

# The Sacraments

Lesson helps, resources, and  
activities for busy catechists



# The Seven Sacraments

**ABOUT THE SYMBOLS SHOWN HERE** Each icon on this page will have a brief description that you can share with others. As you page through this booklet, you'll see these symbols repeated for each of the seven chapters dedicated to the sacraments.



**BAPTISM:** The water drop dispersed by the shell represents the cleansing waters of Baptism. The shell has long alluded to baptism, as a vessel to pour water over a person's head in baptism. This icon alludes to an eight-sided baptismal font. In the Bible the number eight denotes a new creation or new order. It also is symbolic of resurrection and regeneration.

## Sacraments of Initiation

*In these sacraments, we meet Christ in profound ways and are initiated into the Christian life.*

**BAPTISM** offers forgiveness of original sin and gives graces to begin a new life with Christ and the Church. It is the first sacrament.

**CONFIRMATION** strengthens and deepens life in Christ and equips Christians with graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses for Christ.

**EUCCHARIST** is supernatural nourishment in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, to strengthen the Christian to follow Christ more closely.

**EUCCHARIST:** The host and chalice is representative of the Body and Blood of Christ. Here we also see the golden rays representing God's divine presence. The Cross reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus made for our salvation, through the offering of his Body and Blood on the Cross.



**CONFIRMATION:** The dove represents the coming of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist noted the Spirit's presence "descending like a dove" at Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:16). The golden rays suggest the Holy Trinity's power and presence.

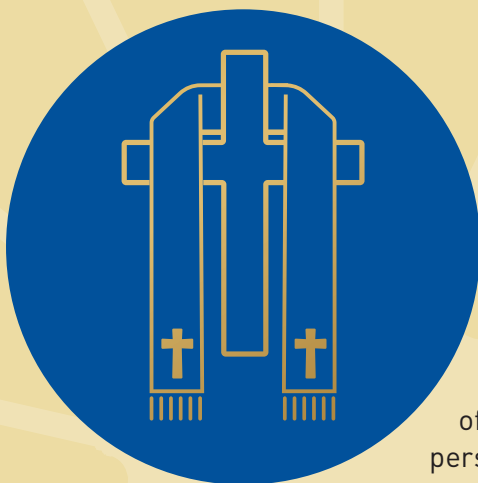
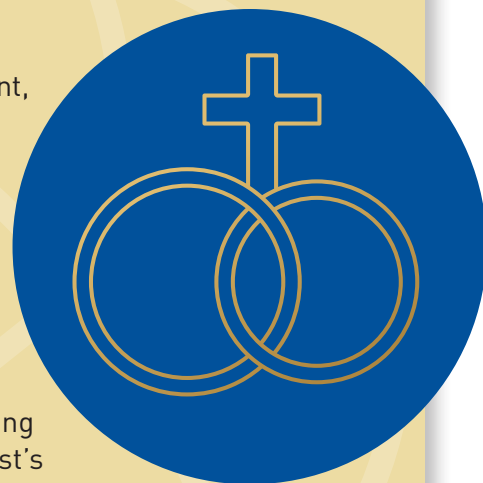


## Sacraments at the Service of Communion

### MATRIMONY & HOLY ORDERS

*are sometimes called sacraments of vocation. They call Christians to dedicate their lives both in communion with God and by loving service to others in specific ways.*

**MATRIMONY:** While the church's minister witnesses this sacrament, Matrimony is the only sacrament whereby the ministers of the sacrament are the couple themselves. The man and woman offer their free consent and vows, the joining of their hands and their lives with the exchange of rings. The wedding rings symbolize their vows of loving self-sacrifice, in imitation of Christ's love for the Church, as symbolized by the Cross in this icon.



**HOLY ORDERS:** This icon portrays the stole worn by priests in their ministry, especially for hearing confessions, praying the Mass, offering anointings, blessings, and other sacramental duties. The Cross is a reminder that a priest offers his ministry in persona Christi, as he is working as the person of Christ in his role in the sacraments offered through his words and actions.

**PENANCE/RECONCILIATION:** Jesus gave Peter and the Apostles the power to "bind" and "loose" (Mt. 16:19). This power includes forgiving sins and offering absolution. We receive those same graces through the ministry of priests, by entering the confessional (symbolized here) when we go to Confession.

## Sacraments of Healing

### PENANCE/RECONCILIATION &

**ANOIDING OF THE SICK** are sacraments through which Christians experience God's mercy and forgiveness of sins, as well as graces to help heal persons who may be suffering physically and/or spiritually.

**ANOIDING OF THE SICK:** This vessel of oil represents the Oil of the Sick. Traditionally, this sacramental anointing with holy oil is given near death, along with Viaticum, or final holy Communion. But it is also administered to the very sick in mind or body, or to persons infirm or elderly. It is both a healing and strengthening by Christ for what is to come.



# The Sacraments

Lesson helps, resources, and activities for busy catechists

## 6 Baptism

We Shall Draw Water Joyfully.....	7
Teaching Baptism.....	10
John the Baptist.....	13
The Beginning of Our Christian Journey.....	14
Baptism as the Bridge Between the Home and the Classroom .....	15

## 17 Confirmation

Sealed With the Gift of the Holy Spirit .....	18
Confirmation: Communicating the Message .....	22
St. Philip Neri .....	24
Awakening Faith and Conversation .....	25
The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit .....	26
Holy Spirit, Strengthen Us .....	30

## 31 Eucharist

May They Be One .....	32
The Source and Summit .....	35
A Quick Guide to Praying the Mass .....	36
Inspiring the Ultimate Encounter with Jesus .....	40
Teresa of Ávila .....	44
Preparing Kids for Their First (or 521 <sup>st</sup> ) Communion .....	45

## 47 Penance & Reconciliation

Penance and Reconciliation .....	48
“Bless me, Father, for I have no idea what I am doing” .....	54

Pio of Pietrelcina .....	57
Restoring Us to God’s Grace .....	58
Examination of Conscience Ideas .....	59
Forgive and Forget .....	61

## 62 Anointing of the Sick

Souls Reaching for Christ .....	63
Teaching About the Sacrament of the Sick .....	67
Maximilian Kolbe .....	71
‘That He May Raise Them Up and Save Them’ .....	72

## 73 Matrimony

The Beauty of the Church’s Vision of Marriage .....	74
Classroom Conversations about Marriage .....	78
Sts. Louis and Zelie Martin .....	82
‘And the Two Shall Become One’ .....	84
The Covenant of a Sacramental Marriage .....	85

## 86 Holy Orders

Holy Orders: The Mission of Christ Continues .....	87
God is Present with His People in His Priests .....	91
John Vianney .....	96
Living the Mission .....	97
Meet the Gaze of Jesus .....	98

**PfLAUM**  
PUBLISHING GROUP

Publisher: David Dziena

Creative Director: Ted Schluenderfritz

Editor: Pat Gohn

Editorial Assistant: Ciera Clivio

© 2023 Bayard, Inc. CATECHIST is a registered trademark of Bayard, Inc. Printed in the U.S.A. Unless otherwise indicated in this publication, no material may be reprinted or reproduced in any form without permission.

# Baptism

IS THE BASIS FOR THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN LIFE, the door to the other sacraments. Recipients are freed from sin and born anew as children of God, becoming members of the Church and sharers in its mission.

## KEY WORDS AND ACTIONS:

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," while pouring of water on the head, or via immersion.

## FIND IT IN THE BIBLE:

*"Go ... make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit."* – MATTHEW 28:19-20

Also: Mt 3:11-17; Mk 1:4-5;

16:16; Lk 3:16; Acts 2: 38-

41; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3: 27;

Eph 4:5

**TO BAPTIZE** means "to plunge" or "immerse."

## THE GRACES GIVEN:

\* *Forgiveness of original sin, all personal sins, and all punishment for sin.*

\* *New life — "a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17) — as an adopted child of God, a co-heir with Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit.*

\* *The theological virtues to believe, hope, and love God.*

\* *Power to follow the Spirit's prompting, grow in goodness, and develop in the spiritual life.*

\* *Membership in the Body of Christ, the Church.*

\* *Anointed to share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission.*

## MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENT:

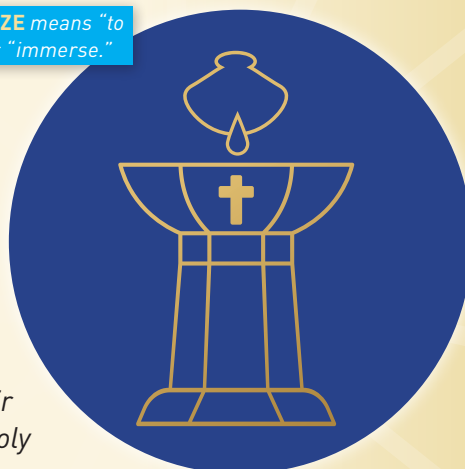
**Priest or deacon.** In dire necessity, any person can baptize using the key words and actions above. (See CCC, 1284.)

## SIGNS:

**Water** = cleansing from sin; new life

**White Garment** = rising with Christ, or "clothed" with Christ (Gal 3:27)

**Candle** = the light of Christ; the newly baptized are "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14)



**IN THE CATECHISM:**  
CCC, 1213-1284

**BAPTISM IS ONLY GIVEN ONCE.**





# We Shall Draw Water Joyfully

*Baptism and the catechist* By Jonathan F. Sullivan

“**T**he God of power and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin and brought you to new life through water and the Holy Spirit.” With these words, spoken to the neophytes immediately after their Baptism at the Easter Vigil, the Church professes our belief in the unique power of the sacrament of Baptism.

Baptism has a special significance for catechists, since the truth it bears — salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus — is the faith we proclaim in our teaching. Understanding our Baptism — and drawing on its graces as a source of inspiration and strength — is a necessity for all who proclaim the Catholic faith to others.

## Baptism in sacred Scripture

In the Old Testament, Baptism is prefigured by a number of familiar stories, many of which are mentioned in the blessing of the baptismal water during the Easter Vigil. The Church has long seen in Noah's ark a symbol of baptism, for through the ark humanity was saved through the water. That these flood waters also contained death connects the mystery of Baptism to the mystery of the cross.

The flight of the Israelites through the Red Sea is another Old Testament image of Baptism. In this case, by passing through the waters, the people are saved from death so they might find the freedom to worship God on the other side. (That the Israelites almost immediately turn to the Golden Calf shows the need for ongoing repentance and conversion, even after Baptism!) In the crossing of the Red Sea, we see God's promise of liberation from captivity and death made manifest, a promise that is renewed and extended to all people in the gift of Baptism.

The Jewish law in the Old Testament also prescribed various cleansings and purifications as part of various religious and cultural rituals. For instance, Jewish law prescribed ritual washings before the Passover, for certain animal sacrifices, and for priests before certain rituals. In all of these we see a prefigurement of our Christian understanding of Baptism — the cleansing of impurity through water.

Baptism finds its highest point in the Scriptures in Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist. Being without sin, Jesus did not need to submit to the purification of Baptism, yet he nevertheless chose to symbolize his union with humanity by receiving John's Baptism. In his Baptism we also see the life of the Trinity made manifest: The Father declares the identity of the Son and anoints him with the Holy Spirit. It is into this life that we, too, are inaugurated at our Baptism.

## The nature and effects of Baptism

Baptism, along with Confirmation and the Eucharist, is one of the Sacraments of Initiation. Indeed, it is the first sacramental step a person takes on their

journey to full membership in the Church. As such Baptism lays the foundation for the Christian life. It is "the gateway to life in the Spirit ... and the door which gives access to the other sacraments" (CCC, 1213).

Baptism has retained throughout the centuries its essential nature and form: a triple immersion (or pouring of water over the candidate's head) accompanied by the words "[Name], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (see Matthew 28:19). While bishops, priests, and, in the West, deacons are the ordinary ministers of Baptism, anyone — including a non-baptized person — can baptize in an emergency, as long as they follow the proper form and carry the Church's intention for Baptism (see CCC, 1256).

As the first of the sacraments received by the faithful, Baptism carries with it a host of effects and graces. First is the cleansing of original sin. In the Nicene Creed that we recite at Mass on most Sundays, we proclaim that we "believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins." In the waters of Baptism, we find the complete remission of all sins which came before. The *Catechism* reminds us that, after our Baptism, there

remains "absolutely nothing left to efface, neither original sin nor offenses committed by our own will, nor was there left any penalty to suffer in order to expiate them" (CCC, 978). The forgiveness that comes from Baptism is perfect and complete — such is the gracious gift of God's mercy.

That is not to say that Christians cannot be tempted or fall back into sin, nor does Baptism remove the temporal consequences of original sin such as suffering and death. The entire Christian life is a training in the virtues and growth in holiness! But Baptism does give us the grace needed to fight the good fight and keep the faith so one day we will enjoy the heavenly banquet (see 2 Timothy 4:7).

Through Baptism we participate in the Paschal Mystery — the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. As St. Paul so powerfully proclaims, "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Timothy 2:11). This phrase may have been part of an early Christian hymn, testifying to the early belief in Baptism's effects: through the

**Baptism lays the foundation for the Christian life. ... "the gateway to life in the Spirit" (CCC, 1213).**





water we “die” to our old, sinful self and “rise” to life renewed by the resurrection.

In Baptism we also participate in the threefold ministry of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. These three offices — the highest in the Old Testament — find their perfection in the person of Jesus, for he perfectly fulfills their duties. As priest, Jesus offers perfect sacrifices and prayers, culminating with his death on the cross. As prophet, Jesus preaches God’s Word and calls people to repentance and right relationship with the Father. As king, Jesus exercises dominion over heaven and earth, ordering all things.

Baptism is also the first sacrament of communion with the body of Christ. During the Baptism of infants, the priest or deacon greets the parents and child at the entrance of the church, proclaiming that “the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Savior.” While this communion with the Church Universal will find its perfection in the Eucharist, it is through Baptism that we belong to the Christian community and enter into the life of the Church.

## Baptism and catechists

The aim of catechesis is to form others in an explicit and life-changing faith in Jesus Christ. The *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that “Baptism, the sacrament by which ‘we are configured to Christ,’ sustains this work of catechesis with the help of its grace” (*GDC*, 80). Through our Baptism we have been given the gift of faith and charged with sharing it with others.

Catechists can draw on the grace and power of their Baptism in a number of ways. First, remember that, through our Baptism, we are connected to the

entire Body of Christ. As such, we do not teach on our own authority, but by the authority of the Church that has been entrusted to us by virtue of our catechetical

ministry. Catechists should take care to pass on the faith as it has been handed to us — not to give our own opinion divorced from what has been revealed by God through Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. Our Baptism should compel us to continually deepen our knowledge of and love for our Catholic faith through study, ongoing formation, and prayer.

In order to fulfill our vocation, catechists also draw on the threefold ministry of Christ into which we have been baptized. As lay participants in the common priesthood (as opposed to the sacramental or ministerial priesthood), we both pray for our students and lead them in prayer. As prophets, we teach the faith and proclaim God’s Word, teaching others to know the Scriptures and God’s plan of salvation. And as kings, we organize lesson plans, manage our classrooms, and communicate with parents in order to maintain an orderly catechetical program. (For more on this, read “Priest, Prophet, and King as a Way of Life” on page 32.)

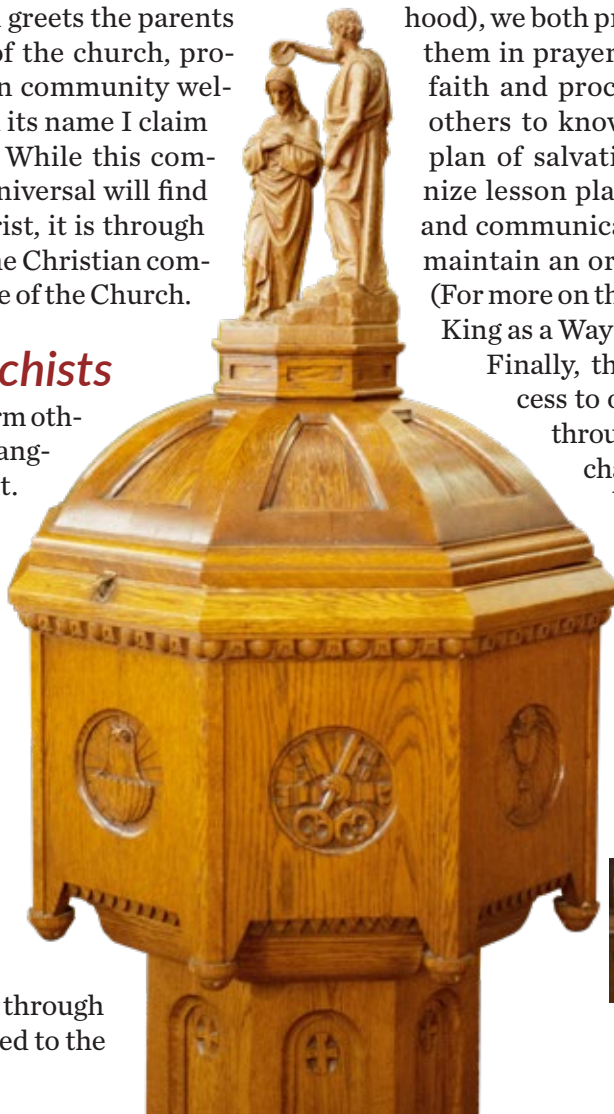
Finally, through Baptism we have access to our advocate, the Holy Spirit, through whom we have been given charisms (spiritual gifts) for the benefit of others. When catechesis is enlivened by the Holy Spirit, it transcends mere education and becomes an encounter with the living God. Never be afraid to call on the Holy Spirit for strength and grace!



**JONATHAN F. SULLIVAN** serves as the director of parish ministries, services, and catechesis for the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana. He blogs

at [JonathanFSullivan.com](http://JonathanFSullivan.com).

**Baptism finds its highest point in the Scriptures in Jesus’ encounter with John the Baptist.**





# Teaching Baptism

By William O'Leary

## Lesson ideas and tips

**E**xperience isn't the best teacher when it comes to teaching Baptism to children and young people (and most adults). How can you help those you are catechizing understand the importance of Baptism when they can't even remember the day?

This article will provide ideas on what and how to catechize about Baptism, enhancing its meaning and value to children.

Three key realities ought to be at the center of our catechesis of Baptism, undergirding all that we teach about this sacrament.

**1.** Baptism makes us children of God — adopted sons and daughters of God.

**2.** Baptism washes away original sin, frees us from the power of darkness, and makes us children of the light. We become new creations who are born again through the waters of Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

**3.** Baptism brings us into God's family, the Church, where we become members and partakers of the divine life of God through his gift of grace.

How can we teach children about the most precious of gifts that identifies all who have received it as belonging to Jesus Christ? Regardless of the age group, the more we can teach by using concrete objects and symbols, the more engaging and memorable will our catechesis on Baptism be. Consider the following points by age groupings when catechizing:

**Kindergarten through third grade** (Most of this material will work with these grades; although there is a lot of text, note that your participants should be doing some moving and not merely sitting still — especially if you can go to the church for instruction.)

■ Note the Scriptural basis for Baptism: Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16.

■ Share that, at Baptism, God's special light comes into our lives, and we become children of God. This is one of the most special days of our lives. Ask students what their parents have told them about their Baptism.

■ Tell the story of how a long time ago God's people lived in darkness because of sin in the world (see Isaiah 9:2).

■ If you are in church, show them the baptismal font. If you are not in church, show them a picture.

■ If possible, show them the paschal candle (if in a classroom, bring a smaller version

of the paschal candle (or a picture of it) to allow the children to see and even hold it.

■ Tell them about the paschal candle and how it was lit on Easter. This light reminds us of Jesus.

■ Point out and explain the symbols that are on the paschal candle: alpha, omega, cross, number for the current year. You will find a great visual explanation at [CATmag.us/2Xu2klA](http://CATmag.us/2Xu2klA) that you can download and print.

**Baptism washes away original sin, frees us from the power of darkness, and makes us children of the light.**



■ Share the other important items used at Baptism — the white garment, the baptismal candle, the sacred oils of catechumens, and the oil of chrism. Perhaps you can get a priest or deacon to show you the oils in the church, where the children can smell the oils. If not, you can show them a picture. Go to [CATmag.us/2WfsRS6](http://CATmag.us/2WfsRS6) for a visual depiction.

■ Ask them: “What does water remind us of?”

■ Illustrate the following first, and then have each of your students imitate you individually. Have each child take his or her left fist (symbolizing their heads when they were babies), and over a large bowl, let them say their name and the words of Baptism. Instruct them to pour the water over their fists with their right hand. “N\_\_\_\_, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

■ Tell them God has called each of us by name. Remind them of the importance of the first time that the priest, deacon or bishop said their name, at Baptism.

■ Share with them that at the moment they were baptized, they became different. God came very close to them, making them new creatures in Christ and a light to the whole world.

■ Explain the following:

◆ **Baptism oils** There are two oils used at Baptism (at a minimum have a picture). Share:

- ▶ The oil of catechumens was applied before you were baptized. The Sign of the Cross was made on your chest by the priest or deacon. It is a sign of strength and protection.
- ▶ The second oil, the oil of chrism, is used by the priest after you were baptized. This perfumed oil is a sign of gladness, thanksgiving, and celebration.
- ▶ The oils tell us about what the Holy Spirit does in our life. His grace strengthens and protects us and brings us joy and gladness. Communicate: This happens at our Baptism, but also every day as we remember that wonderful moment of becoming part of God’s family!



## ◆ Water

- ▶ What is water used for? It is absolutely necessary to sustain life for all living things — animals, plants, and us.
- ▶ It is a sign of new life and becoming clean.

## ◆ Baptismal font

- ▶ Ask: At our church, where is the baptismal font? Communicate: Fonts come in all different sizes — some look like a little dome which symbolizes a womb (like when a mom is pregnant). Out of that womb comes new life. Others are larger in the form of a cross or tomb into which one goes down and comes back up — rising to new life.

## ◆ Special gesture over the water

- ▶ The priest or deacon prays over the water before a baby is baptized.
- ▶ The Holy Spirit comes over the water, and soon that water is poured over a baby’s head.

## ◆ White garment

- ▶ It symbolizes purity — we put on Christ as a new creation.
- ▶ It helps us to understand that what appears on the outside is what has happened on the inside.

## ◆ Candle

- ▶ At your Baptism, you were given a candle lit from the paschal candle.
- ▶ This symbolizes that you are the light of the world.

■ Conclude by having them renew their Baptismal Promises. See [CATmag.us/2IhLwI8](http://CATmag.us/2IhLwI8) to find a copy of them.

## Other tips/aids for this age group:

- Show part or all of the DVD *Born into the Kingdom* from [BrotherFrancis.com](http://BrotherFrancis.com).
- Some valuable worksheets can be found at [TeachersPayTeachers.com](http://TeachersPayTeachers.com) or [CATmag.us/317X6xP](http://CATmag.us/317X6xP).

## Fourth to sixth grades

Remember to allow Scripture to be the driving force

of your lesson: Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16.

Do you ever use the rites themselves to catechize? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it beautifully when it says in paragraph 1074:

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows." It is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the People of God. "Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men." [*Catechesi Tradendae*, 23]

Use the Rite of Baptism (found here: [CATmag.us/2QMwGs7](http://CATmag.us/2QMwGs7)) to catechize about Baptism.

■ Using the Rite is a great way to show young people the gift of Baptism and its importance. It's a very valuable and engaging way to talk about Baptism.

■ Consider giving roles to different students and doing a "mock Baptism."

■ Follow-up questions:

◆ **Share** what the priest asks of parents.

◆ **Ask:** Do you know that your parents made a commitment to raise you as a faith-filled Catholic throughout your life? The priest told them: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

▶ Discuss these two responsibilities of parents:

- ◆ To train you in the practice of the faith.
- ◆ To help you keep God's commandments as Christ taught us by loving God and neighbor.

▶ Share: Your godparents also were asked if they were willing to accept the duty and responsibility of helping your parents raise you in the faith.

◆ **Share:** The priest says these amazing words in the name of the Christian community: "I claim you for Christ, our Saving Lord, by the sign of the cross" (which is then traced on your forehead by the priest and then by your parents and godparents).

- ▶ What does it mean to be claimed for Christ?
- ▶ Emphasize how important the Sign of the Cross is and how the priest, your parents, and godparents claimed you for Christ by this sign.

◆ **Then each of us is baptized in the name** of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our lives have not been the same since.

◆ **Conclude** by talking about the meaning of the sacred oils, the baptismal garment, and the candle.

### Other possible resources:

■ Baptism videos: [CATmag.us/2KsIrRa](http://CATmag.us/2KsIrRa) or [CATmag.us/2IjrEUO](http://CATmag.us/2IjrEUO)

■ Explanation of the paschal candle and its importance: [CATmag.us/2Xu2kIA](http://CATmag.us/2Xu2kIA) or [CATmag.us/2wCz9AU](http://CATmag.us/2wCz9AU)

### Some ideas for seventh to twelfth grades

■ Baptism is the door to the spiritual life. A short video by Bishop Barron is shared here: [CATmag.us/2HYSwL7](http://CATmag.us/2HYSwL7).

■ At [CATmag.us/2HWeCxC](http://CATmag.us/2HWeCxC) Busted Halo has a video about Baptism.

■ Share how Baptism imprints an indelible mark upon the soul. Emphasize how this invisible reality speaks of the truth that we belong to Christ and our identity as followers of Christ is in him.

■ It is useful for this age group to talk about the Rite of Baptism (see above).

■ Visit [CATmag.us/2XmzfII](http://CATmag.us/2XmzfII) for a question-and-answer video on infant Baptism.

Baptism is a Sacrament of Initiation. It is — *hopefully!* — the beginning of our long and fruitful journey as disciples of Jesus Christ. Since most of us were infants when we were baptized, we may not have learned the important signs and symbols by which the sacrament works in us. This is the most important reason for instructions about the purpose, effects, and value of this sacrament.



**WILLIAM O'LEARY** lives in Kansas with his wife and three children. He is the Director of Religious Formation for a large parish in Overland Park, Kansas. Over the last 20 years, his work in pastoral ministry has explored ways to draw parents and their children into the practice of their faith. His blog is [RelevantCatechesis.com](http://RelevantCatechesis.com).





# John the Baptist

BARBARA YOFFIE

**E**xemplifying the sacrament of Baptism is the great preacher and prophet John the Baptist, an obvious choice. Through his preaching and teaching, John challenged the crowds to turn away from sin and be baptized as a symbol of repentance.

Most importantly, John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon him as a dove, strengthening Jesus for his public ministry. The Holy Spirit comes to us at our Baptism and again at Confirmation when we are empowered to be witnesses to the faith of the Church.

## John's life

God chose John for an important mission. This evangelist led others to Jesus, the Messiah. He is known as the forerunner of Jesus. His words were powerful and life-changing.

John challenged everyone to repent and make up for sinful behavior. His message included sharing what you have, being fair with one another, and reaching out to the poor and vulnerable.

After challenging King Herod Antipas to live a moral lifestyle,

the king got angry at John and put him in prison. He was eventually put to death.

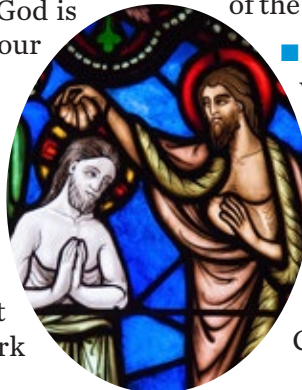
## Saint activities

■ What do you think God is calling you to do with your life?

■ Discuss ways you can lead people to Jesus.

■ Read about the life of John the Baptist in the New Testament (Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 6:17-29; Luke 1:57, 66).

■ Look for ways you can help people in your community and reach out to those in need.



## The sacrament of Baptism

The Church invites everyone, infants through adults, to be baptized. Baptism, a Sacrament of Initiation, is the first sacrament we receive. We become adopted children of God and are welcomed into the Church.

The cleansing waters of Baptism give new life in Christ. Baptism washes away original sin and personal sin. We are given the grace to grow in faith and holiness.

The anointing with holy oil signifies the Holy Spirit and enables us to share in the mission of the Church.

The sacrament of Baptism can be received only once, for it leaves an indelible spiritual mark on the soul. It is an occasion of great joy and celebration for families and the Church.

## Sacrament activities

■ Research the symbols used during the rite of Baptism: water, holy oil, white garment, candle.

■ Think about your baptismal call each time you make the Sign of the Cross with holy water.

■ Look at pictures or videos with your family and share memories about your Baptism.

■ What can a young person do to show membership in the Church?

## Take-home activities

In addition to celebrating your birthday, celebrate your Baptism and entry into the Church! Commemorate the day with a special meal or dessert.

Honor St. John the Baptist on one or both of his feast days, June 24 and August 29. Ask for his intercession to help you grow in faith and for the courage to defend the teachings of the Church.

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

*(first century)*

**Feast days:** June 24 (Birth) and August 28 (Martyrdom)

**Patron saint of** Baptism and converts

**Read more:** Luke 7:18-35



**BARBARA YOFFIE, MRE**, is a director of religious education and saint enthusiast. She is the author of the *Saints and Me!* series from Liguori Publications.



# The Beginning of Our Christian Journey

*Help students connect with their own Baptisms*

LYNN WEHNER

**W**e begin this year of studying the sacraments at the only place that truly makes sense: with the sacrament of Baptism. Baptism is first and foundational. It is where it all begins for our Christian journey. And it is where our students will find their home and their purpose.

Baptism is nothing less than “the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.” Through it “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” (CCC, 1213).

So let’s look back at the early Church to better understand what it is to be baptized into the family of God and to hear his call to invite and welcome others to be a part of it.

## From the Word

*Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them*

*to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

## Class discussion

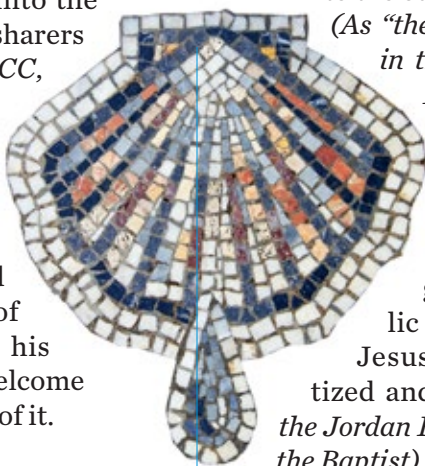
- Why is Baptism called the “door” to the other sacraments?

*(As “the gateway to life in the Spirit” [CCC, 1213], it must be received in order to access the others.)*

- When he began his public life, where was Jesus himself baptized and by whom? *(in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist)*

- Through Baptism, we become children of God. What does that mean to you?

- This Bible passage from the Gospel of Matthew captures what the Church calls “The Great Commission.” What is Jesus asking us to do?



## Activities

**1. Remember when.** Ask each student to bring in and share a photo — and any other sacramentals, such as a baptismal candle or white garment — from their Baptism day. Bring in your own, as well. These sacramentals are powerful touchpoints that help to tell the life-changing story of the day we all became Christians!

**2. Celebrate!** Having a classroom celebration for all of your students’ Baptism day anniversaries holds countless possibilities! Make a cake shaped like a dove — or white cupcakes, with each student’s baptismal date written in icing. Play Pictionary or Bingo using symbols of Baptism. Ask your priest or deacon to share beautiful stories about Baptisms they have celebrated. Give students bottles of holy water. Send home an inspirational reminder to celebrate family baptismal days throughout the year.

Baptism welcomes us into the Church and imprints an indelible mark on our soul. Through this first sacrament, we have become nothing less than children of God, blessed with a share in his kingdom. How will we lead each of our students to understand they belong to Jesus — and what that means for how they are called to live? An exciting year stretches before us.



**LYNN WEHNER** is a Catholic writer, editor, speaker, and catechist who lives with her husband and their children in Connecticut.



# Baptism as the Bridge Between the Home and the Classroom

*4 ideas to help students and parents*

JARED DEES



**A**t an infant's Baptism, parents and godparents affirm an important responsibility:

"You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?" (FROM THE RITE OF BAPTISM)

As catechists we act as members of the Christian community to welcome these baptized children and assist the parents and godparents in their mission to train them in the practice of the faith. Many catechists have found that some parents lack the wholehearted commitment to this responsibility, however. Some parents do not bring their children regularly to Mass or do not support the formation of faith at home through prayer and discussion.

No matter what age you teach, a focus on Baptism at the

beginning of the year can be a great way to bridge the gap between your Christian mission in the classroom and the family mission at home. Try using the following ideas to teach your students and their parents about the importance of their Baptism.

## Celebrate Baptisms like birthdays

Have your students find out the day of their Baptism from their parents. Parents can look through their personal records

or go so far as to contact the parish where their child was baptized in order to obtain a copy of their baptismal certificate (something they will likely have to do anyway for their children to receive their sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation).

Commit to celebrating Baptism days each week or month with a special recognition for each child throughout the year. Sing a rendition of the birthday song, substituting "happy birthday" with "happy Baptism day." Bring in a special gift or handwritten card for the student and give them a special sticker, hat, or desk decoration to recognize their day.

The point is to express how important their Baptism was in their life of faith. On their Baptism day, they became a new creation. They became adopted sons and daughters of God. They were reborn as family members of Christ's Church. This was the





single greatest day of their life, whether they remember it or not.

As a bonus, invite the parents to share the date of their own Baptism, and remember to send them short emails or notes of celebration throughout the year.

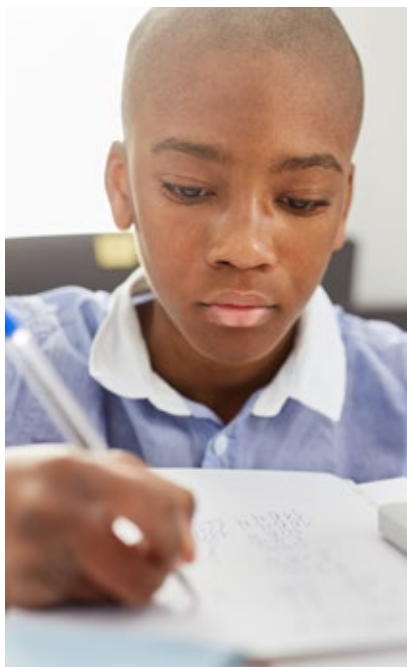
## Godparent letters

Some of your students will have close relationships with their godparents, while others might barely know them. Help your class bridge that gap and invite your students to write letters to their godparents to tell them about what they are learning this year and to ask for their prayers.

This activity will be a nice reminder to these men and women about the commitment they made to support the parents in the training of the children in the practice of their faith. Those extra prayers from the godparents will certainly help throughout the year, too!

## Renew baptismal promises

Invite the parents to come in to class for a short prayer service allowing everyone to renew their baptismal promises. This can be a very special moment for both parents and their children. Standing side by side, the parents will echo the words they spoke on behalf of their infant children. Now these children are able to speak these words of affirmation themselves. This act of prayer will solidify the entire family's commitment to faith, but it also will remind parents of their responsibility to form the faith of their children today.



## Align your mission with the effects of Baptism

How do you want your students to have changed through your class by the end of the year? Try aligning your vision for the end of the year with the effects of Baptism by asking these questions:

- Will they have a greater appreciation for God's mercy and forgiveness?
- Will they see themselves as children of God?
- Will they feel a closer connection to the Church, the Body of Christ?
- Will they feel a deeper sense of unity with their fellow students and fellow Christians?
- Will they proudly bear the spiritual mark of being a Christian?

Ultimately, the effects of Baptism are the goals we reinforce through our work of faith formation. May we strive to serve parents and their children this year in the mission to love God and neighbor.



**JARED DEES** is the founder of *TheReligionTeacher.com* and the author of *Christ in the Classroom: Lesson Planning for the Heart and Mind*, which helps develop lessons that lead students into an encounter with Christ.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

- Being drawn into the life of the Blessed Trinity is the purpose for the grace of the sacraments and a critical goal of catechesis. [catechist.com/baptism-confirmation-full-life-trinity/](https://catechist.com/baptism-confirmation-full-life-trinity/)
- Discussion starters to help explore the Sacrament of Baptism [catechist.com/baptism-belonging-god/](https://catechist.com/baptism-belonging-god/)
- A prayer service for those preparing for baptism [catechist.com/baptism-celebrate-new-life/](https://catechist.com/baptism-celebrate-new-life/)
- How to decorate and arrange your learning space and prayer table with a Baptism theme [catechist.com/your-space-the-waters-of-baptism/](https://catechist.com/your-space-the-waters-of-baptism/)
- Baptism is more than the washing away of original sin [catechist.com/baptism-more-than-washing-away-original-sin/](https://catechist.com/baptism-more-than-washing-away-original-sin/)