

The Symbols of Baptism

Baptism invites us to “symbol-see”—to look beyond the surface to explore with our hearts and minds the meaning of the Sacrament. The ceremony uses community, the water, the font, the oil, the candle and the white baptismal robe to enrich our understanding.



THE COMMUNITY is a primary symbol. Baptism welcomes the child into the community of faith, the People of God. The community promises to support the child and the parents in the faith journey begun in Baptism. Involvement in the community makes that support stronger and richer. It gives us an opportunity for service, the mission of all of us who are baptized in Christ. The Godparents represent the community of faith.



THE WATER is the symbol most closely associated in our minds with the Sacrament of Baptism. Water is the chosen symbol because it is so important to our lives. Our bodies are largely water; it is the essence of our survival. We are all refreshed by images of cool, flowing water. Rain brings life and growth to parched lands. On the other hand, floods bring destruction and sometimes death. Water is a powerful symbol that speaks of the power of Baptism in our lives. Water changes everything it touches. The water symbol also takes us back to our biblical roots in the Old Testament. Listen to the wonderful water words from the ceremony:

At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness.

The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of Baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness.

Through the waters of the Red Sea you led Israel out of slavery, to be an image of God's Holy People, set free from sin by Baptism.

In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit.

Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side as he hung upon the Cross.

Baptism by immersion in flowing water most clearly signifies the immersion of the newly baptized into the death and life of Christ. It also powerfully reminds us of the resurrection to new life that we share with the risen Christ. The water, blessed at the Easter Vigil, emphasizes this relationship.



THE FONT or place of Baptism is a focal point in the church. An immersion font represents the tomb of Christ from which he rose to new life and from which we are reborn. When placed near an entrance to the church, the font reminds us that it is through Baptism that

we entered the Church. A font with flowing water displays the refreshing and life-giving qualities of water.



OIL, an ancient symbol, is ever new. It heals, nourishes, energizes, beautifies. In the baptismal ceremony, two different oils are used to signify that God will always be present to strengthen, heal and make beautiful. In Old Testament times, leaders of the Israelites were anointed with precious oil. This anointing distinguished them as spiritual or political leaders. Anointing identifies the child with Jesus Christ, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism in the River Jordan.



“Let there be light,” is our first introduction to our Creator in the book of Genesis in the Bible. The history of all of us is a history of light and darkness. We are born out of the dark womb of our mothers into the light of life. Our lives develop in cycles of light times and dark times, just as our days do. Fire and light bring us comfort, energy, and vision.

Christ is called the Light of the World, freeing us from the darkness of sin and doubt. The **EASTER CANDLE** is a prominent symbol of Christ. It is the Easter Candle which is immersed in the baptismal waters at Easter Vigil to bless them. In the baptismal ceremony a **CANDLE**, lighted from the Easter candle, is presented to the family and Godparents:

This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He(she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he(she) keep the flame of faith alive in his(her) heart.



The final symbol of the ceremony is the **WHITE BAPTISMAL ROBE OR GARMENT**. It serves as a symbol of the new dignity of the child as a child of God. It is, like the candle, another symbol of the illumination of faith.

All of these symbols contribute to our understanding of the power of Baptism to transform us. Each of these symbols is a part of our human experience reminding us of our rebirth in Christ.

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