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## Baptism

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation are the three Sacraments that initiate us into the life of Christ and the life of the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. These three Sacraments begin our lives as followers of Christ. In this section we explore the Sacraments of Baptism (part 1) and Confirmation (part 2). We discuss the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 1324*), separately in section 3.

This part’s exploration of Baptism includes discussion of the Sacrament’s scriptural roots and history and provides an overview of two rites the Church follows for Baptism: the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the Rite of Baptism for Children. Along the way you will be encouraged to reflect on the meaning of Baptism in your own life: What does it mean to be baptized? to follow Jesus Christ? to belong to the Church? The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 11: Introduction to Baptism (page 55)
- Article 12: Christian Initiation in the Early Centuries (page 59)
- Article 13: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults I (page 61)
- Article 14: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults II (page 66)
- Article 15: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults III (page 70)
- Article 16: The Rite of Baptism for Children (page 76)
- Article 17: Baptism: The Source of Christian Living (page 82)

Article

# 11 Introduction to Baptism

The **Sacrament of Baptism**, the first Sacrament of Christian Initiation, is the basis of the entire Christian life. In Baptism we become members of Christ and of the Church, and we also become sharers in her mission to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

The word *Baptism* comes from the Greek word *baptizein*, which means “to plunge.” In Baptism we are plunged into the waters of death in order to rise to new life in Christ.

Baptism is also called “the bath of enlightenment,” for through Baptism we are enlightened by the Word that is Christ and receive “the true light” (John 1:9) that enlightens every follower of Christ.

The next time you witness a Baptism, either in your own family or at a parish celebration, try to think about its meaning as plunging into death in order to rise into life, and as the bath of enlightenment.

## The Waters of Life: Creation

The Sacrament of Baptism finds its roots in the Old Testament, the Old Covenant with God, the Old Covenant that Jesus came “not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). These roots begin in the Book of Genesis.

“Since the beginning of the world, water . . . has been the source of life” (CCC, 1218). At the beginning of creation, the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters, breathed on them, and brought life from them (see Genesis 1:1).

This is what the Church remembers at every Baptism: The Holy Spirit hovers over the possibility of every human life, and brings wonderful gifts to fruition in it. In Baptism a human being becomes a new creation in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## The Great Flood

But water can be deadly. It is a fact that, among all the natural disasters possible in this world, human life is most frequently lost not through earthquakes, fires, or tornadoes, but through flooding. Again, we find in the Book of Genesis a



### Baptism, Sacrament of

The first of the Seven Sacraments and one of the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation (the others being Confirmation and the Eucharist) by which one becomes a member of the Church and a new creature in Christ.

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Consider your experiences with water, both positive and negative.

picture of that kind of flood. Human life had been overtaken by sin. In the account of Noah's ark, we are told that God was so disgusted with the human state of affairs that he wanted to start over. He wanted to save a remnant of his people and of his creation so that eventually all could be saved.

Noah's ark, and all the people and animals in it, survived the waters of the Flood. A dove (symbol of the Holy Spirit!) brought evidence that land (symbol of the Promised Land) was near. At every Baptism a human being is "buried" in water as a symbol of death and at the same time is brought through those same waters into new life, life in Jesus Christ and in his Church.

### From Death to Life: The Exodus

The Israelites' passage through the Red Sea also gives us insight about Baptism. The People of God, with their leader Moses, were led from slavery to freedom, from certain death to new life, by passing through the waters of the Red Sea. At first Pharaoh agreed to let God's People leave peacefully, but then he changed his mind. He sent his chariots and charioteers to chase them down and bring them back. The Red Sea loomed ahead. They were caught! How would they cross? Moses lifted his rod, the waters parted in great walls to the left and to the right, and God's People marched through on dry land.

The Church remembers all this at every Baptism. The waters of Baptism are the waters that part for *us*, so that we can be freed from sin and can continue our journey to the Promised Land of eternal life. The image of the Israelites' safe passage through the waters of death is an image of the freedom that is ours through Baptism.

At every Easter Vigil, the Israelites' passage through the Red Sea is proclaimed in the beautiful song of the *Exsultet* and in the third reading (Exodus 4:15—15:1). When you hear these proclamations, thank God for your Baptism.

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## The Waters of the Jordan

The River Jordan is a symbol of Baptism that leads us from the Old Testament to the New. In order to reach the Promised Land, God's People had one more river to cross: the Jordan River. When they did, they knew they were "home free." Centuries later, in the same River Jordan, John the Baptist offered a baptism of repentance to the people. He was offering them a chance to prepare themselves to recognize and follow the Messiah, the Anointed One, when he

### Poor, Wayfaring Strangers

An old folk song illustrates one of the symbolic meanings of the River Jordan. The song goes like this:

*I'm just a poor, wayfaring stranger  
A-travelin' through this world of woe  
There is no sickness, no toil or danger  
In that fair land to which I go.*

*I'm goin' home to see my mother  
I'm goin' home no more to roam  
I'm just a-goin' over Jordan  
I'm just a-goin' over home.*

In the song, the wayfaring stranger is near death. He is going "over Jordan" to the Promised Land—that is, to Heaven. He is going to a land free from sickness, toil, and danger. He is going home.

But what if we see the River Jordan as a symbol of the waters of Baptism? Then going "over Jordan" would mean being baptized into Christ. The "fair land" is the Promised Land, here a symbol of the Church itself. In the Church, through the waters of Baptism, we poor, wayfaring strangers find our true home.





### catechumen

An unbaptized person who is preparing for full initiation into the Catholic Church by engaging in formal study, reflection, and prayer.

should appear. Of course, we know that John was the first to recognize Jesus as this very Messiah. The writer of the Gospel of John, when recounting this important moment of recognition, notes carefully that “this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing” (1:28). In this Messiah, in Jesus, is true freedom.

When the water is blessed for Baptism, these four great events of salvation history—creation, Noah’s ark, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the crossing of the River Jordan—are commemorated. They prefigure the mystery of the Sacrament of Baptism. Because these events are part of the Church’s memory and understanding of salvation, they illuminate our own understanding of what the Sacrament of Baptism does for us.

### Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

All these events of salvation history are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was baptized in the waters of the River Jordan, the heavens opened. The Holy Spirit, who had hovered over the waters of creation, descended upon Jesus as “the firstborn among many” (Romans 8:29) and the beloved Son of the Father (see Mark 1:11). On the night before he died, Jesus celebrated the Passover, the passing over of the Jews from slavery into freedom. He spoke of his Passion as a “baptism” with which he was to be baptized (see Mark 10:38, Luke 12:50). When Jesus died and was raised from the dead, he passed from death to life and brought us out of the slavery of sin into the “glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). Jesus, then, is the true Ark in which we have been saved.

When the Jewish leader Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, Jesus told him, “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (John 3:5). After his Resurrection, Jesus entrusted this mission of baptizing all nations to his Apostles (see Matthew 28:12). In the Acts of the Apostles, we find that Peter is following Jesus’ instructions, for in Peter’s address to the crowd immediately after Pentecost, he tells them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The same promise holds true for us today. †



Article

## 12 Christian Initiation in the Early Centuries

It is the third century in Rome. It is the night before Easter Sunday. It is early evening, just before dark. You are gathered with other men and women, some old, some young like yourself, near a gurgling stream that feeds into the Tiber River. You are a **catechumen**. You have been learning the Christian faith and living, as best you can, as a follower of Jesus for the past three years. Now, tonight, you will be baptized. Your catechist is here, and your sponsor (your companion in the faith, who offered your name as a candidate) is by your side. The priest is standing up to his knees in the waters, with the deacon at his side ready to help him and the catechumens during the ritual.

The men stand in one group, the women in the other. One by one, you are called by name. You strip off your robe and walk into the waters. You are immersed three times, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You come up dripping. You are anointed with Sacred Chrism, wrapped in a towel, dried off, and then given a new white garment. It is dark now, and a glowing candle is thrust into your hands as you and the others begin to walk toward the assembly. They have been gathered for some time, listening to the readings from the prophets and from the Apostles. They are waiting for you to join them, for the first time, in the Prayers of the Faithful.

The bishop greets you at the door, seals you in the Holy Spirit with the seal of Sacred Chrism, and leads you into the assembly. As the prayers begin, you realize that you can now pray with your brothers and sisters; no one has dismissed you, and soon you will receive the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ. For this is the night of celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the night of new life and new beginning. "Yes," you say to yourself, "this is the night of my resurrection too, my resurrection in Christ and my new beginning in him. Alleluia!"



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In Baptism, we are called from darkness into light. How can you, in Christ, be light for the world?

### Three Special Sacraments

The previous vignette presented a rough approximation of the receiving of a catechumen into the Church in the early centuries. In this vignette we can recognize the **Sacraments of Christian Initiation**: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. These three Sacraments have been linked from the very beginning. Receiving all three of them at the Easter Vigil or at the Vigil of Pentecost was the usual way of becoming a Christian in the early Church.

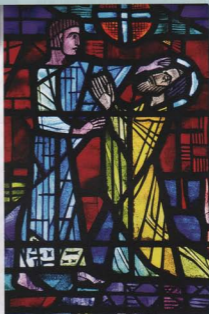
The Sacraments of Christian Initiation involved much preparation. The vignette told us that this catechumen had been studying and learning for three years! The early Christians realized that change is not easy, and that a com-

#### The Baptism of Christ

Even though, as the Son of God, Jesus had no need to repent, he asked to be baptized. He wanted to show his solidarity with us. It was at this event that the Father's voice was heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). At this baptism the Father acclaimed his Son. At our own Baptism, we are adopted as the Father's sons and daughters in Christ.

At Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. The presence of the Holy Spirit prefigures the presence of the Holy Spirit at the Baptisms of the followers of Christ that were to come. John the Baptist himself compared his baptism with the Baptism to be brought about by Jesus: "The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit'" (John 1:33).

Did John realize that when he baptized Jesus, the heavens would open to reveal the presence of the Holy Trinity? Probably not. But ever since, whenever someone is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, the "heavens are opened" and the Holy Trinity is present.



mitment to a way of life requiring love, forgiveness, and service to others took time. This “learning” was not simply hearing information about Jesus and the truths of the faith; it involved active learning and practicing a new way of life in the midst of the Christian community—the Christian way of life. During the process of preparing, the catechumen was supported by the liturgy and by the personal involvement of the community and was provided with **catechesis**, or oral instruction, aimed at education and formation in the Christian life. ✚

Article

## 13 The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults I

Aspects of the catechumenal process followed in the early centuries of the Church eventually fell away as circumstances changed and Baptism was more commonly administered in infancy. However, throughout the centuries, the process of becoming a fully initiated member of the Church has always involved the following essential elements: the proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel and conversion to a new way of life, the profession of faith, Baptism, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and reception of the Eucharist (see CCC, 1229).

Today, as always, Baptism is the first Sacrament of Christian Initiation. We use two different but closely related rites when celebrating this Sacrament. We celebrate the Rite of Baptism for Children when baptizing children who have not reached the age of reason (seven years). Those baptized as young children usually complete their initiation (with the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist) later in childhood or during their teen years. When baptizing older children (seven and older) and adults, we celebrate the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)**. Those celebrating according to the RCIA are fully initiated during the same liturgy of their Baptism. Those adults who have already been baptized in another Christian faith community, as well as adult Catholics who have been baptized but never practiced their faith, participate in the RCIA but are not rebaptized. They are called candidates, and they prepare to receive the remaining two Sacraments of Christian Initiation, Confirmation and the Eucharist.



### Christian Initiation, Sacraments of

The three Sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—through which we enter into full membership in the Church.

### catechesis, catechists

Catechesis is the process by which Christians of all ages are taught the essentials of Christian doctrine and are formed as disciples of Christ. Catechists are the ministers of catechesis.

### Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The process by which an unbaptized person, called a “catechumen,” and those who were baptized in another Christian denomination, called “candidates for full communion,” are prepared to become full members of the Church.

In articles 13–15, “The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults I,” “The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults II,” and “The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults III,” we explore the RCIA. In article 16, “The Rite of Baptism for Children,” we look at the Rite of Baptism for Children. We devote three articles to the RCIA because, in its various elements, it outlines the essence of Christian discipleship. In these articles we focus on the rite primarily as it applies to those who are unbaptized.

### The Restoration of the Catechumenate

The Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963) called for the restoration of the catechumenate, the process of initiation known and practiced in the early Church (see 64). This beautiful communal process was recovered and reestablished as the normative process for an adult (or a child who has reached the age of reason) to become a Catholic. In 1972 the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) was published.

### The Stages of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

An unbaptized person who is thinking of becoming a Catholic has a wonderful and life-changing journey ahead. But it is not a journey that he or she will take alone. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults involves a journey within community. Certainly there will be times of solitary decision and individual reflection, but the process is in itself an introduction to life within the Church. The process involves the local parish and also the local diocese. As we examine the process, we will see how an individual person is welcomed, catechized, chosen (or “elected”) for Baptism, and then admitted to the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—all in the midst of, and with the help and support of, the local Church.

The process is structured to include seven stages—four distinct periods of time and three steps, as follows:

- Period of Inquiry (Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate)
- First Step: Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

## Candidates for the Sacraments

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is first of all intended for catechumens, those who have not been baptized. Those who have already been baptized do not participate in the baptismal rites of the RCIA, as they are already members of the community of the faith. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults can be adapted to those who have already been baptized but have not practiced the Christian faith. For example, if a person was baptized in a Protestant church, she or he would not be baptized again but would be a candidate for the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist. Someone who was baptized in the Catholic Church but never practiced the faith would not be baptized again but would also be a candidate for the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist. A Catholic who was never confirmed may also, in some instances, join the catechumens and other candidates in formation sessions while preparing for Confirmation.



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- Period of the Catechumenate
- Second Step: Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names
- Period of Purification and Enlightenment
- Third Step: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation
- Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

You will notice that each step is preceded by a time, or period, of preparation. In this article and the next two, we discuss each period and step in detail.



### evangelization

The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ through word and witness.

## Period of Inquiry

A person interested in being baptized in the Catholic Church begins by becoming an “inquirer.” The official name for this time of inquiry is the period of **evangelization** and **precatechumenate**. *Evangelization* means “the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus through word and witness.” During this time the inquirer listens to the Good News, learns about the Catholic faith, and discerns a call to live the Gospel life as a Catholic. This process of evangelization unfolds through meetings with priests, deacons, the religious education or catechumenate director, catechists, and often other inquirers and parishioners. The duration of this inquiry time is flexible.

## First Step: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens follows the period of the precatechumenate. In this rite the inquirers publicly declare their intention to follow Christ and are accepted as catechumens. The celebrant greets them (preferably at the door of the Church) and asks:

“What is your name?”

The candidate gives his or her name.

“What do you ask of God’s Church?”

The candidate answers: “Faith.”

Celebrant: “What does faith offer you?”

Candidate: “Eternal life.”

(*RCIA*, 50)



The priest welcomes the candidate with the Sign of the Cross marked on the forehead. From the beginning, the cross of Christ, the doorway to true and eternal life, is the sign of faith and the mark of the Christian.

The faith required for Baptism is a “beginning” faith, a faith that will develop within the community of believers, the Church. Sponsors must be ready to help the new believers on the road of Christian life, and the entire Church community is responsible to some extent for the development of the gift of faith given at Baptism.

The celebrant tells the candidates that because they have followed God’s light, the way of the Gospel lies open before them. He encourages them to continue to walk in the light of Christ and to commit their lives each day to his care. The celebrant then asks the candidates if they are prepared

to begin their journey. When they answer that they are, the celebrant asks the sponsors and the community if they are ready to “help these candidates find and follow Christ” (RCIA, 53). The assembly answers: “We are” (53).

The celebrant then signs the foreheads of the candidates with the Sign of the Cross. The celebrant may also sign other parts of the body (ears, eyes, lips, and so on). Then the candidate’s sponsor does the same. The celebrant then prays a concluding prayer, asking for grace, protection, and perseverance for those who have been accepted into the order of catechumens.

The Rite of Acceptance always includes the Liturgy of the Word and often takes place during the Eucharist. Here, for the first time, the catechumens have assembled together and, in most cases, will be dismissed together after the homily.

### Period of the Catechumenate

The catechumenate is a time of formation. During this time the catechumens are gradually introduced to the Catholic faith. They are also guided in the Christian way of living in love for God and neighbor and in gratitude for Christ’s salvation. Catechumenal formation is carried out in these ways:

1. **Catechesis** Catechesis, gradual and complete, aims not only to help the catechumens understand the Church’s teaching but also to introduce them to the mystery of Christ. This catechesis is generally coordinated with the liturgical year and incorporates celebrations of the Liturgy of the Word (see RCIA, 75, 1).

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A catechetical session is led by an experienced person of faith who can help the catechumens to integrate knowledge of Christ and the Church with a new way of thinking, loving, and living.



### Rite of Election

The Rite, which takes place on the first Sunday of Lent, by which the Church elects or accepts the catechumens for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The Rite of Election begins a period of purification and enlightenment.

### elect

The title given to catechumens after the Rite of Election while they are in the final period of preparation for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

2. **Spiritual development** The spiritual life of the catechumens deepens through their participation in the life of the community. Gradually, their views and actions reflect more and more the Christian way of life. They learn to pray, to witness to the Gospel through words and actions, and to live rooted in the hope that Christ makes possible (see *RCIA*, 75, 2).
3. **Liturgy** The catechumens are supported by liturgical rites, especially celebrations of the Word, during Sunday Mass with the community and at other times when celebrations of the Word are planned for the catechumens, as well as blessings and anointings (see *RCIA*, 75, 3).
4. **Apostolic witness** The catechumens learn to work with others to share the Gospel and to build up the Church through the witness of their actions and their profession of faith (see *RCIA*, 75, 4).

We noted that the catechumen baptized in the early Church in Rome spent three years preparing for initiation. Today the duration of the catechumenate varies according to the faith development of the individual catechumen.

Catechumens are considered “part of the household of Christ” (*RCIA*, 47). Although not yet baptized, a catechumen who dies during the catechumenate is given a Christian burial. †

Article

## 14 The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults II

The next step in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the **Rite of Election** or Enrollment of Names. The word *election* implies a choice. The Church has *elected* to accept the catechumens for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. They are no longer called catechumens. They are given a new title: the **elect**.

### Second Step: The Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names

The Rite of Election is usually held on the First Sunday of Lent. It is the bishop of the diocese, or his delegate, who admits the candidates to the Rite of Election and to the



## Godparents

Sometime before the Rite of Election, those preparing for Baptism choose godparents. A godparent must be a practicing Catholic, over the age of eighteen, who can support this particular person in his or her faith journey—formally from the Rite of Election through reception into the Church and beyond. It is the responsibility of the godparent “to show the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates’ progress in the baptismal life” (RCIA, 11). Godparents are chosen

for their good qualities, their example, and their friendship. This choice is made with the consent of the pastor or priest, and sometimes with the consultation of the catechists.



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Sacraments. The rite takes place at the cathedral; however, in dioceses that cover vast distances, regional groupings of parishes often celebrate the Rite of Election together at a centrally located parish church.

### Called and Chosen

The Rite of Election begins after the homily when the catechumens are presented. The godparents are asked to affirm that the catechumens are worthy and prepared to be admitted to the ranks of the elect and to look forward to receiving the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist at Easter.

The catechumens are asked if they wish to enter fully into the life of the Church through the Sacraments of Bap-



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A godparent takes on a special responsibility, beginning with the Rite of Election. They “stand up” or vouch for a catechumen’s readiness for the Sacraments. Godparents are a living example of the Christian life.

tism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. After they respond, “We do,” they are asked to offer their names for enrollment (see *RCIA*, 132). As one option, they may inscribe their names, usually in a special book. After all have offered their names, the act of admission or election takes place. The bishop turns to the candidates and says:

“I now declare you to be members of the elect, to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter Vigil.”

The candidates respond, “Thanks be to God.”

(*RCIA*, 133)

After the act of election, the liturgy continues with intercessions for the elect. Then the bishop, with outstretched hands, prays a prayer over the elect, that they may be helped and strengthened in the coming days. After this, if the Eucharist is being celebrated, the elect are dismissed.

### Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The Rite of Election begins a period of what the Church calls purification and enlightenment. This time is intended to purify and enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect. This

## Live It!

### Questions of Faith

In the Rite of Election, the godparents are asked to attest to the candidates’ readiness for the Sacraments by answering the following questions:

- Have they faithfully listened to God’s Word proclaimed by the Church?
- Have they responded to that Word and begun to walk in God’s presence?
- Have they shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters and joined with them in prayer?

These questions set out the basics of the Christian life: listening to God’s Word, responding to that Word, and joining in Christian community with others. Those of us who have long been members of the Church may find these questions to be valuable guidelines on our journey with Christ. We might ask ourselves how well we have listened and responded to the Word of God this week, and how regularly we seek to pray with the members of our community of faith through liturgical prayer and devotions.

involves examination of conscience and doing penance as well as deepening one's knowledge of, and relationship with, Jesus Christ. The period customarily coincides with the season of Lent, which is a time of purification and enlightenment for the whole Church. The elect participate in reflection that helps them to prepare for Baptism while the others in the community reflect on the meaning of their Baptism.



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### Scrutinies

During this period, the elect participate in three **scrutinies**, liturgical rites celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. These rites aid in self-examination and repentance, and have the spiritual purpose of healing any weakness or sin. These rites also strengthen what is good, and help the elect to “hold fast to Christ” (*RCIA*, 141).

The scrutiny takes place after the homily. As the elect stand with bowed heads or kneel, the assembly prays several petitions directly for them as they prepare to receive the Sacraments at Easter.

This is followed by an exorcism, a prayer that the elect may acknowledge their weaknesses and put their trust in God. If it can be done easily, the celebrant lays hands on each of the elect. Then, with hands outstretched over all of the elect, he prays that their hearts may be touched by the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands and the outstretched hands of the celebrant are both signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is called upon to purify the hearts of the elect and to prepare them for all the graces God is preparing for

During a scrutiny, the elect kneel while the priest, with hands outstretched, prays that the power of the Holy Spirit may come upon them. Godparents show support by placing their hands on the shoulders of the elect.



### scrutinies

Rites within the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults that support and strengthen the elect through prayers of intercession and exorcism.

them. After the Liturgy of the Word, the elect are dismissed as usual.

### The Creed and the Lord's Prayer

The period of purification and enlightenment also includes two presentations—the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. The presentations take place on weekdays during the third week of Lent (Creed), and the fifth week of Lent (Lord's Prayer).

Ideally, the key elements of the Christian faith are not presented on paper. Instead, in each instance, the elect are asked to stand and *listen* as the Creed and the Our Father are recited for them. This represents the personal, spoken handing on of the faith. This kind of learning explains Saint Paul's words that we receive the Spirit from faith in what we hear (see Galatians 3:2). In handing over the Creed and the Lord's Prayer to the elect, the Church asks the elect not only to learn them by heart but to *live* them by heart. ✚

The Paschal Candle is a symbol of the Risen Christ, who overcomes all darkness, sin, and death. It remains lit for the entire Easter Season. It is also lit at Baptisms and at funerals, as a sign of new life in Christ.

Article

## 15 The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults III

As the end of Lent nears, the elect, with the entire Church, are focused on the saving events of Holy Week and the

Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, the mystery into which they will soon be immersed through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. For the elect, Holy Saturday is a special day of preparation, and they are urged to use it as a day of reflection in preparation for the Easter Vigil, when they will celebrate the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

### Third Step: Celebration of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation

Imagine this: It is the Easter Vigil. We are gathered in assembly, with the elect in our midst. The new fire has been lit. The Church is dark. Out of the darkness, a voice sings out, "Light of Christ!" We respond, "Thanks be to God!" We turn and see a flame marching slowly toward us, a flame at

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the top of a tall white candle. As smaller candles are lit from this flame, light slowly overcomes the darkness. Now it is your turn to light your small candle, and to pass it on.

The tall candle (the **Paschal candle**, the symbol of the Risen Christ in our midst) has reached the front of the church. All eyes are upon it as the deacon sings these ancient words excerpted from the Exsultet (named after its first word, *Exult!* or *Rejoice!*):

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,  
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,  
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night,  
when once you led our forebears, Israel's children,  
from slavery in Egypt  
and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night  
that with a pillar of fire  
banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night  
that even now, throughout the world,  
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices  
and from the gloom of sin,



### Paschal candle

Also called the Easter candle, this is the large, tall candle lit at the Easter Vigil by a flame from the new fire; the symbol of the Risen Christ. It is lit in the sanctuary for Masses during the Easter season, and during the year is kept near the baptismal font. It is lit at Baptisms and at funeral services throughout the year as a sign of the presence of the Risen Christ among us.

## Pray It!

### Rejoice! Sing! Exult!

In the hustle and bustle of our lives, we tend to forget about Easter and its significance for our lives throughout the entire year. The Exsultet will help us to remember. Here is a short passage from that beautiful proclamation to help us remember that we are living risen lives with Jesus:

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven  
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,  
let the trumpet of salvation  
sound aloud our mighty King's triumph!

Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,  
ablaze with light from her eternal King,  
let all corners of the earth be glad,  
knowing an end to gloom and darkness.

*(Roman Missal)*

As you pray, may glory fill you, and may gloom and darkness come to an end!