

## Baptism

### Overview

Baptism is one of the 7 Sacraments and can be said to be the “first” of them since Baptism initiates a person into the other sacraments.



### What is Baptism?

Baptism comes from the Greek word “*baptzein*” which mean to plunge or immerse. It is the central rite where the catechumen’s “plunge” symbolizes Christ’s death and resurrection as a new creature (CCC#1214). The Catechism – paragraphs 1213 through 1264 – discusses this in great detail and we will attempt to summarize it here.

Everyone with the exception of Jesus and His mother Mary were born with Original Sin. During our lives – prior to a Baptism - we also create our own personal sins. Both Original Sin and personal sin are cleansed away in the waters of baptism.

The act of baptism is performed using holy water and the Trinitarian formula. That is, the minister pours water over the head of the person and recites the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

### What is the history of baptism?

Scripture is full of direct and indirect references to baptism and using water as the media. The Old Testament uses the word water 567 times showing the importance of water. In passages such as Leviticus 8:6 “*Bringing forward Aaron and his sons, he first washed them with water.*” we can see a prefiguring of baptism. When the Israelites crossed the river Jordan it is seen as a gift from God and an image of the promise eternal life. This promise is fulfilled in the New Covenant. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan – not that he needed salvation – but as a gesture of His self-emptying (CCC#1224).

### Who can baptize?

Firstly, the ordinary ministers - the Bishop, Priest and the Deacon (in the Latin Church) are those who are commissioned to baptize – as ordained ministers. Secondly, in an emergency any person – whether baptized or not – can baptize if he has the required intention. Thirdly there is the baptism of intent which means that if a person wanted to be baptized but was not able to receive it due to circumstances such as death, is baptized by his intentions. (CCC#1256)

### The celebration of Baptism

When baptism is celebrated as a rite the faithful are initiated into the riches of the sacrament. It begins with the sign of the cross and proclamation of the Word. The baptismal water is consecrated during the Easter Vigil and is the same water present in the entrance of the church. When we dip our fingers into the water and make the sign of the cross we recall our own baptism. The celebration also includes anointing with sacred Chrism oil which also was consecrated during Holy Week. The faithful may wear a white garment – symbolizing that he has “put on Christ” and has risen with Christ.