

Oil

The Jewish people, Jesus' ancestors, used oil to consecrate altars and to anoint kings, priests and prophets. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit of God: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have endowed him with my spirit that he may bring true justice to the nations..." (Is 42:1-4 & Lk 4:16-19).

The oil of Chrism is olive oil mixed with sweet smelling oil, blessed in the Cathedral during Holy Week. It is named for Christ, the 'anointed one' (khristos in Greek, messiah in Hebrew).

During the baptismal rite, there are two moments of anointing with oil, the first at the beginning of the Baptism and the second immediately after the water is poured. The anointed one is blessed and strengthened to begin the new and challenging life of a Christian. They are anointed as; a priest, able to worship God and pray for others; a prophet, able to speak and to bear witness to God's truth; a king, able with freedom to live as God's child and Jesus' disciple, sharing in the task of bringing about God's kingdom (or reign) of justice, peace, truth and love.

A White Garment and a Candle

The white garment received by the newly baptised, is a sign of purity and newness, a symbol of transformation in the Risen Christ. The newly baptised person 'has put on Christ'.

Fire is a source of warmth and light. God's love warms us and we cannot find our way without light. Fire symbolised God's presence in the Old Testament stories (Ex 3:5 and Numbers 9:16). Jesus is the light of the world and our light in darkness and light of the world (Jn 1:5 & 8:12). Fire symbolises the coming of the Spirit in the Pentecost story (Acts 2:3). The baptismal candle is lit from the Easter candle and is a symbol of the Risen Christ and the life of Jesus Christ that will shine in the new Christian.

Questions of Faith: Do You Believe?

These are very challenging and thought provoking questions:

Question 1: Do you believe in God the Father the maker of Heaven and earth?

Do you believe there IS a maker of heaven and earth, someone who gives purpose and meaning to your life? Do you believe there is a God but it is not you?

Question 2: Do you believe in God the Son?

Do you believe that you are not God, but the one who was equal with God emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, became a human being?
Do you believe that what you are as a creature, so powerful, so important so wonderful that God has chosen to become a creature along with you?

Question 3: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy catholic Church?

Do you believe that the Spirit of God is present in the world, in you and me and in our experience of the community of the Catholic Church?

To say 'I do' to all three of these questions is to make a very radical statement about who God is, who I am and what my relationship is to God, to all human beings and to all creation.

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Sacraments ~ Part 2

Baptism

Sacraments of Initiation

Do you know the date and place of your Baptism? Have you reflected upon just how important this day was for you and for the whole community?



Jesus Christ

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always to the end of the age.'

(Matthew 28:19-20)

'For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink'

(1 Corinthians 12:13)

The First Meaning of Baptism

At the moment of Baptism, Jesus Christ starts to live in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This enables us to understand we are not alone. God is constantly with us. This also enables us to live according to the teachings, values and attitudes of Jesus, and gives the necessary power to continue his work. Moreover because of all this we are destined to live with our God forever.

To every baptised person, God says, 'You are my beloved son, or daughter; with you I am well pleased' (*Mark 1:11*). The one baptised is called to be another Christ, or 'Christian'. Each baptised person shows the face of Christ to the world in a way that only they can.

A New Life

'Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourself with the new self...' (Colossians 3:8-10)

The decision to be baptised meant a different life with new values for the first Christians. For many, it also meant persecution, estrangement from family and friends, and possible death.

Challenges, difficulties and hardship continue to face committed followers of Jesus Christ even today. There is no turning back for those who have really found Jesus Christ and discovered a relationship with him that grows stronger with the years.

A Lifelong Journey

INFANT BAPTISM: The early Church community baptised children with parents when entire households were baptised. When we baptise a baby, we are reminded of God’s unconditional love and his desire to be constantly with us in an intimate manner. It is God who takes the initiative, who wants to love this child. God’s gifts are given freely to each child from the beginning, before he or she can ask for them; life itself, loving parents, food and shelter. No one has to earn God’s love.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS: When a baby is baptised, the parents have responsibility for nurturing the life and practice of faith for their baptised child by their good example, just as they look after the child’s wellbeing and growth in every other way. The Church recognises parents as the first educators in faith for their children. Parents teach their children and show them what is important in life. From parents, children learn that they are loved and never alone. They learn that they are accompanied and loved by God, who is there to meet them in prayer. Parents need to take this responsibility very seriously before considering baptising their child.

‘For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents’ help is important. So too is the role of the godfather and godmother, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptised - child or adult - on the road of Christian life.’
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1255)

ADULT BAPTISM: In the early Church, many asked for Baptism when they witnessed the lives and example of Christians (Acts 4:32- 37). This is also being repeated in our times. The period of time when candidates prepared for Baptism was called the *catechuminate*. It was a time of serious preparation for Baptism and a new life. The candidate was supported by a sponsor and by the prayer of the whole community. Conversion of heart, prayer and fasting led up to learning the ‘Creed’ and the ‘Our Father’. On Holy Saturday night Baptism followed the Easter Vigil, the celebration of Christ’s Resurrection.

In 1972 these practices of the early Church were recovered in the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)**, celebrated in our parishes today.

Every decision to live according to Jesus’ way is a step forward on the journey that begins at Baptism. God’s love embraces the traveller and the Spirit is near for guidance and help. Baptism is a lifelong journey.

Initiation

How often have you been welcomed and ‘initiated’ into a new community. When have you made someone else welcome? Baptism makes us ‘members one of another,’ says St Paul (*Eph 4:25*). Baptism also makes us part of the Christian community in the Catholic Church. Full initiation is completed with Confirmation and First Eucharist. Baptised people share the life of the Church and her mission.

‘Baptism incorporates us into the Church. From the baptismal font is born the one People of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races and sexes’ (Catechism, 1267)

Baptism is the Sacrament of faith and the beginning of a life of faith. But faith needs the community of believers (Catechism, 1253-1254). Therefore, Baptism is celebrated as a community event. This is the reason the baptised person needs to belong and participate actively in the life of the parish. Baptism loses much of its meaning and we miss so much of its benefits, when we do not regularly practice our faith. Being baptised and being actively involved in parish life go hand in hand. The Christian community welcomes the new member and promises loving support for them.

Mission

Through Baptism ‘the faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world’.

(The Vatican II Council, Lumen Gentium, 31 and Catechism 1213-1214).

The baptised person joins a community with a Mission. It has work to do. Every member is called to follow Christ, to be active as a member who truly belongs to the Christian community. The Body of Christ is not complete if anyone is missing! All belong and have their part to play.

Baptised people are called to share their gifts, and to strive to become all they are called by God to be. All are called to service, to speak up against injustice, to side with the poor and the oppressed, to stand for truth and goodness, to love as Jesus loved and to worship God in Jesus as a regular part of their lives. Each does all that they can to promote and enable all that is ‘true, good and beautiful in the human community.’ (The Vatican II Council, Gaudium et Spes, 76)

‘For their work prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labour, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, even their hardships if patiently borne - all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’
(Vatican II Council, Lumen Gentium, 34)

The Symbols

Water

Water is:	Life giving	Thirst quenching
	Cleansing	Powerful
	Healing	Water enables growth

Nothing grows without water. It washes, purifies and sustains. Genesis gives an image of God’s Spirit hovering, bringing order and life out of watery chaos (Gen 1:2). In the Old Testament, water is often associated with the life giving breath of God’s Spirit (*Ruah* in Hebrew means both ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’ Ez 36:24-26).

Jesus gave new meaning to the symbol of water. He is the source of living water, the One through whom a blind man finds healing in the Pool of Siloam. He washes his disciples’ feet as an example of serving love. He promises life of the Spirit is like a spring of water welling up to eternal life for those who have faith. (Jn 4:10; 9:7; 13; 7:38).

At Baptism, water is used to indicate that the baptised person is now fully filled with the life changing and powerful presence of the resurrected Jesus and washed clean.

