

How Does Baptism Change Us?

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During the Litany of the Saints at the Easter Vigil, the bishop invited Jenifer and her family to come to the font. This mother and her children had been awaiting Baptism for nearly two years. Jennifer decided she would go first, to show the children (ages eight to fifteen) how she would enter the waters into which they would follow. After the Blessing of the Water, the bishop helped her into the large, deep baptismal font. He then stepped in himself. All of a sudden, the smallest child ran to the bishop, waving his finger and exclaiming, “Do not drown my mom!” The bishop was quite surprised. He reassured this child that he would not drown the mother. Then, turning to the assembly, the bishop said, “Did everyone hear that? He gets what Baptism is about—death, but also, we need to add, new life.” Then, the mother was baptized, followed by her children, and, of course, the most eager to be baptized, the young boy.

This story illustrates the power of sacramental symbols to evoke meaning at a deeply human or cosmic level. The child’s experience of water meant that he knew the destructive quality of water—it can unleash floods or quench one’s breath in drowning. But there is another side to water—it sustains life. The human body needs water to stay alive, specifically for the continual activity of the cells within the human body. The production of food requires water. Life at its fundamental is dependent on water. Baptism changes us to see the human and the cosmic as imbued with life-giving and death-wielding power.

DYING AND RISING

But there is also a theological significance to water. The theological meaning is tied to death and life, but particularly to the life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ Jesus. His life, Death, and Resurrection give meaning to Baptism. The baptized enter cosmically and bodily into the very life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. The blessed water ritually cleanses the person, provides access to Christ’s renewed life, and gives entrance into the Body of Christ, the Church. From the waters of Baptism, one receives the Holy Spirit, is washed clean from sin, and is renewed in the life and mission of Christ, a life and mission the Church promises to serve. Baptism changes us in such a way we are given a new mission, a new calling, and a new body because of the work of Christ’s Spirit in the font.

The anointing that may go along with the Baptism is also tied to Christ’s life, which is given in Baptism.



Baptism immerses us in Christ’s person and mission.

St. Augustine remarked that the anointing with the Cross, a symbol of Christ’s Death and life, is tied to the person and mission of Christ. (The word *Christ* is Greek for *anointed one*.) To be anointed, therefore, is to be marked a Christian, a person dedicated and joined to the person and mission of Christ.

These baptismal waters are sometimes referred to as waters of regeneration. The waters not only drown our old selves but regenerate, or recreate, us into disciples of Christ. If Baptism immerses us into Christ’s person and mission, the rest of life is potentially a response to that baptismal call. Each day we are to discern how we might live as Christ. Baptism changes not only how we see the world but how we live according to Christ’s mission.