

## If new life is available, how do I get it?

Though the Apostle Paul clearly teaches that Christ died to give everyone the possibility of eternal life, the question still remains: “How do I get it?” What means did God establish for us to access the victory Christ won through his death and resurrection, so that we, like Jesus, can overcome death and live eternally with

God? How do we find, once again, a relationship of friendship and kinship with the Father, so we can claim the family inheritance of heaven? Let’s go back to Nicodemus and his encounter with Jesus.

**S**T. JUSTIN MARTYR, a martyr and avid defender of the apostolic faith, elaborated on the Church’s understanding of Baptism in his *First Apology*, written between A.D. 148–155: **“Then they are brought by us to where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated (reborn). For in the name of God, the Father . . . and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ said, ‘Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’”**

[Ephesians 2:1](#)

[CCC 1250](#)

[Ephesians 1:4](#)

### Spiritual rebirth.

While Nicodemus expresses confusion as to how he could be “born again,” Jesus makes it clear that he is speaking of a different kind of birth, not merely earthly birth in human flesh, but supernatural rebirth, given through “**water and Spirit**” ([John 3:6–12](#)). Such rebirth is absolutely necessary for all people, because Revelation tells us that although we enter the world

physically alive, we are spiritually “dead” due to sin. In other words, though we are alive on a natural or human level, we have ceased to possess the supernatural life within us that God intended for his children—the life that enables mere human beings to interact with their Creator as divine sons and daughters, spirit to Spirit.

God alone can restore us to the supernatural life, and it is precisely this act of restoration that the God-man, Jesus Christ, came to accomplish for us. In short, Baptism is the only way we can become who we were intended to be before the foundation of the world.

### Baptism is the gateway to life.

The sacrament of Baptism was established by Christ as the means through which we are brought to life by God, wherein we become “one” with Jesus and receive the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of divine life through the Holy Spirit who comes to live within us. The Church has believed for 2,000 years that Baptism is “the gateway to life in the Spirit,” and it has always understood Jesus’ words to Nicodemus as a direct reference to Baptism. Just as we passed through the waters of our mother’s womb to receive natural birth, so must we pass through the waters of Baptism to receive supernatural rebirth. This fundamental truth of the Christian faith is repeatedly affirmed by Jesus’, as well as through the Apostles’, own record of the role of Baptism in the early Church.

### Bible Search

**Look up specific biblical references about the importance of Baptism:**

- [John 3:5](#)
- [Acts 2:38](#)
- [Mark 16:15–16](#)
- [Acts 9:10–18](#)
- [Matthew 28:19–20](#)
- [Acts 16:30–33](#)



[CCC 1265, 1213](#)

# The Effects of Baptism

Baptism offers amazing grace—the forgiveness of our sins and the free and undeserved gift of eternal life won for us by Jesus Christ. Its power depends entirely on the death and resurrection of Christ, and upon his Word that faith and Baptism open the door to his heavenly kingdom.

Mark 16:16

Though the principle effects of Baptism are the forgiveness of sin (including original sin and all personal sin) and new birth in the Holy Spirit, Baptism has many radical consequences for us. Scripture reveals that when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, we become members of Christ’s living Body on earth<sup>1</sup>—completely new creatures with new natures, adopted children of God who possess new powers and new rights! Let’s look at these many incredible effects.

CCC 798, 1262–67

## ■ Baptism restores communion with God.

Sin and death ruled over the human race until God sent his only Son to die on the Cross, taking upon himself “the sin of the world” (John 1:29) and overcoming death by rising from the dead. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus ushered in a new era for mankind—an era that restored us to the possibility of communion with God and freedom from the dominion of death. Christ’s redemptive act *repaired* the damage done by sin; opening the way for people to once again to live as the Father’s own sons and daughters, both now and for all eternity.

CCC 654

**We access Jesus’ “repair work” through faith and Baptism**, which Scripture reveals unites us to Christ’s death and resurrection in so real a way that we, like our Lord, die and rise again to new life, overcoming sin and death through the victorious death and resurrection of Christ.

CCC 1010–11

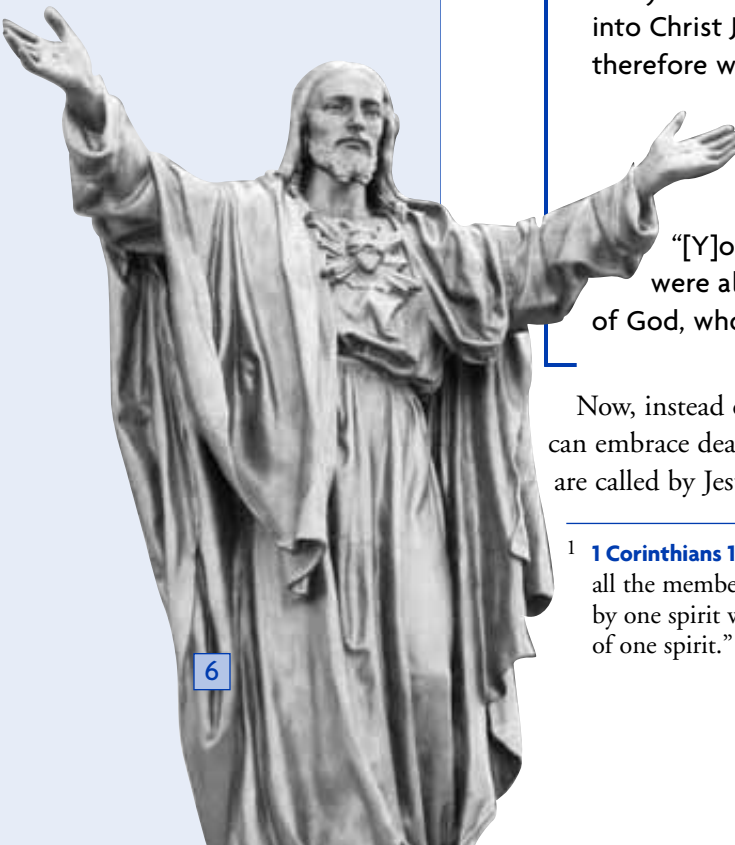
“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Romans 6:3–4

“[Y]ou were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” Colossians 2:12

Now, instead of fearing death as a “curse” to be avoided at all costs, we can embrace death as a blessing—the blessed threshold through which we are called by Jesus to enter our true home, heaven.

<sup>1</sup> **1 Corinthians 12:12–13:** “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one spirit.”



## ■ We become adopted children of God.

When we respond in faith to Jesus Christ and receive the sacrament of Baptism, not only are we unafraid of death, we are restored to the life God always desired for us, regaining the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and the gift of sonship originally enjoyed by Adam and Eve. Regaining our status as the Father’s divine children means that we are on a “first name basis” with God, and we therefore have the right to address him in the most familiar of terms as “Daddy.”<sup>2</sup>

St. Paul tells us about this marvelous reality when he writes: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of sonship [through which] we cry *Abba, Father!*” (Romans 8:14–15). As God’s sons and daughters, we also begin to “bear the family resemblance,” imaging God in holiness and love as we wait to claim our family inheritance, heaven.

## ■ It brings us into the life of the Blessed Trinity.

According to Christ’s instructions, we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our Savior issued this command because he desires that we bear his *family name*—the name of the Holy Trinity, in whose name we become God’s own people and possession.

The eternal God consists of three Divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and receiving the sign of these Persons (the sign of the Cross) signifies our belief in their existence and union, as well our understanding that we are birthed into their extended family by our Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection. The innermost mystery of the Divine Family is precisely *the familial love* shared among them—a love exchange between the Eternal Father and his only begotten Son that is so great that it literally overflows into a Third Person, the Holy Spirit. When we are baptized, we are granted more than a “name only” association with the Trinity; we are impregnated with the Spirit of their **love**, who comes to live within us to enable us to behave as God’s family members. That means that we can now put our unwavering **faith** in God’s promises, **hope** in heaven as our true home, and most importantly, love with the very love of God.

**A**ROUND A.D. 189 St. Irenaeus, who was a disciple of St. Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of the beloved Apostle St. John, wrote about the gift of divine sonship in his work titled *Against Heresies*: “**For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word, and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God**” (CCC 460).

CCC 1265

Ephesians 4:30

2 Corinthians 1:22

CCC 1235, 1239

## Theological Virtues

**G**IFTS INFUSED into the soul by God at Baptism that supernaturally empower us to behave as God’s children are:

- **faith**
- **hope**
- **love**—“the greatest of which is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

CCC 1266, 1812–29

<sup>2</sup> “Abba” is the Hebrew word for “Daddy,” and it is the name we are instructed to call God in the New Covenant.

## ■ We become temples of the Holy Spirit.

Through Baptism, our beings are infused with God's Spirit in so profound a way that we are transformed into living "temples"—"houses of worship" whose primary purpose is to manifest God's presence, glory, and love now and for all eternity.

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" **Acts 2:38**

"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price." **1 Corinthians 6:19–20**

**"The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification:**

- enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues;
- giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and
- allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues."

CCC 1266



## ■ We become a new creation.

Once we receive God's name and God's Spirit, we no longer belong to ourselves, but we become the sacred property of the One who has taken up residence within us. Because we are God's possession, he makes his mark on us, sealing us with an indelible imprint of the Holy Spirit that remains with us eternally and identifies us as one who belongs to God. The "seal of the Spirit" can never be lost, and because it is permanent, can never be given again. We become a "**partaker in the divine nature,**"<sup>3</sup> a member of Christ and co-heir with him. We change not only in "status," we change in our very nature becoming new creatures in Christ. Baptism gives us the very character of Christ, empowering us to live as his Body on earth, sharing God's love and the good news of faith in Jesus Christ to all we meet.

<sup>3</sup> **2 Peter 1:4.**

## ■ We become living members of the Body of Christ his Church.

Baptism incorporates us into Christ's Body, the Church, which is the "living" extension of his resurrected and glorified Body now in heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:17

"[A]nd he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all." [Ephesians 1:22–23](#)

Although Jesus' physical presence was taken from his disciples at the Ascension, he promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would form them into one Body on earth—a Body through which Jesus could continue to live and act in the world to call all people to receive divine sonship and eternal life through faith and Baptism.

**"Now you are the body of Christ and individually parts of it." 1 Corinthians 12:27**

Belonging to the Body of Christ means that we are intimately connected with the Body's Head, Jesus Christ, and with all who have made up its members since the inception of the Church. As such, we receive the prerogative of calling upon the whole Body to help us.



**A**LL PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE in Christ and have been properly baptized belong to Christ's Body, the Church. This includes those who belong to Christian denominations that exist outside of the Catholic faith. The Catholic Church recognizes as valid all baptisms that are performed in faith using a Trinitarian formula and either sprinkling, pouring or immersion in water. [CCC 818, 1271](#)

# Celebration of the Sacrament

CCC 1238

## ■ The Blessing of the Baptismal Waters

The minister now blesses the waters to be used in the Baptism, touching the water with his right hand to call down God's life-giving power upon it. The minister prays the following (or similar) words, acknowledging the active presence of the Three Persons of the Trinity in the sacrament of Baptism.

**“We ask you, Father, with your Son to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of this font. May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise with him to the newness of life.”**

Water has always been a sign of natural and spiritual life, and its immediate association with the Spirit of God goes back to the beginning of creation. In Baptism, the Church asks the Father, through his eternal Son, to send the Holy Spirit upon water so that those washed in it may be **“born of water and the Spirit.”** According to Jesus' own words, without this rebirth, we **“cannot enter the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5). Such rebirth, which is found in the sacrament of Baptism, is “prefigured” in the Old Testament through the great events of salvation history, especially those events that use water to display God's life-giving power.



CCC 1237

## ■ The Renunciation of Sin

After the water is blessed, the parents and godparents are asked to explicitly renounce sin and Satan on the child's behalf, formally disassociating the child from **“the father of lies”** (John 8:44) and aligning him with Jesus, **“the source of eternal salvation”** (Hebrews 5:9). Parents and godparents also renew their own baptismal promises at this time by answering “I do” to the following (or similar) questions, indicating their desire and intent to remain free of the poison of sin:

- **“Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children?”**
- **Do you reject the glamour of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?**
- **Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?”**

Though Baptism heals us of original sin and all actual sin,<sup>7</sup> the baptized are called to continually strive to overcome sin through ongoing conversion to Christ. A key to such conversion lies in the sacramental life of the Church, particularly in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which heals us of venial sin, and the sacrament of Reconciliation, which heals us of mortal sin and restores us to the life of grace.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Because children under the age of reason do not commit actual sin, Baptism heals them of original sin only. In the case of adults and children over the age of reason, Baptism heals original sin and all actual sin up to the moment of Baptism.

<sup>8</sup> Though all sin offends God and hurts us, Scripture differentiates between mortal sin, which destroys the life of grace in the soul, and venial sin, which wounds our relationship with God without destroying it. See **1 John 5:16–17**.

## Bible Search

### Prefigurations of Baptism in the Old Covenant

**Look up the following scriptural references to learn about the many events in the history of salvation that “foreshadow” Baptism. (CCC 1217–1222)**

- Creation (Genesis 1:2)
- Noah's Ark (1 Peter 3:20–21)
- Crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14:13–31)
- Crossing of the River Jordan (Joshua 3:5–4:7)

## ■ The Baptismal Garment

Having become a member of God’s “royal priesthood,” the baptized child is now clothed in a white garment, indicating that he has “put on Christ” (**Galatians 3:27**). Baptismal garments were once worn by the newly baptized for the entire Easter season, demonstrating the belief that they had been “washed clean” by the Blood of Christ (**Revelation 7:9–14**). During the baptismal rite, the garment is placed upon them by his parents and godparents, as the minister prays the words:

“You have become a new creation and have clothed yourselves in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven. Amen.”

The baptismal garment also represents the wedding gown of the Bride of Christ, the Church, as she makes herself ready for her marriage to the Heavenly Bridegroom at the end of time. At that time, all who belong to Christ will participate in an eternal “wedding feast” in heaven (**Revelation 19:7–8**)—a feast that begins now on earth as we are incorporated into the Church, and as we are given the privilege of consuming the sublime food of the wedding banquet—the Body and Blood of Christ.

## ■ The Lighting of the Baptismal Candle

The baptismal rite concludes with the lighting of a candle, given to the newly baptized by their parents and godparents as the minister says:

“Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He is to walk always as a child of the light. May he keep the flame of faith alive in his heart. When the Lord comes, may he go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.”

The lit candle indicates that the baptized child has been enlightened in his understanding of the truth and is now fully equipped to share the light of Christ with others. Baptism, also called “enlightenment,” transfers the child from darkness into the kingdom of light, wherein he is made fit “to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (**Colossians 1:12–13**). This inheritance, the “birthright” of the children of God, is heaven, which the baptized begin to experience here on earth as we allow God to transform us ever more into his image and likeness—the original image of holiness, sonship, and divinity lost in Adam and restored to us through the “new Adam,” Christ Jesus. The birthright of God’s children also includes calling upon the eternal Creator as “Father,” and it is thus that the baptismal ceremony concludes with the prayer that Christ taught us to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. . . .”

**S**T. JUSTIN MARTYR wrote about the connection of Baptism and the Eucharist in his *First Apology*, written around A.D. 148–155: “**And this food is called Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes the things which we teach are true, and has been washed in the washing (bath) that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is living as Christ has enjoined.**”



## Infant Baptism

**“Let the children come to me.”** Mark 10:14

Now that we have journeyed through the baptismal rite and learned of its rich and varied symbolism, we will examine why the Church baptizes infants—a practice that has been part of Catholic tradition since the founding of the Church almost 2,000 years ago. Though infant Baptism seems natural and fitting to Catholics, many Protestant denominations have rejected the practice, claiming that a person must be able to make an adult profession of faith in order to receive Baptism.

CCC 1243, 1216

The Gospel of Mark gives us a view into our Savior’s heart concerning children:

“And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God.’”

Mark 10:13–14

This account of Jesus and the children sums up the Catholic Church’s view on infant Baptism, as the Church has always hastened to baptize young children that they may be “brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called.”

CCC 1250

### Infant Baptism in the Early Church

The validity of infant Baptism is affirmed not only by the words of Jesus, but also by the scriptural record of the earliest days of the Church, which repeatedly indicates that whole “households” were baptized—households that must have included children, as many of ours do. In addition to that, St. Paul teaches that Baptism replaces circumcision, which was administered to infants eight days of age to incorporate them into the Old Covenant. Would a New Covenant—a new and better Covenant—suddenly exclude children, who had previously been included

Acts 16:15, 33, 18:8

1 Corinthians 1:16

Colossians 2:11–12

in the Old Covenant? The obvious answer is that children are welcomed by God in both Covenants, hence we find infant circumcision and infant Baptism as the ordinary practice of God’s people.

**A**ROUND A.D. 230, the renowned biblical scholar and theologian Origen wrote: **“The Church received from the Apostles the tradition of giving Baptism even to infants. For the Apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of divine mysteries, knew that there is in everyone the innate stains of sin, which must be washed away through water and Spirit.”**



## Applying What We've Learned in Our Daily Lives

- If you've already been baptized**, we encourage you to study this material with an eye to rededicating yourself to your baptismal vows, asking God to open you further to the graces of your Baptism. A wonderful time to renew baptismal vows is at the Easter Liturgy, as well as each time you enter the Church and prayerfully bless yourself with Holy Water.
- If you are preparing for Baptism**, we pray that you will use this workbook as an ongoing tool for instruction, as you ask God to open your eyes to the abundant gifts he will give you in Baptism. Look up each Scripture reference and *Catechism* reference cited throughout the workbook because they are so helpful in providing information about the truths of the Catholic faith.
- For parents of children preparing to be baptized**, meditate on your role as the primary educator of your child in the life of faith, considering the ways you can help your child grasp and receive all that this sacrament has to offer. Prayerfully consider how you can help your child grow in the life of faith, and how you can more fully participate in the sacramental life of the Church so that you and your child may both grow in faith.
- If you are or will be a godparent**, think of concrete ways that you can help your godchildren (and their parents) grow in their faith. Also, consider how can you play an ongoing role in child's life as they grow and mature in faith, including praying for them, remembering them with a card or letter on their "baptismal birthdays," or taking them to Church with you.
- If you were baptized but never confirmed**, we encourage you to complete what was begun in Baptism by receiving the sacrament of Confirmation. Go to a priest and find out how to begin the process for Confirmation, that you may receive all that God has for you.
- No matter where you are in your conversion process, prayerfully consider how you can deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ.** Consider a commitment to daily prayer, daily Scripture reading, and frequent reception of the sacraments. Also, take advantage of the educational opportunities offered in your parish or in nearby parishes, including Bible studies and classes on Catholic doctrine. Grow in grace!