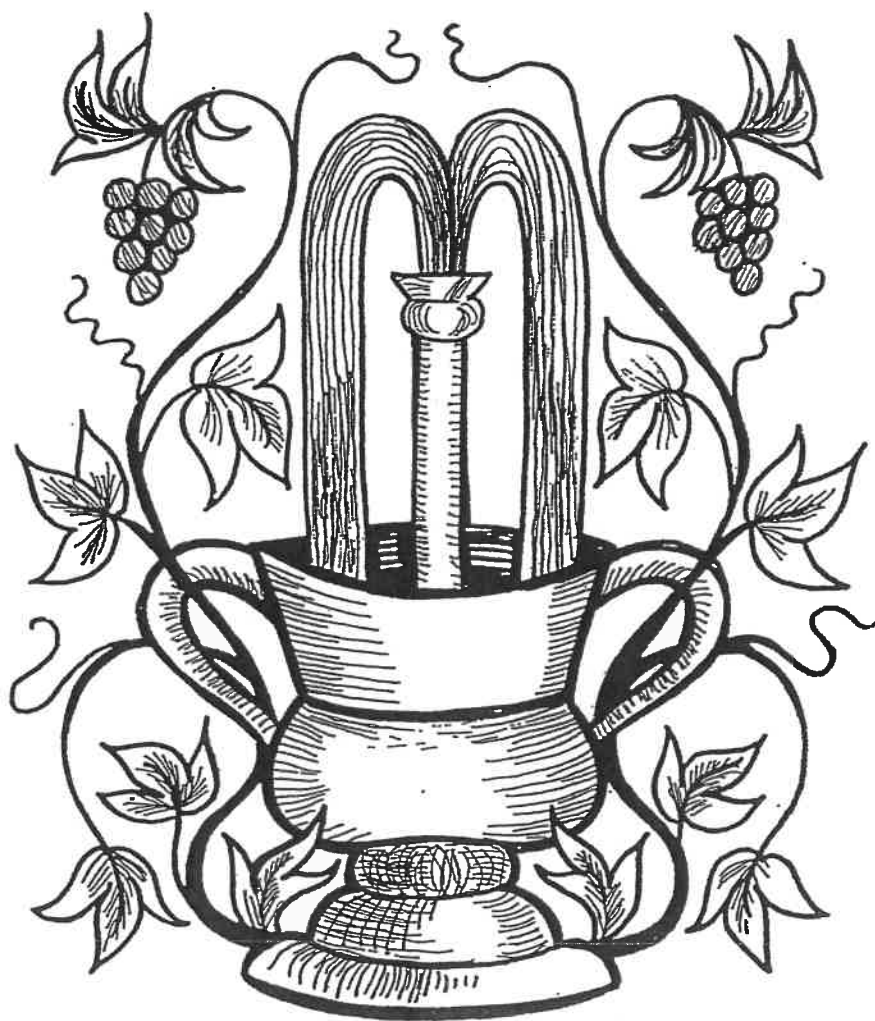


CHRISTENED

= NEWBORN IN CHRIST =



Chapter 1

Christening: Incorporation into Christ

In the Gospels we read the story of a man named Nicodemus; even though he was a religious leader among the Jews, Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was someone special, that God was somehow powerfully with him. In a very enlightening dialogue, Jesus tells Nicodemus:

I solemnly assure you, no one can see the reign of God unless he is begotten from above (John 3:3).

Still on a very natural plane, Nicodemus can only see this in terms of being physically reborn, so he asks rather naively if we are to re-enter our mother's womb to be born again!

Capitalizing on this misunderstanding (and obviously heightened interest!) Jesus then replies:

I solemnly assure you, no one can enter into God's kingdom without being begotten of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

In other words, to enter into God's world or kingdom, Jesus tells us that we must indeed be born again!

This re-birth in Christ is our Baptism, the first of the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments), the one that is the key admitting us to the fullness of this life in Christ; for initiates or introduces us into the new life in Christ. It is truly a *birth since it is our beginning of a new way of life.*

Baptism is...Re-Birth

In our physical birth, we were born a child of this world; we are truly human and very much part of this world, a world touched by sin. Since man has never lived according to the manner intended by God, there has been a real distortion of this world, a twisting of its purpose.

Instead of living in a real relationship of harmony with God, man has always chosen to go his own way, to "do his own thing." Man has turned in on himself and pretended to be free from God. And here we find the roots of sin, the sin that has affected our world and infected our spirit. This sin has distorted the original meaning and purpose of our world and broken off our communication with God. Our world is a *broken* world, one whose allegiance has been split, whose integrity has been fragmented.

We experience the effects of this very strongly today in the secular spirit which pervades our society. Secularism is the way of thinking which alleges that our world is completely sufficient unto itself, that we need no recourse to anything or anyone beyond the scope of this life. Secularists feel that anything which smacks of a world beyond is "old-fashioned" or out of style. To speak of a God who is beyond the limits of this world,

they say, is to seek escape from the responsibilities of the here-and-now. Secularism is more than an allegiance split or an integrity fragmented, it is the option already made that this world is all there is.

Into this world we have been born. Our flesh is part of this sinful and broken world and we are infected with its spirit from our birth. There is no way we can escape being touched by it. The Psalmist says:

Indeed in iniquities I was born and in sins my mother conceived me (Psalm 50:5).

Since we are born into this world of divided allegiances, we need to have our integrity restored, to be healed and made whole once again, to be made holy. And Baptism is the new birth that restores us to our original dignity—even more, it lifts us to a new level of life that surpasses the original creation.

In Baptism we are re-born in water and the Spirit, that is to say, these are the manner and meaning of our re-birth.

...In Water

Water is one of the most common elements of our life. From even the most microscopic and simple-structured organism up to the human being, everything that lives needs water for the sustenance of this life. We can go long periods without food, but without water everything dies very quickly. Water is basic to the support of all life. Thus the symbolic value of water as a sign of life, as something that gives life and new birth, is quite obvious.

The first verses of Genesis speak of water as one of the most basic elements in creation. From it, under the impulse of the Spirit, the rest of our world emerged. So too in Baptism, the Spirit working in the waters produces life. In this respect St. John Chrysostom comments: "What the womb is to the embryo, the water is to the believer"; for it is in the life-giving water of Baptism that we believers find the source of new life. This symbolism of re-birth in water is further enhanced by the design of the baptismal fonts, which in many places were formed in the shape of a womb. In the waters of Baptism we are truly re-born.

But the water also has another aspect: it can become very destructive. Have you ever seen a raging river or menacing flood waters rising and threatening everything and everyone in their path? Swollen rivers and streams can produce rapidly moving water that wipes out everything along the way. From the simple erosion of the soil from a trickle of water, gradually whole fields and farms can be wiped out. Entire cities have been ruined by the raging water which destroys.

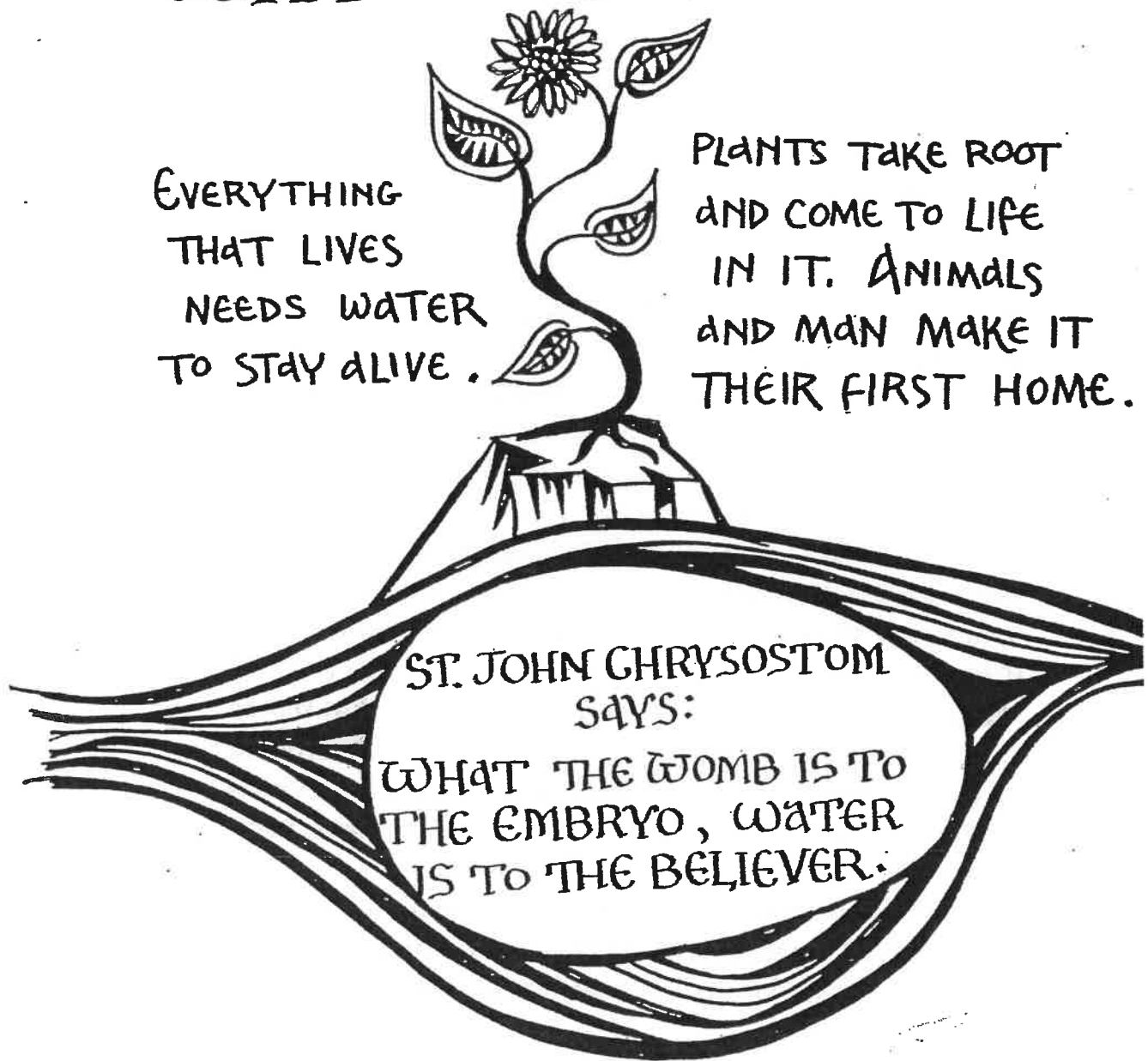
Even the normally beautiful blue lakes and refreshing pools of water can be very threatening to one who does not swim. For water can literally swallow us up and destroy us.

The second aspect of water—the destructive element—also plays an important role in Baptism. In the waters of Baptism, the sin and darkness it brings are literally swept away. Since we are born into this broken or sinful world, we are in effect touched and soiled by it; the purifying waters wash this away, cleanse us and remove all that covers the true image of our creator.

WHY WATER ?

EVERYTHING
THAT LIVES
NEEDS WATER
TO STAY ALIVE .

PLANTS TAKE ROOT
AND COME TO LIFE
IN IT. ANIMALS
AND MAN MAKE IT
THEIR FIRST HOME.



ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
SAYS:

WHAT THE WOMB IS TO
THE EMBRYO, WATER
IS TO THE BELIEVER.

WATER ALSO DESTROYS —
FLOODS, RAINSTORMS, RAPIDS —

IN BAPTISM'S WATERS SIN AND THE
DARKNESS IT BRINGS ARE SWEEPED AWAY.

Thus water is a paradoxical sign—both life-giving and destructive at the same time. As such it is the sign *par excellence* of our Baptism, for it indicates both the destruction of sin and also the appearance of the new life that is given to us.

...And of the Spirit

In the New Testament water has yet a deeper meaning. Jesus speaks of running water as a sign of the Spirit giving life in us.

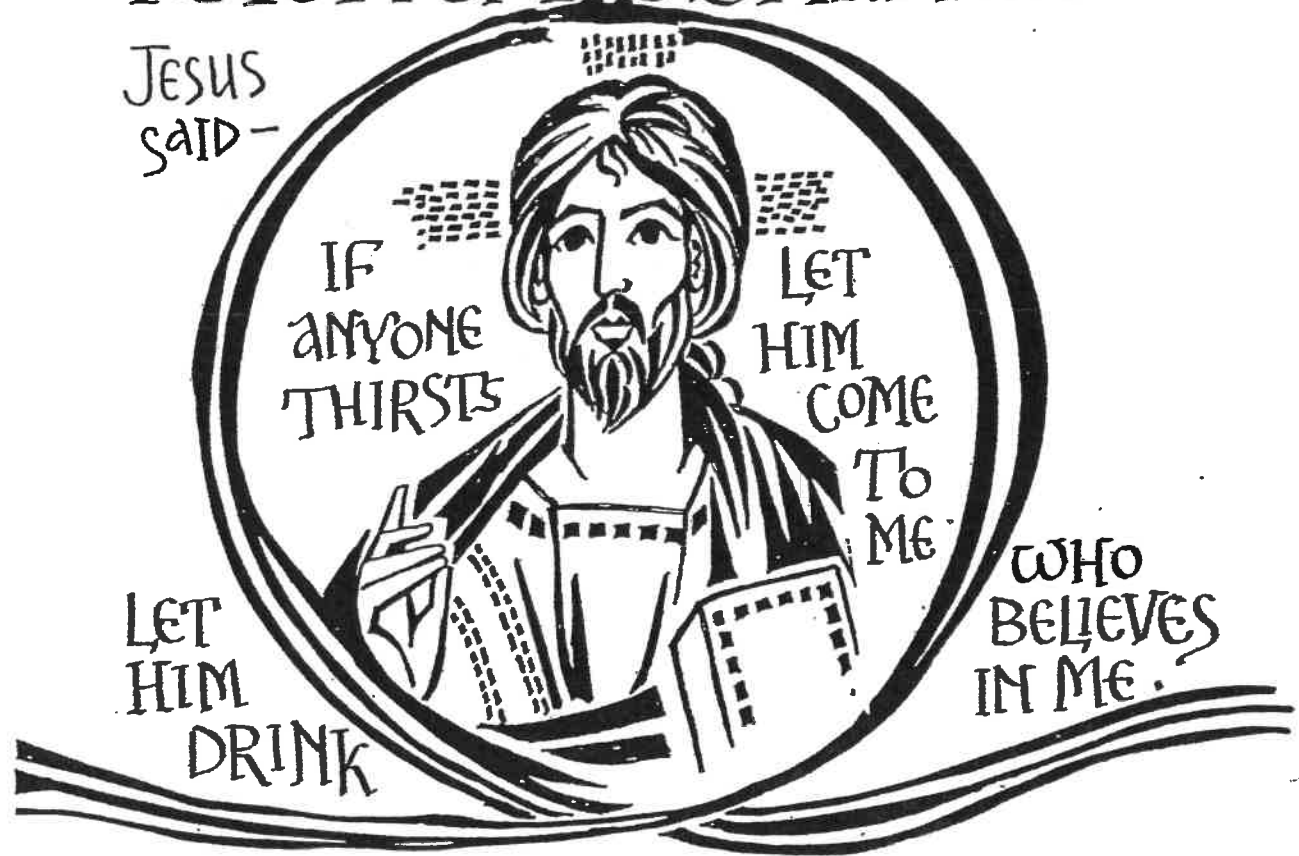
If anyone thirsts, let him come to me. Let him drink who believes in me. Scripture has it: "From within Him rivers of living water shall flow" (John 7:37-39).

The image of living water, running water such as a deep running mountain spring evokes ideas of freshness and vigor. The bubbling water of brooks, joyfully dancing over and around the rocks, is very different from the still and often stagnant waters that do not move: a fitting symbol for the life-giving and invigorating Spirit of God.

In Baptism we are physically plunged into water, but our contact is actually with Christ the source of that living water which is the Holy Spirit. We are born of Him and made to "share the very being of God" (2 Peter 1:4). We are no longer merely part and parcel of this broken world: we are God's temple, where the Spirit of God dwells.

But what does it actually mean to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, to be a partaker of the divine nature? Again we may look to Jesus to give us an answer. Christ is

a SIGN of The SPIRIT....



SCRIPTURE HAS IT: FROM WITHIN HIM
RIVERS OF LIVING WATER SHALL FLOW.
HERE HE WAS REFERRING TO THE SPIRIT
WHOM THOSE THAT CAME TO BELIEVE
IN HIM WERE TO RECEIVE. JOHN 7:37-39

FLOWING WATER IS A SIGN OF LIFE AND POWER.
SO JESUS USES IT AS A SIGN OF HIS
HOLY SPIRIT WHO GIVES US DIVINE LIFE.

BAPTISM IS A PLUNGING INTO THAT
LIVING WATER WHICH IS THE HOLY SPIRIT.

both God and man and his divinity does not make him any less human. His human qualities are all the more authentic because he is perfectly united with the Father.

When we are christened, we are given new life in Christ. Like Him—although in a radically different way—we are united with God. To the degree that we allow this seed of God-life to grow in us, we become *deified*, as the Fathers said. We radiate the light of God within us and show ourselves to be made anew according to the image and likeness of God.

This participation in the life of God—this *deification*—is actually the goal of all human existence. This goal—realized by nature in Christ—is grace. If we respond to this offer it becomes possible for us to say with St. Paul, “The life I now have is not my own; Christ is living within me” (Galatians 2:20).

...Into the Paschal Mystery

All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with him (Galatians 3:27).

In Baptism we truly put on Christ, we are *christened* as our common expression has it. And we are in fact putting on Christ through our mystical participation in his death and resurrection. Again St. Paul says:

Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Through Baptism into death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life (Romans 6:3-4).

And here we see the primary understanding of our Baptism. It is a mystical (that is, sacramental) sharing in the death/resurrection of Christ. For His death/resurrection is His passover from life on earth to eternal life; it is the uplifting of our human nature that he assumed so as to carry it to be seated at the right hand of the Father on high.

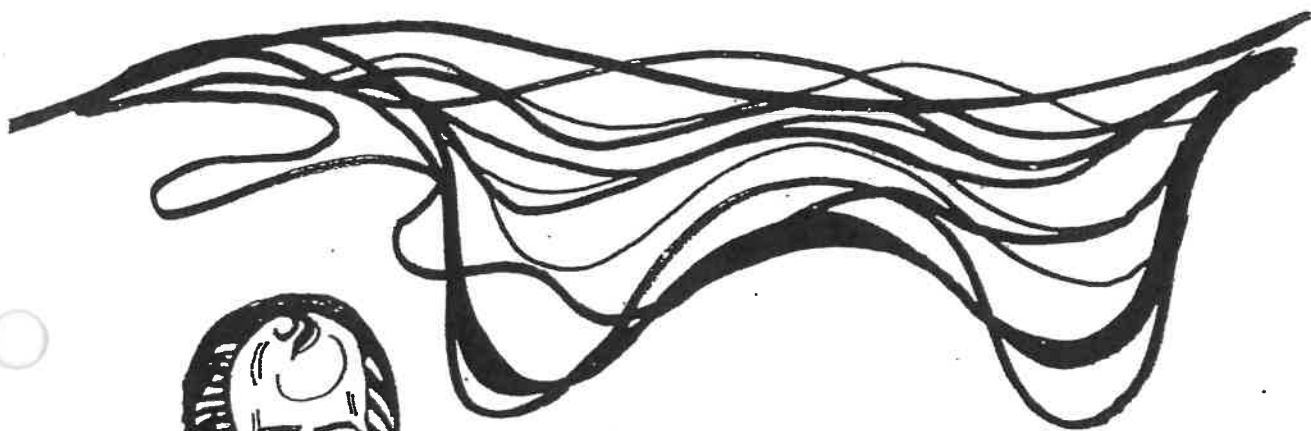
In a discussion with two of his disciples, James and John, Jesus even identifies his own suffering, death and resurrection as his Baptism:

Can you drink the same cup that I shall drink or be baptized with the same bath of pain as I? (Mark 10:38)

This great mystery, that God becomes man in Christ so that man might become God, reached its completion in the saving death and resurrection of Christ. In this event, all that is of the earth is joined to what is heavenly. Christ has become the One to re-join God and man, to indeed bring about the re-creation, the renewal of all mankind. Now that he has completed all that the Father has planned, He is lifted up in glory to be in the bosom of the Father.

Indeed, not only Christ, but all of us are invited to share in this same unity with the Father. Through Baptism (a word which means to "dip" or "immerse") we are buried in the waters of death and destruction and raised up through the waters of life. "Our head is plunged in the water as in the tomb. The old man is buried and completely drowned. When we emerge from this water, the new man is raised from the dead" (St. John Chrysostom, *Homily XXV on John*).

When we submit to Baptism, when we accept to be buried in the waters, we are also accepting the need to die to the *old man* within ourselves. The rite then becomes an indication of our commitment to live out in our daily actions the newness of life we received at our christening.



**"OUR HEAD IS PLUNGED
IN THE WATER AS THOUGH
IN A TOMB. THE OLD MAN
IS BURIED AND COMPLETELY
DROWNED. WHEN WE
EMERGE FROM THIS WATER,
THE NEW MAN IS RISEN
FROM THE DEAD."**

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Chapter 2:

The Rite of Christian Initiation

It is in the actual unfolding of the baptismal ritual that we can best see the meaning of this great mystery. For the prayers and the actions give eloquent expression to what is taking place: God communicates Himself to us, which is the basic meaning of any sacrament. And in the rites of initiation (which in the Churches of the East, always include Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist) we have the gradual initiation of a person into the life in Christ through Baptism and in Chrismation, also into life in the Church. Thus it is a celebration of the whole Church and the participation of the community is an important element in these sacraments.

We have already seen that Christian initiation means that we are taken up into the God-life. And all that is possible only because God first came to us and chose us. One of the great writers of our Church expressed it this way:

Union with Christ, then, belongs to those who have undergone all that the Savior has undergone, and have experienced and become all that He has. Now He was united to blood and flesh pure from all sin. By nature He Himself is God from the very beginning, and that which

He afterwards assumed, human nature, He has deified. Finally He died for the sake of the flesh, and rose again.

He who seeks to be united with Him must therefore share with Him in the flesh, and partake of deification and share in His death and resurrection. So we are baptized in order that we may die that death and rise again in the resurrection. We are chrismated in order that we may become partakers of the royal anointing of His deification. By feeding on the most sacred bread and drinking the most divine cup we share in the very Flesh and Blood which the Saviour assumed (*Life in Christ*, Cabasilas).

Baptism unites us to Christ in a deeply personal and individual way. Christ calls us by name, as it were, and takes us with him to the cross and the tomb so that we can become one with him in the most profound experience of his ministry. But Christian life is not only intensely personal, it is also lived in the community. And so inseparably joined are the communal sacraments of Chrismation and the Eucharist which join God's anointed people and unite us ever deeper to one another in the one Body, the Church, whose head is Christ, and in which we receive the Divine life—the life of the Trinity.

The sacramental ritual of Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist, then, lead us into this full life in the Kingdom of God. We will now look at the manner in which this takes place, and thus see through a different dimension the meaning of this initiation. The service itself is somewhat like a procession: we begin at the entrance to the church, then proceed to the baptistry or else to the

center of the church; finally we are taken to the Holy of Holies, thus completing our journey into the Kingdom.

A Christian is

...A Member of the Christian Community

The person about to be baptized together with the sponsors is met by the priest at the entrance of the church. The initial prayers are filled with the theme of coming under the saving protection of God who overshadows us with His wings. The gestures of the priest underscore this theme of preservation. He first makes the sign of the cross over the candidate. The sign of the cross is perhaps our most common gesture as Christians and our most powerful, for if we but use it, we drive out the deceit of the demons (St. Athanasius). The priest also lays his hand upon the head of the person to be baptized, further indicating that Christ now takes possession of this person. This is the reception: the person is welcomed into the Church and received by the community. For when we are received into Christ, we are accepted personally, by name, but never privately; our Baptism into Christ gives us membership in his Body, the Church.

In the prayers of exorcism which follow, the priest breathes upon the candidate. The warm breath of life, highly symbolic of God's life-giving power, chases away everything ungodly and fills the person with the sign of life.

With these initial gestures—the sign of the cross, laying on of hands, breathing—and the prayers of exorcism that follow, we are taken from the world of

darkness and evil and brought into the Church, the sign of the new world to come. We are lifted up, as it were, from the level of the original creation to the new creation where Christ is all in all.

*...A Believer in the Father,
Son and Holy Spirit*

This movement or transfer of allegiance is most clearly seen in the dialogue between the priest and the one to be baptized (or his sponsors). For the candidate is then asked to turn and face West (the symbol of darkness) and three times is asked to renounce Satan and his power. After having done this, he then turns towards the East (the place of light and the Throne of God) and is asked three times to commit himself to Christ.

It is this double movement—the renunciation of Satan and the acceptance of Christ—that forms the nucleus of our baptismal commitment. It is not only the negative aspect of turning away from evil, for this is never enough. Remember the Gospel story about the demon who departs from a man and goes in search of a resting place. Finding none, it decides to return to the man and finds its dwelling place occupied, swept clean and empty. Then it goes off and brings back seven spirits more evil than itself so that the condition of the man is worse than his original state (Matthew 12:43-45).

Thus it is not enough to turn our backs on evil. We must make a positive statement. We must turn towards Christ. And turning towards Him means our belief in Him, that He is the only Son of the Father. He has sent

the Holy Spirit to be our strength and guide on our journey.

With all this in mind, as the sign of his commitment to Christ, the candidate for Baptism then professes his faith by reciting the Nicene Creed. It is this creed—the symbol of our faith—that verbalizes the content of our faith. It is this statement of faith that serves as a sign of unity among true believers, for it unites us with the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church, with the faith of our fathers.

After having turned away from evil and towards Christ, there is yet one further dimension to our entrance into the Church. Our faith is not just a private affair of the heart, it is not simply to accept the Lord and believe in Him in my own way. We are then asked one further response, that is, to worship Him. For our faith must be expressed in some manner, and our worship is this very expression of our faith.

This is certainly an important consideration today since religion and faith are considered by so many as a "private affair." Religion for many people is like an insurance card, neatly and safely tucked away in our wallets—only to be brought out and used in case of emergency! But right here in the opening of the baptismal service we see clearly that we are not only asked to believe, but to *express* this belief in our worship. Our worship, our participation in the Holy Services of our Church, becomes the real expression of our faith, and also a way of deepening this faith.

With this commitment to serve Christ now made, we are ready to enter into the Church for the Baptism itself.

...Washed and Anointed

At the place where the baptismal water is, the Great Litany is chanted. The special petitions and the prayer of blessing bring several important themes before us.

In the blessing we pray that this water may become the water of regeneration or re-birth. "He saved us through the *Baptism of new birth* and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Indeed this baptismal water is the sign of new life that not only remits our sins, but makes us born anew.

...you have been washed, consecrated, justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (I Corinthians 6:11).

Reflecting on this complete renewal that we pray for through the waters of Baptism, St. John Chrysostom uses the following example. The baptismal water does not simply wipe away our sins; it totally renews us. It is like a vessel that has been tarnished and defaced. To wash it only cleans the surface; it still leaves the traces of the mars and stains. But when it is thrown into the purifying fires of the furnace, it is melted down, the impurities skimmed off, and it is re-cast in even a better manner than the first. So also God takes our broken and disfigured nature and re-molds it through the purifying waters of Baptism; and we are re-created into a new level of life; yes, one that surpasses the beauty of the original creation in paradise.

Now the oil, "the weapon of righteousness" that strengthens us for battle, is blessed. In the prayer of blessing, we are reminded that we are anointed as an

athlete or warrior, as one who must struggle; we are anointed for strength to fight the good fight. With many it is not fashionable to see the Christian life as a struggle, a battle; we need to hear St. Paul's words once again:

Draw your strength from the Lord and His mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world, of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above (Ephesians 6:10-12).

St. John Chrysostom continues the same theme when he says that we are anointed as a soldier who is preparing for the spiritual battle, as athletes for Christ. This anointing fortifies us as an athlete is strengthened before the contest, and keeps us free from the powers of the Evil One.

With this oil, the candidate is now anointed. The whole body—head, breast, shoulders, ears, hands and feet are traced with the sign of the cross. With the cross they are thus marked for service to Christ and bound in fidelity to Him, thus being made ready for Baptism. For the sign of the cross shines brightly upon them, blinding the devil and making the candidate safe from his power.

...Buried in Christ

The candidate has turned away from Satan and turned towards Christ; he has bowed low in worship and professed faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit;

finally he has been marked with the sign of the cross; now he is ready for the Baptism.

According to the ancient traditions of the Church, the idea for Baptism is certainly immersion in living (i.e. running) water. Being immersed is the concrete image of our entering into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ—which is, as we say, the meaning of our Baptism. For we are literally “swallowed up” by the waters as if in a grave, and then we are raised up to the newness of life. The images of washing and cleansing, re-birth and regeneration, life-giving and saving waters, all converge here in the simple act of entering the baptismal water.

If the full immersion is not possible, it is still permitted to pour water over the head of the candidate. But from all that went before, we see that this will obviously lose the symbolic value. In the current renewal in the worship of the Church, the original symbol of immersion is highly stressed since the symbol corresponds so closely with the meaning of the action.

This immersion is done three times in honor of the Holy Trinity, into whose life we are baptized. And with this action, the name of the Holy Trinity is solemnly invoked, and but one time:

The servant of God (*name*) is baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thus triple immersion is accomplished while the words are said only once, in such a way as to remind us of the unity of the Trinity. For it is truly the Trinity who touches and saves us. The priest is in truth the *minister*

who serves; but it is God who touches the person and gives him new birth and life.

When you are baptized, it is not by the priest that you are baptized, but it is God who touches your head with His invisible power (St. John Chrysostom).

This vision of God-who-acts is common in all the sacraments in the Eastern Churches. The priest never replaces Christ; rather, Christ is in our midst as the one true priest and the minister is present to serve Him, to minister to Him, to share in His unique priesthood.

...Clothed with the Robe of Light

After the Baptism, the newly baptized person is given a new robe to wear. This new garment is the baptismal garment, the sign of the new life that he has entered. Usually it is a white garment, symbolic of the purification and innocence that is now his. And it is proper to wear this garment only now, after the Baptism, after the new life it signifies has begun.

What have you done is put aside your old self with its past deeds, and put on a new man, one who grows knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his Creator (Colossians 3:9-10).

This garment is also compared to the wedding garment (remember the Gospel image of the wedding garment, the symbol of the quality of our life); in his address to those who were about to be baptized, St. John Chrysostom begins by speaking of Baptism as a spiritual marriage, that is, a spiritual relationship with God.

But you have been invited to a spiritual wedding, and a royal banquet; consider, then, what sort of wedding garment you should buy. On the other hand, there is no need for you to buy it, because He who has anointed you cannot offer your poverty as an excuse. Guard, then, the garment you have received; if you ruin it, you will not be able to borrow or buy another. There is no place where this kind of garment is for sale (Second Instruction).

...Sealed with the Holy Spirit

Earlier we saw that Christ joined himself to our nature, and thus deified it or made it truly god-like, and finally he died and rose again to lead us back to the Father. And now we, in the opposite order, die and rise with Him through Baptism which is our entrance into the divine life. And through the Holy Chrismation we are truly deified, that is, we are made god-like through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is as if our passover in the death/resurrection of Baptism has brought us into the Kingdom of God. Now the gift of the Holy Spirit brings this entrance to completion, to fullness, for we are indeed deified and made "fellow citizens" with the Holy Trinity.

When Jesus emerged from the waters of His own Baptism, the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove and rested upon Him. Jesus understood this as a kind of anointing or confirmation of His ministry. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he quoted, "because he has anointed me" (Luke 4:18). In this way he associated his experience with that of the Old Testament prophets,

priests and kings who were anointed with oil for their ministry.

In the same way, as we emerge from the waters of Baptism, we are anointed with the Holy Chrism for a gift of the Holy Spirit. Just as in Baptism we share in Christ's death and resurrection, so too in Chrismation we share in his anointing with the Holy Spirit. We share fully in the Christ-life. For this reason our Christian initiation is often referred to as our "CHRISTening." We are now "others Christs," other anointed ones.

...A Ministering Member of Christ

When the Old Testament prophets, priests and kings were anointed, it was to prepare them for their mission. So too, when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, he began his saving ministry among men. Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, was the beginning of its ministry as well. Now every Christian is an anointed one: gifted with the Spirit *for the sake of* a mission:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people claimed by God for His own to proclaim the triumphs of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (I Peter 2:9).

To be a Christian, then, is to be a proclaimer. To be anointed head, eyes, nostrils, lips, ears, breast, hands and feet—that is, my whole body—is to be dedicated in my whole person. We are truly the temple of the presence of God, called to be images of his love and compassion. This is a mission of witness to the world, to be

a living icon or reflection of God's image. We are sanctified so as to be Christ-bearers, and our whole life should offer a glimpse, a transparency into the new world of God's kingdom. This is certainly a far cry from a private, individualistic religion: a closet Christianity which can so often lead to a self-justifying snobbery or, perhaps worse, a pious indifferentism.

It is for this life in the Church, in the community, that the Spirit is given to us. His presence is manifested differently in each one, but always for the sake of that public role which is ours as members of Christ's witnessing body, the Church. "To each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*" (I Corinthians 12:7). The gift of the Spirit in chrismation, then, is an indispensable part of Christian initiation, as the public stance of the proclaimer is an indispensable element of Christian life.

To be anointed with the Holy Spirit is to be made holy by the grace of Christ. It is to realize that God who created me as good, has re-created me in the bath of Baptism, and this is the source of my dignity as a person. We are "saints," holy ones—not because we are better than anyone else—but because God has set us apart, he has shared his divine life with us.

Finally, to be anointed with the Holy Chrism is to be made one with the Church. Our Baptism makes us children of the Father, his adopted sons and daughters. We are involved with the life of the Trinity. And since we are all children of the same Father, we are brothers to each other; that is, we belong to the Church. Our Chrismation reinforces this dimension of belonging to the Church. For although the chrismation is done by the

priest, the chrism is sanctified by the bishop. And all the people of his diocese or area are anointed with the chrism that comes from him, thus signifying our unity with the larger dimension of the Church.

After all these rites of Baptism and Chrismation are completed, the newly baptized together with the sponsors are led in procession three times around the baptismal font. The procession which signifies the walking in the newness of life, the procession into the Kingdom, is accompanied by the following hymn which, in a few words, describes all we want to say here:

All you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia!

...A Sharer in the Eucharist

If Baptism is our mystical participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, and chrismation is our deification, our participation in the divine life, then only one thing is lacking for complete union. Christ became a sharer in our flesh and blood through his Incarnation, and now we are invited to return to share in his Flesh and Blood to become one with him.

To complete the initiation of the Christian who has been initiated through the bath of regeneration and sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit, the nourishment of the Bread of Life is given as a share in the full life in Christ. To eat his Body and drink his Blood is to become completely changed and transformed by Christ. It is to share in the one true life.

If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you (John 6:53).

There is only one true life, and that is life in Christ. To be truly alive is to live in Christ: and this is the life of the Christian. Life without Christ, on the other hand, is not really "life," but an empty form or shell. It is simply a shadow of real existence.

The Eucharist, which is the greatest of the Mysteries, is our regular nourishment. It is the bread that comes down from heaven for the life of the world. This full communion with Christ is open to all baptized Christians. Baptism, the initiation into the death and resurrection of Christ, is our key to the Eucharist; it admits us to full participation in the life of Christ. For this reason, every baptized person is given the right to the Eucharist at the time of his Baptism, even young children and infants. United to Christ at Baptism, we gather at his Holy Table as his friends and fellow heirs of God's Kingdom to celebrate the gift we have received.

Here it is good to note that it is most fitting to celebrate the Baptism and Chrismation at the time of the Divine Liturgy. This gives the opportunity for the church congregation to be present to receive this new Christian into the company of the saints—for as we have seen, Baptism is no private affair, nor is faith a private virtue! But even more importantly, to follow the Baptism with the celebration of the Eucharist gives the fulfillment to this Christian initiation. For Baptism always points to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is the completion or consummation of the Baptismal union.

It is an unhappy circumstance that this wholesome and unitive vision of Christian initiation has in some

places been lost and these sacraments have been separated, isolated into fragmented moments. But the unanimous witness of the Eastern Churches (up to a relatively recent time) points to the unity and inseparability of these three sacraments. Hopefully with our growth in knowledge and a better understanding of the inner connection between them will lead to a restoration of what was once a universal practice in the entire Church, both East and West.

...One Who Lives Out This New Life

Our sharing in the life of God does not end with the last "Amen" of the service; that is, in reality, only the beginning...the beginning of a new life. The sacraments introduce us into the Christian life; and as all life, it must be nourished so that it may grow. Life never stands still; it is growing or else it is dying.

Our initiation into this life in Christ gives us a definite orientation; we are on a path that leads to the fullness of life. In the Prayer of the Eighth Day (at which time the name of the child is given) we prayed that this person...

...may be made perfect through the awesome mysteries of Christ, so that, after living according to your precept and guarding intact your seal, he may receive the happiness of your chosen ones in your Kingdom....

In other words, we are beginning a new life—one whose direction is towards the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is already present through Baptism and the

new life received in it; but it must also grow in each one of us until we reach the full measure of our life in Christ.

And if you and we belong to Christ, guaranteed as his anointed, it is all God's doing! It is God also who has set his seal upon us and has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts as a pledge of what is to come (I Corinthians 1:21).

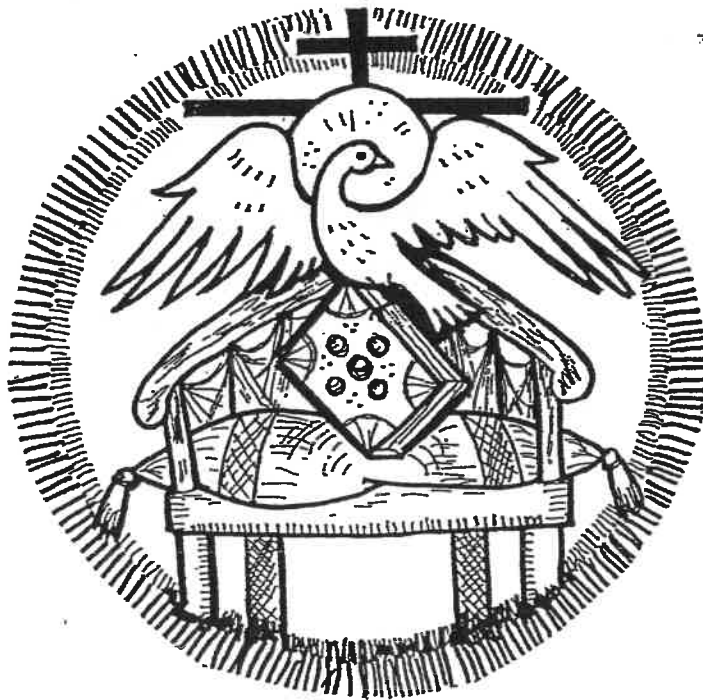


SAINT PAUL SAYS :

“ ARE YOU NOT AWARE THAT WE WHO WERE
BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS WERE
BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH ?
THROUGH BAPTISM INTO HIS DEATH WE
WERE BURIED WITH HIM SO THAT —
JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE
DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER —
WE TOO MIGHT LIVE A NEW LIFE. ” ROMANS 6:3-4

NOW LET US LIVE THIS NEW LIFE ---

OUR UNION WITH GOD DOES NOT END WITH THE LAST 'AMEN' OF THE CHRISTENING SERVICE. OUR BAPTISM IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE: ONE WHOSE DESTINATION IS THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM OF GOD.



AND IF YOU AND WE BELONG TO CHRIST,
GUARANTEED AS HIS AND ANOINTED,
IT IS ALL GOD'S DOING! IT IS GOD WHO
HAS SET HIS SEAL UPON US AND HAS
GIVEN THE SPIRIT TO DWELL IN OUR
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TO COME . I CORINTHIANS 1:21