

Q What happens during the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil?

A For those who were baptized as infants, the Sacrament of Baptism may seem far away and abstract. When we come to the Easter Vigil and witness full Christian initiation through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, we not only support those being initiated. We are drawn more deeply into our own sacraments of initiation.

For the Church, the Easter Vigil is the most essential celebration of the year—a deep plunge into the great mystery of the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We gather as a family and welcome new Christians. In the dark of Holy Saturday night, we await the Resurrection, entering into a time without time. As the Easter fire crackles and the Easter candle is prepared, the celebrant prays,

“Christ yesterday and today,
the Beginning and the End,
the Alpha and the Omega.

All time belongs to him and all the ages.

To him be glory and power through every age

and for ever. Amen.” (Roman Missal, Easter Vigil)

The Easter Vigil is unlike any other liturgy during the year. We bring out all our symbols to express the meaning of this moment: light, Cross, Word, water, oil, bread, and wine. We process into the dark church, following “the Light of Christ”—the Easter candle—and we light our tapers from it (Roman Missal, Easter Vigil). We listen to the compelling stories of God’s love and pursuit of us, generation after generation, culminating in Christ’s Resurrection and including St. Paul’s reminder of the inseparable connection between the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and our Baptism into Christ.

Now we bring newcomers to the font to be baptized, singing the Litany of the Saints to remind ourselves that the entire Communion of Saints is here to witness these Baptisms and intercede for these people. The water in the font is blessed with a beautiful long prayer remembering all the ways that water has brought God’s grace to us throughout history. The elect renounce sin and profess their faith; each is baptized (by immersion in the water or by pouring) with Jesus’ own instructions: “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit.” The newly baptized Christians rise, drenched with the waters of new life. They are “a new creation,” and receive a white garment to express their newness. A candle lit from the Easter candle signifies that they are “enlightened by Christ.” Now they are confirmed: the celebrant lays hands on each head,

praying for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and anointing each with the fragrant oil so that they will be “sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 226, 229, 230, 235).

The assembly now renews its baptismal vows, renouncing sin and affirming the faith of the Church. To remind us of our own Baptisms, we are sprinkled with water from the font.



Finally the newly baptized and confirmed join us for the first time in the Universal Prayer and the great prayer of thanksgiving—the Eucharistic Prayer—and they receive the Body and Blood of Christ, tasting with us the eternal banquet of Christ’s redemption.

Joyfully, the Church calls us and witness all of this at the Easter Vigil! Our Christian family, born in the waters of Baptism, has a unique identity: we belong to Christ. We praise the God who created all things, and we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. We walk alongside newcomers to faith and welcome them beside us at the altar of the Lord. Together we are sent forth to share the good news that Christ is Risen, singing, “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!”

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