

## Homily on the “Sacrament of Baptism” -- Seven Questions, Seven Answers

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### **Question #1: What is Baptism?**

**Answer:** As one of the Holy Mysteries of the Church, Baptism is our death, burial and resurrection in union with Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is our personal Pascha, our rite of passage, given by Christ to the Church as an entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life. The Apostle Paul describes the promise of God in this “mystery” when he writes: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

### **Question #2: What does “baptism” mean?**

**Answer:** Literally to “baptize” (*baptizo* in Greek) means “to immerse, to put into.” This is why the Orthodox Church has from the beginning of her history baptized by triple immersion “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” the formula given by Our Lord Himself in Matthew 28:19. By means of this bath of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, a person sheds the sinful garments of the old man and is clothed with Christ, entering through Him, as through a door, into the Church, the Kingdom of Grace: “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). The person is thus regenerated, renewed, recreated ... his nature being made over into the Divine Image, so that he becomes a member of the mystical Body of Christ, a son of God by grace, a partaker of the Divine Nature through participation in the Holy Spirit.

### **Question #3: What is the Scriptural basis for this sacrament?**

**Answer:** In the Old Testament, baptism was prefigured by the passage of God’s people with Moses through the Red Sea (I Cor. 10:1,2); they escaped slavery in Egypt and entered new life in the Promised Land. In the new covenant, baptism is the means by which we are freed from bondage to sin and death and the devil and enter the Kingdom of God, joined to Christ, granted forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our Savior made baptism holy when He Himself was baptized in the Jordan River by Saint John the Baptist. The Sacrament was instituted after the Resurrection, when Our Lord said to His holy apostles, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...” (Matthew 28:19).

### **Question #4: What happens at baptism?**

**Answer:** Those who are baptized are cleansed of the ancestral (original) sin and all actual sins they have committed if they are adults. (In a later video, we will talk about the baptism of infants.) In baptism all sins are uprooted and obliterated, together with their guilt and deadly eternal consequence ... and the person becomes reconciled to God, justified, made worthy by grace of the divine adoption. Those who are baptized (and chrismated) become citizens and members of the Body of the Church, in the mystical Body of Christ, which is actually formed through baptism.

### **Question #5: What are the results of baptism?**

**Answer:** First: our dying with Christ in baptism was our death with Him on the Cross. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, speaking in the fourth century, instructed new converts: “You were led by the hand to the holy pool of divine baptism ... each of you was asked if [you] believe in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And you made the saving confession, you descended into the water and came up again three times. In the very same moment you died and were born.” As Christ was buried in the tomb for three days and rose, so we are immersed in the font of baptism three times, and rise a Christian, united to His death and resurrection. But there is a second death of baptism, a continual one -- dying to sin daily as we walk in the newness of our life in Christ. Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians concerning their baptism: “Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Having become united with Christ, how can we ever go back to the slavery of sin?

### **Question #6: Is baptism necessary?**

**Answer:** Absolutely. Those who call themselves “born-again Christians” often quote John 3:3 – “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ALL who turn to Christ are indeed “born again” – or, in the Greek of the original Scriptures, “born from above.” But those who dismiss the Sacraments, fail to note John 3:5 – “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Those are the Sacraments of initiation. In Baptism, we are born of water ... and in Chrismation, we are born of the Spirit. (We will talk about the Sacrament of Chrismation in our next video). Furthermore, Baptism is our initiation into the Christian life, our opening to all the other sacraments; we must be first baptized to receive any other Mystery. Baptism is the first moment of our salvation, the beginning of eternal life. We are raised to new life for the purpose of union and communion with God. Our relationship with God is not something static – not a one-time event. It is a dynamic, ongoing process, a day-by-day real life in Christ ... holding the promise of life everlasting ... it is the prelude to the resurrection of our body at Christ’s second coming.

### **Question #7: What do the Saints teach about Baptism?**

**Answer:** According to Saint John Chrysostom: “It is through baptism that we receive remission of sins, sanctification, communion of the Spirit, adoption and eternal life.” Saint Basil the Great tells us that baptism is “the ransoming of captives, the forgiving of their debts, the regeneration of the soul, the bright garment, the unassailable seal, chariot to heaven, the cause of the Kingdom, the gift of adoption.” And, according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, baptism “frees us from all spot (of sin), and thus we become the holy temple of God and partakers of His Divine Nature, through our participation in His Holy Spirit.”