Christian life. This can happen quickly, but usually takes at least a year. This journey includes the following stages:

- Listening to the proclamation of the Word of God,
- The acceptance of the Gospel leading to conversion,
- Making a profession of faith,
- Baptism,
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Confirmation),
- And admittance to the table of the Lord (the Eucharist).

When you graduate from college, get married, or change citizenship something about your identity changes. Upon receiving a diploma in an elaborate ceremony you are now an *alumnus* and a college graduate. Even

though you no longer take classes you are still part of the school’s family. Upon becoming a *citizen* of the United States, you take an oath and now have rights and responsibilities as a member of the country. Upon getting married you take vows and you create a new permanent *family* in which to beget and raise children. By doing so you serve the common good of society.

The Christian life is similar. When you are baptized, the character of your soul is changed, you receive an *indelible mark* on your soul that can never be erased. You become a member of God’s family.

Why do we need Baptism – a Biblical Perspective

If you have ever been to a football or baseball game you have probably seen someone holding up a sign with the words “John 3:16.” It is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17). Jesus was answering the questions of Nicodemus, a Pharisee (a teacher), about how someone can be born again.

A little earlier in that same chapter of the Bible Jesus said “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). St. Paul wrote that we are all born in a broken relationship with God called *original sin*. “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). Original sin is the absence of a relationship with God. Due to original sin and our actual sins – those offenses we commit against God and our neighbors – we have lost eternal life and cannot enter Heaven after death. Again St. Paul writes “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

New life is available to us because Jesus died on the cross for our salvation and rose from the dead three days later. Jesus is God. He made it possible for us to have our sins forgiven and become initiated into God’s family through adoption. That is what Jesus was talking about in John 3. We can become God’s family by being “born again” by water and the Spirit.

The Sacrament of Enlightenment

This Baptism is the gateway to life in the Holy Spirit (Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity) and the



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door through which all of the other Sacraments are received. You can receive these sacraments! A *sacrament* is a sign instituted by Jesus Christ to give us God’s life (called grace). Grace is always a gift of God, so baptism is a gift as well. The sign of baptism is the immersion of the person into water three times, or pouring water on their head three times with the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The water “symbolizes the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as ‘a new creature’” (CCC 1214). A catechumen is someone who presents himself or herself for baptism. St. Gregory of Nazianzus taught that our sins are buried in the water of baptism. Through baptism...

- Original sin is washed away and we are adopted as God’s children.
- All actual sins are forgiven.
- We receive sanctifying grace (called *justification*) and are freed from the slavery of sin. This freedom allows us to make moral decisions, live upright lives, and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life.
- We are made members of God’s family, the Church (the Body of Christ).
- We receive an indelible spiritual mark (our soul is changed).

Baptism “actually brings about death to sin and entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ” (CCC 1239). Woah. That means that every sin you ever committed against God or your neighbor is forgiven in baptism. It is washed away. God no longer remembers it.

Infant Baptism

After baptism you are *anointed* with oil signifying the gift of the Holy Spirit that you have received in you. That is why the Church even baptizes infants. “Having been born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God... The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth” (CCC 1250).

If baptism were our *own work* then it would not make sense to baptize infants since they cannot give their consent to baptism. Baptism is not only a testimony to faith in Christ, but the sacramental union to God’s family. Just as a child is born or sent to a particular family without their choosing, so too might they be reborn into the family of God by the faith of their parents. The Church is a family and that includes children.