



# Belonging

Baptism in the Family of God

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ASCENSION  
ADDRESS

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# Welcome

from Fr. Mike Schmitz

Congratulations on entering this new season in your life. We believe it will be filled with joy, challenges, and love. We are honored to walk with you as you prepare for your child's reception of the sacrament of baptism, and we will continue to walk with you in the weeks that follow. That is the reason for this guide.

This guide for parents will serve as a place to jot down notes about the six video segments you will be watching in a parish or home setting during the preparation phase leading up to your child's baptism. It provides space for you to record your answers to the reflection questions posed in those videos. We have also included a section outlining the Rite of Baptism and explaining the various parts of the rite.

Shortly after your child's baptism, we will begin sending you a video every Sunday for ten weeks that corresponds to a reflection in this guide. These follow-up videos and reflections are meant to help you think about the call to live on purpose and to inspire you to follow Jesus in this season—and every season—of your life.

Each reflection will offer you the chance to think about an element of your relationship with your spouse, God, or your parish. We have provided a quote from the Bible as well as a thought-provoking question for you to reflect on each day. The time you spend on these reflections is up to you and will depend on the amount of time and energy you have.

We have created this guide as a tool to help you as you begin your journey into motherhood and fatherhood. There is no pressure to complete it in its entirety or to fill every page. If you take the time to jot down one thing each day, then one day you will be holding a treasure through which you can remember this important time in your life. It will be a record of your thoughts and prayers during the first weeks of your child's young life in the Catholic Church.

Finally, we hope this guide for parents will remind you that you *belong* in your parish community.

# What's in a Name?

## Segment One

What's in a name? Your name reveals your identity. Your name was given to you by your parents, and you have given your child his or her name. Our names mean something. What does your name mean?





## Rite of

# Baptism

### Meaning of the Rite

The Rite of Baptism is ancient. Because of that, sometimes the meaning of what we do is lost on us. There are at least four overall symbols throughout the rite.

- 1. Washing:** We can trace the origins of Christian baptism all the way back to our Jewish roots. The Jewish people had a “ritual washing,” which Jesus transformed.
- 2. Dying and Rising:** St. Paul points to this as one of the great mysteries of a life in Christ. “If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Romans 6:8).
- 3. Being Clothed in Christ:** In baptism, we are given a new identity. Scripture refers to this as being clothed with Christ (see Galatians 3:27, NAB).
- 4. Received into the Community:** In baptism, a person is welcomed into the body of Christ, the Church.

## Baptismal Font

The baptismal font is usually located at the entrance of the church. This represents baptism as the entryway to the Christian life—Baptism leads to the altar. Becoming part of the Christian community is not simply checking off a box. It is the beginning of a life lived for a purpose and with a destination. That destination is the Eucharist, the “source and the summit of the Christian life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1324).<sup>1</sup> The baptismal font’s location is also a reminder for all the baptized of what God has done for them and of their constant need to renew and profess their faith in Jesus.

## Reception of the Child

This takes place just before the Introductory Rites of the Mass and begins with the congregation calling upon the Trinity, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The beginning of the Rite of Baptism also emphasizes the personal nature of God’s relationship with each of us when the priest asks the parents what

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 11.

name they have given their child. Saying the child's name aloud points to the reality that our Triune God wants a personal relationship with the child.

Next, the priest asks the parents why they have brought their child to the church: "What do you ask of God's Church for your child?" The response is "baptism," "faith," or "eternal life." In response to this, the priest claims the child for Jesus by tracing the Sign of the Cross on his or her forehead. He then invites the parents and godparents to do the same. The parents and godparents making the Sign of the Cross on the child's forehead reveals their profound involvement in raising the child in the Faith.

Following this, a passage from Sacred Scripture is read aloud. This usually consists of a New Testament reading or a reading from the book of Psalms. Doing this emphasizes what we as Catholics believe about Scripture: that God has revealed himself to us through his Word. Scripture informs us by teaching us truths about God, the world, and ourselves. One of the reasons Scripture is read at your child's baptism is to provide information

about God's identity, his plan for your child, and what Jesus has done for your child. These truths call us to live in a new way.

### **Liturgy of the Word**

The baptism itself occurs during the Mass after the readings, the homily, and the Prayer of the Faithful. Baptism occurs immediately following the Prayer of the Faithful to remind those present that they are part of something bigger than themselves and that they must pray with one another and for one another.

This reality extends beyond this world into the next. Because of this, the Prayer of the Faithful leads directly into the Litany of Saints. We recognize that every person who has died and is in heaven is part of the communion of saints, and we invoke their prayers and are reminded of their care for us.

In the early Church, non-baptized people joined the rest of the church community up until the Prayer of the Faithful, when they would be excused to another location

to receive instruction on the Christian Faith while the rest of the congregation continued with Mass. This was not done to exclude people, but because participating in the Prayer of the Faithful reveals that a person is part of the body of Christ, an active member of the Church.

### **Prayer of Exorcism and Anointing**

The next part of the baptismal rite—the Prayer of Exorcism—sometimes frightens people. It does not need to. In the Catholic understanding, the human person is created in God’s image and likeness—we are good. Yet all of us experience the wound of original sin. St. Paul dramatically describes this by saying we are all born as slaves to sin under the power of the evil one.<sup>2</sup> This prayer refutes any influence of evil over the child. The priest then anoints the child with the oil of catechumens in the name of Jesus.

While your child may have had few or no encounters with evil, in the early Church, when adult baptisms were very

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<sup>2</sup> See CCC 402; Romans 5:12, 19, and 7:14.

common, people would have had regular encounters with evil. The prayer of exorcism and the anointing address the consequences of those encounters.

### **Blessing of the Water**

This prayer recounts the story of salvation and the many ways God has used water to save his people in the past. As the priest blesses the water, we are reminded that the water is made new. It is made holy: blessed and consecrated. This should remind us of the Gospel story of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (see Matthew 3:13-17).

In all other "baptisms" before Jesus' baptism, the water was merely a symbol for the washing and changing of the person. But when Jesus was baptized, the water did not change him; he changed the water. He not only changed the water, he changed the entire meaning and power of baptism. Because this ritual has been changed, it has new power. The blessing of the water is a sign and a reality of this new power.

From  
Fr. Mike

**Follow-Up Reflections**

When your child was baptized, he or she was brought into Jesus' "story"—the great story of salvation history. That story isn't over. The story has just begun. This is a new beginning—not just for your child, but for you and for your marriage.

God knows your name. He created you on purpose and with a purpose. When you were baptized, you were brought into God's family. You may not have spent much time thinking about your role in God's family up until now. You may feel you don't know much about who you are as a Catholic in relation to the church community. It is our prayer that the time spent preparing for your child's baptism was a kind of renewal for you. Now we would like to help guide you on the personal journey you are taking as a parent.

What follows is a series of reflections to go along with the videos you will receive over the next ten weeks. We hope these dynamic videos, reflections, and short questions will turn this time into a meaningful journey

for you and will help you reflect on the purpose for which God created you. This guide is meant to give you the opportunity to invite God into your life in a more intentional way at this beautiful time of transition.

It is my prayer that the journey that led you to baptize your child will continue to bear fruit in your life and that you will come to a deeper and keener awareness of Jesus and his Church. You are an important part of God's family—both in your parish and in the Catholic Church throughout the world. You *belong*.

## Week One

# Living on Purpose

Sometimes we can get where we want to go by drifting (like Thor Heyerdahl on the raft to the Polynesian Islands). But it is not a very wise way to live. Just wishing and hoping rather than *choosing* is unwise.

Think about your past weekend or your last extended time off. What did you do with your time? Some people use time off to do housework. Others rest. Some spend time with family, whether at home or visiting relatives out of town. Still others exercise, shop, or catch up on their favorite shows. Regardless of what you chose to do with your downtime, the most important thing was not whether you rested or worked or spent time alone or with others. The most important thing you did was *decide* how to spend the time.

Too often, we look back over our days (which turn into weeks and months) and realize we have not been choosing at all. Instead, we have been bouncing from one random event or situation to the next with very little sense of “ownership.” Making good decisions is a critical difference between a life well-lived and a life wasted.

People avoid making decisions for many reasons. I know a man who often shuns decision-making simply “because he can.” So far, he has gotten by without making many decisions. He figures he might as well “keep the streak alive.” After all, if he made the wrong choice and things didn’t turn out well, he would have only himself to blame. If he leaves his life up to chance, he feels protected from this responsibility.

I know a woman who does not make decisions because she fears making the wrong ones. Faced with many possibilities and options, she becomes overwhelmed and anxious about what she will “miss out on” if she commits to one thing. So, she lets someone else choose for her. When she was single, she often found herself sitting at home because she couldn’t make up her mind on which invitation to accept. Now that she is married, one of her husband’s frustrations is that he must make all the decisions for them.

This might not describe you. You might be someone who “takes charge” and leaves no element of your life

to chance. People even may have used the term “control freak” in association with your name. If this is the case, what are you trying to control? Even if you could control your life and the lives and choices of the people around you, what goal or destination would you be trying to reach?

God has intentionally willed every person *on purpose and for a purpose*. If you lived the rest of your life the way you lived the past week, would you be living your life on purpose? Would you be living a life of purpose?

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Be strong in the Lord  
and in the strength of his might.



Ephesians 6:10

