

Q What is the difference between the Baptism of infants and the Baptism of adults?

A In its essentials, Baptism is the same regardless of the age of the person being baptized. But the celebrations are meant to meet the different spiritual needs of those two different circumstances.

Infants are usually baptized within the first months after birth. The sacrament can be celebrated outside of Mass, but the preferred setting is during a Sunday Mass with the Baptism of several children together and the whole parish community joining in the celebration. Baptism is not just a family moment: it is a parish moment. Every Christian has cause for rejoicing when a new member is joined to the Body of Christ through Baptism. So important is the presence of the parish community, in fact, that for children who were baptized in emergency circumstances in a hospital or another institution, the Church provides a special Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church, to be introduced to and welcomed by the parish community.

The Rite of Baptism for children begins with a welcome of the children and their families. The parents are invited to say aloud the name they have given their child, and then the priest, parents, and godparents make the Sign of the Cross on the child's forehead, claiming the child for Christ. Following the readings and homily, the saints are invoked, a prayer of exorcism is prayed, asking that the child be freed from Original Sin, and the child is anointed with the Oil of Catechumens. The parents and godparents then make a profession of their own faith, for they are entrusted with handing on that faith to the child. Baptism follows, along with the "Explanatory Rites," which provide images for the new life of the baptized—the white garment, the lighted candle, and the anointing with Chrism. Those baptized as infants will receive the other sacraments of initiation—Confirmation and Eucharist—much later.

While infants can be baptized at almost any time of the year, for adults the time for Baptism is at the Easter Vigil, the high point of the Church's liturgical year. (Of course, in case of emergency, Baptism for adults can happen at any time.) In this way, the preparation and Baptism of

adults corresponds to the liturgical year. The Period of Purification and Enlightenment, a time of intense prayer and preparation for the sacraments, coincides with the season of Lent, when the whole Church is focused on prayer, penance, and preparation for Easter. The Baptism of adults, by which they are united with the Paschal Mystery of Christ's dying and rising, takes place in the very heart of the Church's celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. And the time of mystagogy, a deepening awareness of the sacraments they have received, unfolds in the context of Easter Time, the joyful days between Easter and Pentecost.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults outlines a rich series of prayers and rituals for adults preparing for Baptism, which follow (over time) much the same pattern as infant Baptism. Their journey formally begins with admission into the Order of Catechumens through the Rite of Acceptance, in which their foreheads, their senses, and even their hands, feet, and shoulders are marked with the Sign of the Cross. On the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent, the scrutinies—prayers of exorcism—are prayed over the elect. Then, at the Easter Vigil, they receive the three sacraments of initiation, one after the other, in keeping with the most ancient practice in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

