

Becoming the Body

Baptism and Confirmation

Lesson # 20

Scripture Memorization Verse: We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

Lesson Goals & Objectives

Goal: To help students to recognize the importance of Baptism as the entrance into a living relationship with the risen Lord as part of his Body. The emphasis will be on the Baptism as a participation in the saving work of Christ, as it is directly communicated to us by grace in baptism. At the same time, the goal is elicit faith and commitment as response to this grace as outlined in the Baptismal Covenant.

Objective: We begin by looking at Jesus' baptism as a paradigm for what takes place in our own baptism, by which we are adopted as Children of God. By looking at passages in Paul's epistles we explore the themes of participating in the saving work of Christ and then to the response of faith and commitment, particularly as expressed in the sacrament of Confirmation.

Introduction and Background for the Teacher

Baptism is the sacrament of Christian initiation by which we are joined to Christ and to his church, and through which we participate in the saving effect of his death and resurrection and are adopted as Children of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

The word "baptize" (*baptizo* in Greek) was originally a simple term for "dip" or "immerse," as when plunging a piece of cloth into a vat of dye. It does not acquire a ritual meaning until the New Testament uses the word for a ritual washing formed by John the Baptist as a "sign of repentance." John's baptism may have derived from ritual baths performed by converts to Judaism. But for John, it was for those already belonging to Israel, and it signified a moral renewal in preparation for the coming Messiah. Jesus' disciples also practiced baptism (John 3:22), but Christian baptism really emerges after the Resurrection when Jesus tells his disciples to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism?

Various traditions differ over whether to baptize infants or to wait until a person can make a conscious decision for Christ. The underlying issue concerns the relationship between faith and

baptism?

The 16th century Anglican reformers addressed this issue by asking what baptism signifies. Does it demonstrate our faith in Christ before the world? (In which case it is difficult to justify infant baptism.) Or does baptism primarily signify God's redemptive action in Christ, which precedes our response of faith? Article XXVII of the "Articles of Religion" stresses that baptism signifies *both* our "profession" of faith, and also God's act of regeneration, so that baptism becomes "an instrument" by which we share in that redemption.

Article XXVII. Of Baptism.

Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed, Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.

God in his Grace makes the first move with us, ("God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us," Romans 5:8) and then invites our response of faith. Infant baptism in particular signifies God's initiative of grace.

Also, as a sign of our incorporation into the covenant community, Baptism corresponds to the Old Testament practice of circumcision, by which male children – without a conscious reflective choice – were brought into the Covenant.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

Yet there is no full participation in Christ apart from a decision of faith. The new life of Baptism must be received by faith.

St. Augustine said:

...in baptized infants the sacrament of regeneration comes first; and if they hold fast to Christian piety, conversion in the heart will follow, following on the sacramental sign of it in the body. This all shows that the sacrament of baptism is one thing, the conversion of the heart is another, but the salvation of man is effected by these two. (On Baptism)

In liturgical churches this conscious decision of faith is signified in the Sacrament of Confirmation in which the blessing of the Bishop empowers the mature believer to "fight the good fight" of the faith, and serve as a disciple of Christ.

Opening Prayer (BCP, 834):

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin: Grant that we, being reborn to new life in him, may live in righteousness and holiness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Introductory Activity:

Take a walk in through the church, especially the area in which the baptismal font is located. Give students prayer books and review the Baptismal liturgy. As much as possible, let the students tell you what takes place during the service. Point out such items as the plug in the font (if you have one), the proximity of the Paschal Candle, the fact that often the font is near the entrance to the church (symbolizing that baptism our means of entry into the body of Christ). Stress that baptism is about becoming part of the community, which is why we rarely perform private baptisms.

Lesson

1. The Baptism of Jesus

- A. **Optional:** Show the baptism scene from Franco Zeffirelli's film, *Jesus of Nazareth*. If you or your church does not have the video or DVD, try your local library, or show the scene from www.youtube.com.
- B. Have student read **Mark 1:4-11**.
- C. **Questions:**
 - 1. Why is John baptizing and why do you think so many people are coming to him?
 - 2. What does John say about the one coming after him?
 - 3. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and how is it different from John's baptism?

Note: John never tells us what it means to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. But Mark, our story teller, moves directly to the narrative of Jesus' own baptism in which, in verse 10, the Spirit is very much at work. Mark clearly wants the reader to recognize that Jesus' baptism is prime example of Baptism with the Holy Spirit. This gives us a basic principle that you should communicate to your students: **THE BAPTISM THAT JESUS RECEIVES IS THE BAPTISM THAT JESUS BESTOWS TO OTHERS.**

- D. Have your students list the three things that take place as Jesus comes out of the water, and explain their significance. Weave their responses into your own explanation of the following:
 - 1. The heavens are "torn open" – indicating the immediacy of God and a new accessibility to His presence through Jesus.
 - 2. The Spirit descends "like as dove." The Spirit is both the bond between Father and the Son (see lesson on the Trinity) and the power of God at work in Jesus' (and our) humanity. Note the result of this descent of the Spirit in verse 12, as "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness." Jesus is now activated and equipped for his messianic mission.
 - 3. The Word of the Father: "You are my beloved Son." Here is the key to the passage, which is all about revealing who Jesus really is.

But if the baptism that Jesus receives is the baptism that Jesus bestows, then this passage also tells us about ourselves. Say to your students, “At your baptism, a pigeon probably did *not* flutter down from the rafters of the church and land on your shoulders; and you probably did *not* hear a voice come booming through the speakers, ‘You are my beloved son or daughter’ – but God said it all the same. At baptism you become to God, what Jesus is to his Father, a beloved child. Before you were God’s workmanship, but now you are God’s child.”

2. “That we might receive adoption as sons...”

Jesus is the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God, who ‘dwells in the bosom of the Father’ from eternity (John 1:1-2, 18). We are not. We *become* children of God, and God becomes our Father. Question: we have a name for how an adult assumes the role of parent for a child who is not his or her biological offspring. That term is...?” (Adoption)

A. Ask if any in the group was adopted by their parents. Do they know anyone who was adopted? Has anyone known childless couples who sought to adopt? Could they tell how much these couples longed to bring a new child into their family, and how thrilled they were when they finally found a child to adopt? An adopted child may not have the DNA of a biological child, but the status and quality of family relationship is the same. So with us, and Jesus, and his Father.

B. Have a student read **Galatians 4:4-7**

C. Questions:

1. Why does God “send forth his Son”? (“That we might receive adoption.”)
2. What is the consequence of this adoption for us? (“God sends his Spirit of his Son into our hearts.” Because we are now God’s children, God works an objective spiritual change within us by the gift of his Holy Spirit. We begin to relate to God as our Father – as the Spirit in our hearts cries “Abba, Father.”)

3. An Outward and Visible Sign I: Cleansing from Sin

Ask the students to repeat the definition of a sacrament (“An outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”)

A. Questions:

1. What is the “outward and visible sign” in the sacrament of baptism? (Washing with water.)
2. If the water is a sign, then what does it signify? (Undoubtedly, someone will say something about spiritual cleansing.)
3. If baptism is a cleansing, what do we need to be cleansed from? (Review quickly the lessons on sin and redemption – #10-#12.)

- B. Have students read **Psalm 51:1-11** from the *Book of Common Prayer* (page 656-7). Try having each student read a verse and go in a circle. Discuss: themes of cleansing, reconciliation with God, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the psalm.
- C. Stress that Baptism is the means by which God cleanses us. You might say that “the water washes us on the outside, and God cleanses us on the inside.”

Quote **1 Peter 3:21**: “Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

It is not the water that cleanses us; water is just a symbol. What really cleanses us the death and resurrection of Jesus. The reason baptism “saves us” is because connects us to the Jesus’ death and resurrection.

4. An Outward and Visible Sign II: Participation in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Have a student read **Romans 6:3-11**. Point out that here baptism is about being connected to Jesus at the deepest level; we are “baptized *into* Christ.”

Questions:

1. Water does not signify cleansing here; what does the water symbolize in this passage? (Drowning, burial with Christ.)
2. If we share in the death of Christ by baptism, what also do we share with Christ? (Newness of life and resurrection.)

Illustration: Imagine that you hop onto a train just as it is going into a long dark tunnel. Yet you are also on the train as it emerges into the light on the other side. So also in baptism, we are with joined to Jesus in his death, and hence still joined to him as he comes out into the light of resurrection life.

Another Illustration: Ask if anyone has received a vaccination? A vaccination injects a microbe into our body to stimulate the immune system. It is like a small dose of a disease that doesn’t hurt us, but counts as if we have received the disease itself. Because, as result, we have the necessary antibodies, the real thing cannot harm us. Application: only Jesus actually dies on the cross; he alone pays the price for our sins. By baptism, we re-enact that death (being buried with Christ) without actually paying the price itself. It is as if baptism is a mini-crucifixion (a harmless dose) that counts for the real thing, so that God’s judgment on sin is lifted and we are brought into fellowship and share in Jesus’ risen life.

6. The response of Faith and Commitment: Confirmation

Say to your students: “We have seen that Baptism signifies what Jesus Christ has done for us in dying on the cross and being raised to new life. In our baptism we are joined to Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. Baptism is about God’s Grace, what He does for us. It is a gift.”

“But we must receive the gift that God gives us by faith.”

Optional, a story: Twenty years ago the *New York Times* carried a brief column about a woman who won the New Jersey Lottery. She walked around with the winning ticket in her purse for a year before she cashed in. She wanted to know how best to use the money, so she took courses in finance. Before cashing in the ticket, the money was already hers, but it had no outward effect on her life. She did not buy a new car, nor update her wardrobe. It was not until she cashed in her ticket that these things changed. In the same way, in our baptism as infants we have been given the gift of new life in Christ; but we must claim that gift by faith to enjoy its full benefit.

In the Anglican Tradition, the **Sacrament of Confirmation** provides a way for us publically to affirm promises made on our behalf at baptism, renounce evil, to turn to Jesus as Lord and Savior, and observe lives of obedience, repentance and service to others.

The sacramental act of Confirmation is the laying on of hands by the Bishop, following our public confession of faith, with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will “empower us for His service.”

Take-Home Activities:

1. Try something that was a daily practice of the reformer, Martin Luther: when you wake up in the morning, sit up and make the sign of the Cross and say to yourself, “I have been baptized; I am a Child of God.” After a week or so, think about how this affects your sense of yourself and your relationship with God.
2. Read through the Baptism and Confirmation services in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Closing Prayer:

O God, in the death of your Son, you have caused the our redeemed humanity to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, adapted from page 222)

Scripture References

- Mark 1:4-11
- John 3:1-8
- Romans 6:3-11
- Colossians 2:11-12
- Galatians 3:27-4:7
- 1 Peter 3:21

Resources

- Michael Green, *Baptism: It's Purpose, Practice and Power*, Intersivarsity Press
- Daniel B. Stevick, *Baptismal Moments, Baptismal Meanings*, Church Hymnal Corp.