

Baptism!

Today's Gospel introduces us to a very important person from the Bible's New Testament—John the Baptist, who some folks refer to as John the Baptizer. John was important because he was the prophet who heralded the coming of Jesus. He went about baptizing all who would “repent” and join him at the Jordan River.

Even today at Assumption, we are baptized by water as we receive His Holy Spirit so that we might radiate our faith to people who need God's light. Infants and catechumens (adults seeking baptism) are baptized to welcome them into the Catholic faith and to free them from the original sin with which they were born. To the Catholic Church, original sin isn't a personal sin, but a sin transmitted from generation to generation by birth. Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns the baptized toward God.

Infant Baptisms usually take place on Sundays, during the parish Mass or in the early afternoon after all the Masses are over. Adult Baptisms usually take place at the Easter Vigil. A priest or deacon administers the sacrament, anointing the person being baptized with the chrism oil and the oil of catechumens (which you can see in the *ambry*, the small mounted windowed cabinet in Assumption's baptistry near the main door) and pouring blessed water over the child or adult's head—not just once but three times, invoking the Holy Trinity.

In the eyes of the Catholic Church, any Baptism that uses water and the invocation of the Holy Trinity is a valid sacrament. So if a follower of another denomination that performs Baptism to these standards wants to become Catholic, he or she doesn't have to be re-baptized. For instance, I was baptized in the Presbyterian Church, but because my baptism met this standard I was not baptized again when I became a Catholic.

A person being baptized dresses in white to symbolize purity of faith and the cleansing power of Baptism. The white garment symbolizes the white garments Jesus wore when he was placed in the tomb after his death on Good Friday. An infant may wear a baptismal gown handed down for generations. An adult typically puts on a full-length white gown known as an alb. Every person being baptized must have a sponsor, traditionally called a “godparent” for infants. You must have at least one sponsor, but usually infants get one of each gender and often from each side of the family.

If you've been at Mass at Assumption when an infant was baptized, or if you've attended the Easter Vigil, you will remember that the baptism ritual is a participatory one, with all attendees rejecting Satan and professing their faith, while the parents of the infant and the godparents are a bit more involved.

The role of godparents has a very practical history. Godparents took over rearing children orphaned when their parents died prematurely. Today, being a godparent carries with it no legal right to the custody of children. Being a godparent, besides giving Christmas and birthday gifts every year, really means actively being a good Catholic role model by regularly and faithfully practicing our faith.

Like the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Sacrament of Holy Orders, you're baptized just once. No one can ever be un-baptized or re-baptized. And, best of all, Baptism confers a wonderfully-God-given, indelible mark on your soul!

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