

Becoming the Body: Baptism and Confirmation

Lesson # 20 of 27

Scripture/Memory Verse

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into His 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 Goal & Objectives

Goal

- \$ The students will recognize the importance of Baptism as the entrance into a living relationship with the risen Lord as part of his Body.
- \$ They will understand that Baptism is a participation in the saving work of Christ as it is directly communicated to us by the grace of this sacrament.
- \$ Through group discussion the students will indicate a response of faith to this grace as outlined in the Baptismal Covenant.

Objective

- \$ We will examine Jesus’ baptism in the Holy Scriptures as a paradigm for what takes place in our own baptism: in baptism we are adopted as Children of God.
- \$ We will examine the passages in Paul’s epistles which describe the theme of participation in the saving work of Christ. This discussion will lead the students to a response of faith and commitment which they will express by receiving the sacrament of Confirmation.

Introduction and Background for the Teacher

1) The Meaning of Baptism Baptism is the sacrament of Christian initiation by which we are brought into union with Jesus Christ and made members of His church. Through baptism we participate in the saving effect of his death and resurrection and are adopted as Children of God, being made fellow heirs with Christ. *The Catechism* summarizes: “Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as His children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the Kingdom of God,” This sacrament is also characterized by, “...new life in the Holy Spirit.” (Book of Common Prayer, page 858)

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. We might say that it means to soak in water like a sponge or a tea-bag. The word does not acquire a ritual meaning until the New Testament uses it to describe the ritual washing performed by John the Baptist as a “sign of repentance.” John’s baptism may have derived from the ritual baths performed by converts to Judaism. However, for John this ritual was for those already belonging to Israel because it signified that a person was making his own commitment to moral renewal in preparation for the coming Messiah.

Jesus' disciples also practiced baptism during His earthly ministry (John 3: 22). However, Christian baptism as such, which includes the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, only begins to be used starting on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus' Resurrection. At His ascension into heaven Jesus told His disciples to return to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit Who would, "clothe them with power from on high." He then commissioned 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." After receiving the power of the Holy Spirit in the form of wind and tongues of fire, the Apostle Peter preached to the crowds who witnessed the event out in the street. At the end of his sermon, we are told that 3000 people believed and were baptized. (Acts chapter 2). From that day onward, it was the practice of the Christian Church to baptize new converts not only to indicate repentance but also for the purpose of incorporating them into the Body of Christ and empowering them with the Holy Spirit.

2) Infant Baptism or Believer's Baptism? Among Christians there is a variety of differing opinions concerning the question of whether it is right to baptize infants or to wait until a person is able to make a conscious personal decision for Christ himself. The issue which underlies this debate is concerned with the relationship between the personal commitment of faith and the action of the Church to administer the grace of the sacrament.

The 16th century Anglican reformers addressed this issue by asking the question, "What does baptism signify: does it demonstrate our own 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 by grace, so that baptism becomes "an instrument" by which we share in that redemption: "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." (Book of Common Prayer p. 873)

Therefore we can say that the Anglican understanding of Baptism is that it represents not only an action which witnesses to our Faith, it is primarily a genuine means by which the grace of God is given to us. In his letter to the Romans, chapter 5 verse 8 St. Paul tells us, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God reaches out to us with His saving grace, and then invites our response of faith. God initiates the provision of Grace through the Holy Spirit, making our response possible. Therefore, the practice of infant baptism in particular points out and clarifies our understanding that Grace is initiated to us by God; it is not our decision of Faith which somehow calls down God's Grace or caused Him to bestow it upon us. Rather, Faith is our response to the Grace given to us; even an infant can receive this Grace. We can also see that, as a sign of our incorporation into the New 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 of Abraham. In a similar way, infants are brought into the New Covenant of Grace in Jesus Christ by baptism.

3) The Relationship between Baptism and the Sacrament of Confirmation Although we understand that the grace of salvation is imparted to us by the Sacrament of Baptism, the process of sanctification which must follow upon it is only possible if we make a personal decision of Faith to commit ourselves to Jesus Christ and to live out that commitment in real ways. The new life of Baptism must be received and lived 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 affected by these two. (*On Baptism*)

Confirmation, like all the sacraments, is also: “An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual Grace.” (BCP p. 857). It is important to remember that confirmation does **not** somehow complete or add anything to our baptism: the sacrament of baptism is complete in itself. However, confirmation provides a special grace to go out and do the mission of the Church which is to “make disciples [by] preaching the Gospel to all nations.” It provides the particular empowerment to “fight the good fight” of giving witness to the light of Christ in a dark world. A person cannot go out to do this mission or fight this good fight without a real personal commitment to Jesus Christ and His Gospel in his own life. When someone stands up and goes forward to receive confirmation, this conscious choice represents a public decision and witness of faith. Therefore, in liturgical churches the sacrament of confirmation provides the opportunity for a person to make this conscious decision of faith and to proclaim it to the world. However, the grace of this sacrament – like the grace of all sacraments – makes our lived faith commitment possible. The faithful baptized Christian is called upon to choose this commitment and to be strengthened in it by the grace of the sacrament of confirmation.

Materials:

- \$ Bibles or printed excerpts from Holy Scripture as listed below.
- \$ Questions as listed below prepared ahead of time for use by the students.
- \$ Optional – DVD player and DVD of Zeffereilli’s *Jesus of Nazareth* – if possible
- \$ Paper and pens or pencils

Opening Prayer: (5 minutes)

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. (BCP, 254 #10 *At Baptism*)

Introductory Activity: (5 – 10 minutes)

Take a walk through your 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 a member of the Body of Christ and a part of the community, which is why we rarely perform private baptisms.

Lesson (20 – 30 minutes)

Part I: Describe and discuss the Baptism of Jesus:

Read the account of Jesus' Baptism in Mark 1: 4 – 11 (or Matthew 3: verses 5 & 6, and 13 – 17). *Optional* (if you have the necessary equipment): 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 on the internet.

Discussion Questions:

- a) Why is John baptizing, and why do you think so many people are coming to him?
- b) What does John say about the one coming after him?
- c) What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and how is it different from John's baptism?

[Note to teacher: John never tells us what it means to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. But Mark, (or Matthew) the Gospel writer, 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 a 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 upon others.**]

- d) What are the three events that take place as Jesus comes out of the water? [The students will list them.] When they have done this, explain the significance of each. 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* a 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." This is the key to the rest of this passage, which is revealing Who Jesus really is – the Son of God.

Therefore, if the baptism that Jesus receives is the baptism that Jesus bestows, then this passage also tells us about ourselves. Explain 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 this all the same, and this is true. At baptism you also become, in relation to God, what Jesus is to his Father: a beloved child. Before you were God's workmanship, but now you are God's child.

Part II Discuss the idea: "That we might receive adoption as sons..."

Jesus is the eternal "Word" Who was in the beginning with God, and was God, who "dwells in the bosom of the Father" from all eternity (John 1:1-2, 18). We are not this ourselves. [Note to teacher: We become children of God, and God becomes our Father by the process which Holy Scripture calls: "adoption." Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, provides the way for us to become the adopted children of God.]

Discussion Questions:

- a) 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)
- b) (You should check into these questions with students before the class to make sure that none of these questions are "hot button" issues for anyone in the class). Ask if anyone in the group was adopted by their parents. Do they know anyone who was adopted? Has anyone known a childless couple 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.
- c) Read aloud: Galatians 4:4-7. Why does God "send forth his Son?" (That we might receive adoption to be God's children)
- d) What is the consequence of this adoption for us? ("God sends the 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.")

Part III: Discuss the nature of baptism: An Outward and Visible Sign – Cleansing from Sin

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

Discussion Questions:

- a) What is the "outward and visible sign" in the sacrament of baptism? (Washing with water.)
- b) If the water is a sign, then what does it signify? (Guide the students to focus on spiritual cleansing.)
- c) If baptism is a cleansing, what do we need to be cleansed from? (The students should remember something from the lessons on sin and redemption – #10, #11 and #12. Review if needed.)
- d) Read Psalm 51:1-8 (Book of Common Prayer page 656) 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."
- e) Quote 1 Peter 3:21: "Baptism is now the means God uses to save you from sin, 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.

Part IV An Outward and Visible Sign: Participation in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus
Read Romans 6:3 – 11. Point out that in this passage baptism is described as connecting us into Jesus at the deepest level; we are "baptized *into* Christ."

Discussion Questions:

- a) Water does not signify cleansing here; what does the water symbolize in this passage? (Drowning & a kind of “death;” burial with Christ in the “tomb” of the font which refers to the early practice of baptism by full immersion)
- b) If we share in the death of Christ by baptism, what do we also share with Christ? (An entirely new “resurrected life” by means of Jesus’ 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 Jesus in his death, and hence still joined to him as he comes out into the light of resurrection life.

Another Illustration: We have probably all received vaccinations. A vaccination injects a microbe into our bodies to stimulate the immune system against that disease. It is a small harmless dose of a disease that causes our bodies to generate “antibodies” which will destroy any germs of that disease that we might encounter later. This creates an immunity to the disease itself. The vaccination “counts for the real thing” as though we had had the real disease already. 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 (our death and resurrection), so that God’s judgment on sin is lifted and we are brought into fellowship and share in Jesus’ risen life.

Reflection: (5 – 10 minutes)

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. However, we must receive the gift that God gives us by faith in order for it to affect us.

Optional illustration: 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 does two things: it gives us the grace of strength to live our faith and do the mission God has given us; and, it also provides a way for us publically to affirm the promises made on our behalf at baptism. We now renounce evil, turn to Jesus as Lord and Savior, and observe lives of obedience, repentance and service to others as our free choice and commitment.

The sacramental act, or “outward sign” 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.” The “inward spiritual grace” is this strength, guidance and empowerment which the Holy Spirit gives to us.

Discuss: What are your thoughts feelings about preparing to make this choice and commitment?

Take-Home Activities: (5 minutes)

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: (5 minutes)

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 (Optional: Matthew 3: 5 & 6 and 13 – 17)
- * 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*, Intervarsity Press
- * Daniel B. Stevick. *Baptismal Moments, Baptismal Meanings*, Church Hymnal Corp.