

Baptism: The Gift and the Calling

The Baptism of Jesus reveals the true meaning of Christian baptism. It is not just a one-time ritual, but a transformative moment that confers incredible spiritual gifts and marks the beginning of a lifelong mission as an active and responsible disciple of Christ.

The Divine Gift: What Baptism Grants



You Become a New Creation

Original and personal sins are forgiven, clearing the path to God's Kingdom.

You Become an Adopted Child of God

You share in the divine life and become a temple of the Holy Spirit.



You are Marked as Christ's Forever

Baptism imprints an indelible spiritual seal that no sin can erase.



The Lifelong Call: What Baptism Demands



A Crisis of Faith

In the U.S., for every 1 person joining the Catholic Church, 8.4 leave.



Take Personal Ownership of Your Faith

You must consciously decide to follow Christ through prayer and the sacraments.

Live Out a Trinitarian Responsibility

Obey the Father, follow the Son, and keep in step with the Holy Spirit.



NotebookLM

Reading I - [Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7](#)

Thus says the LORD: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. a bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching. I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10](#) R. (11b) The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Reading II - [Acts 10:34-38](#)

Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius, saying: "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

Gospel - [Matthew 3:13-17](#)

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" Jesus said to him in reply, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came

up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

This homily presents a reflection on the Baptism of Jesus Christ, emphasizing its significance as the beginning of His public ministry, the revelation of His identity as the Son of God, and the spiritual meaning and responsibilities of Christian baptism for believers as an ongoing transformative commitment to faith and discipleship within the Church.

In the Church, today marks the end of the Christmas season and the celebration of the moment that marks the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Jesus submits himself to John the Baptist, allowing himself to be baptized. All others being baptized in the Jordan by John were doing so as a sign of repentance for their sins, and as an expression of their desire to turn again to God. Jesus, in so doing, was expressing his total solidarity with humanity, presenting himself for baptism to fulfill the word of God proclaimed by the prophets.

This moment in the life of Jesus is also so much more. His baptism reveals that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the “anointed one”—the Spirit-endowed Servant promised by Isaiah in today’s First Reading. As Isaiah prophesied, the Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove—as the Spirit hovered over the face of the deep in the beginning. ^{Genesis 1:2} *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* Standing there in the Jordan he is being ‘missioned’ by his Father for the work of our salvation. He is the new covenant, light from light for those who live in darkness.

As it was in the beginning so too at the Jordan, the majestic voice of the Lord thunders above the waters. The Father opens the heavens and declares Jesus to be His “beloved son.” God had long prepared the Israelites for His coming, as Peter preaches in today’s Second Reading. Jesus was anticipated in the “beloved son” given to Abraham, ^{Gen 22:2, 12, 26} and in the calling of Israel as His “first-born son.” ^{Ex 4:22–23} Jesus is the everlasting heir promised to King David. ^{Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14} By the new covenant made in His blood, ^{1 Cor 11:25} God has gathered the lost sheep of Israel together with whoever fears Him in every nation. Christ has become the source from which God pours out His Spirit on Israelites and Gentiles alike. ^{Acts 10:45}

These truths are essential to know and understand if we are to find and cling to our only hope for the satisfaction that we all most deeply desire. In a recent homily, Pope Leo XIV spoke to a large crowd of young people in Italy, identifying in them what every human person wants – a good life, to be loved, saved, affirmed, included, forgiven, and accepted. A key truth of our faith is that Jesus Christ is the only One who can satisfy every good desire in the human heart. He said, *“Centuries ago, Saint Augustine understood the deepest desire of our hearts, the desire of every human heart... He too had a restless youth, but he did not settle for less, he did not silence the cry of his heart. Augustine sought the truth, the truth that does not disappoint and the beauty that does not fade. And how did he find it? How did he find true friendship and a love capable of giving hope? By finding the one who was already looking for him, by finding Jesus Christ.”*
Pope Leo XIV, August 2nd, 2025

You are here today because in some way, like St. Augustine, you encountered Jesus Christ, or you are still searching for that one truly life-giving relationship. For those of us who have found what we were looking for, whether baptized as infants, youth, or adults - In baptism, we were anointed with that same Spirit. We are literally “anointed ones,” the “sons and daughters of God” in today’s Psalm—called to give glory to His name here in this Church, during this celebration, and together we are a multitude.

Just as the sign of a new year is a new calendar, the sign of a new life in Christ is baptism. The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. *“No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.”* ^{Jn 3:5} Christ commanded his disciples to preach the Gospel, draw people to faith in him, and baptize those who come to conversion. And, although we can do better, we are not neglecting the mission we have received from Christ to ensure that all be baptized and reborn of water and the Spirit. Every year millions of people around the world are baptized. In 2023 2.7 million adults were baptized by Roman Catholic clergy, and the total Christian baptisms number in the tens of millions annually. Jesus saves and the Holy Spirit is busy helping us to share that good news. But in the U.S., it seems the most recent data indicates that for every one person received into the Catholic Church, another 8.4 have left the faith altogether, or for another worship tradition. It also seems that of those who say they are Catholic, just 29 percent attend Mass weekly or more often.

Considering this, it would be useful for us today to reflect on the meaning of our own baptism and how it relates with that of Jesus. To be firm of faith and practice, we must be engaged disciples who truly understand the full meaning of our baptism, and realize that we are—not passively, but actively—members of the Body of Christ. That our baptism is not simply some past event recorded in some dusty parish register but is a living reality which is to be constantly deepened and enriched, transformative.

Those of you here today are either among the 29% who know, have rediscovered, or have recently discovered the faith that saves and that to be baptized and bear the name of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is both incredible and an awesome responsibility. Or you don't, and you've got one foot in and one foot out of the Church or worse, the divine life in Christ. Have you been baptized? If so, does your baptism mean anything to you? Are you spiritually fresh and alive as a missionary disciple? Or do you think of your baptism as just a ritual without any real impact? If you've been baptized, you need to grasp the importance of it, because if you don't, you will always be at risk of lukewarm faith and practice or falling away completely.

One of our consistent prayers ought to be that all of us remain faithful to our God as His children, that our Father might call us what he calls His Son—“my beloved . . . in whom I am well pleased.” Every Christian should be able to identify some moment or season of life when they took personal responsibility for their faith. Maybe it was at First Communion. Maybe it was at Confirmation. Maybe it was when you got married. Maybe it was after a retreat, or on a pilgrimage, or in the aftermath of a family tragedy. It can happen in many ways and places, but it must happen. To follow Christ in a mature manner, we must consciously accept his invitation, to make a fundamental option in our lives: to declare ourselves for Christ. Once we have decided to follow Christ we start living like Christians: but only through a steady effort supported by prayer and the sacraments.

St. Paul says, *“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”* ^{2nd Cor 5:17}. By Baptism original and personal sins are forgiven, and temporal punishment due to sin is removed. After one has been reborn in Christ, there is nothing to prevent one's entry into God's Kingdom. Baptism also gives us new life as adopted children of God. We become sharers of divine life and temples of the Holy Spirit. We are now made righteous by God and live in a state of grace, that is, we live in union with God because of his gracious and loving initiative. By Baptism we become members of the Church, the Body of Christ. We share in the priesthood of Christ as well as his prophetic and royal mission. *“You are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”* ^{1 Pt 2:9} We enjoy the community we find in the Church, share our talents and gifts with its members, respond willingly to its teachings and requirements, and assume the responsibilities that our membership implies.

Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, we are configured to Christ. We are sealed with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of belonging to Christ. Though sin can prevent baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation, no sin can erase this mark. Baptism cannot be repeated.” CCC, no. 1272 This spiritual mark is also called a character, which St. Augustine likened to distinctive brandings impressed upon soldiers and slaves during Roman times to signify the commander or owner to whom they belonged. Baptism marks us permanently as belonging to Christ, whose image we bear.

Our baptism cannot be understood apart from discipleship and a transformed life. As new creations in Christ with new life, we have a serious obligation to share our faith with others both by word and example. It involves much more than simply ‘saving our souls’ and ‘leading sinless lives’. We are called to be living witnesses of the gospel, to be the salt of the earth, to be a city on a hill, a candle radiating light in the surrounding darkness. We are called, in short, to be united with the others in our Christian community in the building up of God’s Kingdom.

Baptism isn't just about what you can get from God. It's also about God's claim on you. It's a privilege to be baptized in the name of the Father, to be part of God's family, loved and protected by him. And with great privilege comes great responsibility. As Jesus put it, *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded."* Luke 12:48 If you are baptized in the name of the Father, you must obey as his child and treat the rest of the family as dear brothers and sisters.

It's a privilege to be baptized in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ, to be washed by his blood and share in the benefits of his death and resurrection. But with the privilege comes responsibility. If you are baptized in the name of the Son, you must honor your Savior and follow Jesus wherever he leads.

It's a privilege to be baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit, to have the living God make his home within you, giving you rebirth and renewal, uniting you to Christ, making you increasingly like him, and filling you with fresh life and power. But with the privilege comes responsibility. If you are baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit, you must keep in step with the Spirit and not grieve him.

The Baptism of Jesus: A Foundational Event

The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist is presented as the cornerstone for understanding Christian baptism. It is not merely a historical event but a moment of profound theological revelation.

Narrative and Context

As recounted in the Gospel of Matthew (3:13-17), Jesus came from Galilee to John the Baptist to be baptized. John initially tried to prevent him, stating, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me." Jesus insisted, replying, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Following his baptism, the heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended like a dove upon him, and a voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Theological Significance

The event carries multiple layers of meaning that define Jesus's identity and mission:

- **Solidarity with Humanity:** Though sinless, Jesus submitted to a baptism of repentance, expressing his complete solidarity with human brokenness and sinfulness.
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy:** His baptism fulfills the word of God proclaimed by prophets. Specifically, it identifies him as the "Spirit-endowed Servant" promised by Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7).
- **Trinitarian Revelation:** The event is a key Trinitarian moment where the Father's voice is heard, the Son is physically present and baptized, and the Holy Spirit descends. This echoes the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation (Genesis 1:2).

- **Revelation of Identity:** The Father's declaration, "This is my beloved Son," reveals Jesus's divine identity as the Christ, the Son of God, and the "anointed one." This identity was anticipated in figures like Abraham's "beloved son" (Genesis 22) and Israel as God's "first-born son" (Exodus 4:22-23).
- **Commencement of Public Ministry:** This moment marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Jesus's public ministry, as he is "missioned" by the Father for the work of salvation.

The Dual Nature of Christian Baptism

Christian baptism is presented as a transformative reality that is both a gift conferred by God and a demanding, lifelong mission for the believer.

Part I: The Divine Gift (What Baptism Grants)

Baptism confers several profound spiritual gifts and graces, fundamentally altering the believer's relationship with God.

Gift Conferred	Description
You Become a New Creation	Original and personal sins are forgiven, and temporal punishment due to sin is removed. This clears the path for entry into God's Kingdom. As St. Paul states, "So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5:17).
You Become an Adopted Child of God	Believers are given new life as adopted children of God. They become sharers in the divine life and are made "temples of the Holy Spirit." This state of grace signifies living in union with God through His loving initiative.
You Are Marked as Christ's Forever	Baptism imprints an "indelible spiritual mark" or "character" of belonging to Christ. This seal cannot be erased by any sin and means baptism can never be repeated. St. Augustine likened this mark to the brand impressed upon Roman soldiers, signifying to whom they belonged.
You Become a Member of the Church	Believers are incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ. They share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal mission, becoming part of "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own" (1 Pt 2:9).

Part II: The Lifelong Calling (What Baptism Demands)

The gifts of baptism are not meant to be passively received. They initiate a call to a life of active and committed discipleship.

Demand of Baptism	Description
Take Personal Ownership of Your Faith	It is essential for every Christian to have a "moment or season of life when they took personal responsibility for their faith." This involves consciously deciding to follow Christ, moving beyond an inherited or obligatory faith to an embraced identity. This act "unlocks the graces of the sacraments."
Live Out a Trinitarian Responsibility	The privilege of baptism comes with great responsibility. Believers are called to: 1. Obey the Father as his children. 2. Follow the Son , honoring their Savior wherever he leads. 3. Keep in step with the Holy Spirit , who dwells within them. As Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48).
Engage in Active Discipleship	Baptism is a "living reality" that must be "constantly deepened and enriched." This requires active participation in the Christian community, sharing talents and gifts, and serving as a living witness to the Gospel—to be "the salt of the earth" and a "city on a hill." This effort must be sustained by prayer, the sacraments, and fellowship.

Contemporary Context and the Call to Action

The imperative to understand and live out the full meaning of baptism is set against a backdrop of declining religious practice and a need for authentic witness.

A Statistical "Crisis of Faith"

The sources highlight a significant challenge to faith, particularly in the United States:

- For every **1 person** who joins the Catholic Church, **8.4 people** have left the faith.
- Only **29 percent** of self-identified U.S. Catholics attend Mass weekly or more often.

These statistics underscore the risk of a "lukewarm faith" and frame the urgency for baptized Christians to move from passive affiliation to active, transformative discipleship. In contrast to this trend, the homily notes that local church attendance has doubled in the last two years, and globally, millions are baptized annually (including 2.7 million adults by Roman Catholic clergy in 2023).

The Search for Truth: The Model of St. Augustine

The story of St. Augustine is presented as an archetype for the human journey. Augustine sought truth, beauty, and love that would satisfy the "deepest desire" of his heart. He did not settle for "fake news" or lesser satisfactions and ultimately "found the one who was already looking for him." A quote attributed to "Pope Leo XIV, August 2nd, 2025" summarizes this: "Augustine sought the truth, the truth that does not disappoint and the beauty that does not fade... by finding Jesus Christ." This narrative serves as an encouragement for all who are searching for or seeking to deepen a "truly life-giving relationship."

The Ultimate Challenge: To Be a Fearless Disciple

The final call to action is a challenge to move from private belief to public witness. It is not enough to affirm Christ within the walls of a church; the graces of baptism are meant to be "fully unlocked" to make believers "fearless disciples of Christ in every way, in every moment, every day." The central question posed is whether one has made a fundamental, life-altering decision for Christ and is prepared to fearlessly declare to the world: "I am for Christ and Christ is for me."

Glossary of Key Terms	
Term	Definition (based on the Source Context)
Anointed One	A title for Jesus, identifying him as the Christ and the Spirit-endowed servant promised by the prophet Isaiah. Christians, by baptism, are also anointed with the same Spirit and are literally "anointed ones."
Baptism	A sacrament that is not just a one-time ritual but a transformative moment marking the beginning of a lifelong mission as a disciple. It forgives original and personal sin, confers new life as an adopted child of God, incorporates one into the Body of Christ, and seals the person with an indelible spiritual mark of belonging to Christ.
Body of Christ	A term for the Church. Through baptism, individuals become active members of the Body of Christ, sharing their talents and gifts with the community.
Christ	A title for Jesus revealed at his baptism, meaning the "anointed one," the Son of God.
Covenant	A sacred agreement. Jesus is described as the "new covenant" made in his blood, set by God as a covenant of the people and a light for the nations.
Disciple	An active and engaged follower of Jesus Christ. Baptism calls a person to be a missionary disciple who understands the meaning of the sacrament, takes personal responsibility for their faith, and fearlessly declares themselves for Christ.
Fundamental Option	A conscious decision and declaration to follow Christ and live the Christian life fully. This choice is key to a transformative relationship and must be sustained by prayer, the sacraments, and community.
Grace	A state of union with God resulting from His gracious and loving initiative. Through baptism, believers are made righteous and live in a state of grace.
Indelible Spiritual Mark	A permanent, spiritual seal or "character" impressed upon a person at baptism, marking them as belonging to Christ forever. No sin can erase this mark.
Original Sin	The state of sinfulness inherited by humanity. Baptism forgives original sin, along with personal sins, clearing the path to God's Kingdom.
Royal Priesthood	A description of the identity of the baptized community. As members of a "chosen race" and "holy nation," they share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal mission of Christ.
Solidarity	A state of unity or fellowship. Jesus's baptism was an expression of his total solidarity with humanity, its brokenness, and its sinfulness.
Temple of the Holy Spirit	A state of being for a baptized person. Through the sacrament, believers become sharers in the divine life and a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.
Trinitarian Responsibility	The lifelong demand of baptism which involves three actions: obeying God the Father, following the Son (Jesus Christ), and keeping in step with the Holy Spirit.