

CHAPTER VI

INTRODUCTION TO THE LITURGY: HOLY BAPTISM

This chapter is designed to explain and point out the various parts of the service of Holy Baptism. It is to be used in conjunction with the chapter on the Holy Eucharist.

Baptism was the primary rite of initiation into the Christian community. This rite is what makes one Christian. The Episcopal Church, as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church maintained this pattern of becoming a Christian. Confirmation by the bishop at a later stage in one's development became the customary pattern in Anglicanism. This pattern changed as Baptism assumed its proper place as the sacrament of entrance into the church. Confirmation became an adult response to the vows taken in Baptism. Baptism was the beginning of new life in Christ. "Baptism is a sacrament of beginnings, of newness, of grace, of a fresh start within history and in the depths of individual life."⁸²

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

From the beginning of the Christian community as it emerged from the matrix of Judaism, Baptism has been fundamental to the life of the community. It has always been understood to be what made one Christian. This was when one was *born again* or *born from above* (γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν). This notion has continued to be integral to the sacrament, and continued to be expressed in the sacrament itself. In Judaism baptism was part of the ceremonies that were performed for proselytes who had come into the faith of Israel. Here there was re-birth into a new way of life. Both men and women were baptized; and in addition men were circumcised prior to baptism. Baptism occurred as part of the understanding of being born into Israel. "Coming out of the water, the candidate was signed as God's sheep, slave, and soldier by the marking on the forehead with a Taw (T), the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, symbol of the name of God."⁸³ This became the paradigm for entrance into the church that was brought directly into the nascent Christian community.

In the early church, baptism was not simply administered because someone decided they wanted to become Christian. The process of becoming Christian took up to three years. This was a period of probation, education, and nurturing in what it meant to be Christian. In this period also it was a time for a person to decide if he/she wanted to partake of the community which might cost them their life. The un-

82. Daniel B. Stevick, *Baptismal Moments: Baptismal Meanings*. The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York (1981), p. 1.

83. Hatchett, p. 251-2.

baptized were allowed to take part in the opening part of the service. The first part of the liturgy included hymns, scripture readings, and sermon. There were no prayers in this part of the service. Following the sermon the catechumens, as the un-baptized newcomers were called, were dismissed, the doors locked, and the deacon would declare that all was now ready to continue to the Eucharist.

For the first time in the liturgy, prayers were offered. "In rites as late as that described in the catechetical instructions of Saint John Chrysostom (c. CE 390), those who were immersed came out of the water and, as soon as they were clothed, took their places among the congregation to participate for the first time in the prayers of the people and the exchange of the peace."⁸⁴ Only the baptized were allowed to hear the prayers, because only those who have been incorporated into Christ can pray through his Name. This incorporation into Christ was Paul's phrase, *in Christo*. Further, from the earliest times while the Eucharist was an ever repeated event, Baptism was not. "It is of the essence of the Eucharist that it is *repeated*, whereas Baptism *cannot be repeated* for the individual."⁸⁵

In the Early Church, the rite was administered following the lengthy, three-year catechumenate. At this point the un-baptized persons were dismissed following the sermon. Then followed the prayers and the celebration of the Eucharist. Now when all was in readiness the candidate for baptism disrobed and removed all jewelry. Then nude, as at their first birth, the candidates entered the water. They were interrogated by the Bishop or Presbyter. Following each interrogation (Do you believe ...) the person was immersed in the water. Following the baptism they were anointed with oils of birth and clothed in new clothes. They had been reborn!⁸⁶

The initial rubrics on page 298 of the Book of Common Prayer concerning the service make it plain that Holy Baptism is the full initiation into the church. Baptism is part of the life of the gathered Church, the Community of the Faithful, and thus finds its proper celebration within the Eucharist as the chief service on Sunday or feast day. This means that the old practice of private baptism being the norm (as it was before the 1979 edition of the Prayer Book) is no longer appropriate. Except for special situations that require pastoral sensitivity (which really means some type of emergency situation or of exceptional circumstances), private baptisms are no longer to be performed. Baptism is meant to be a community celebration and is properly celebrated within the Eucharistic setting of the life of the community. In accordance with the Additional Directions (Book of Common Prayer, pp. 312-13), Baptism is to be celebrated most appropriately at the Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saint's Day, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany) or at the visitation of the Bishop. If for any reason there are no Baptisms on these days, then the congregation appropriately says the Renewal of Baptism Vows.

84. Hatchett, p. 278.

85. Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, SCM Press, London (1950), p. 29.

86. Stevick, pp. 8-9.

In case of emergency, any baptized person may baptize another. Give the name, if known, of the person and say, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This is described on pages 313-314 of the Prayer Book.

The service opens in the same way as the Eucharist, the first part of the service being **The Liturgy of the Word**. Following the opening acclamation the celebrant moves directly to the Collect of the Day. If desired the *Gloria in Excelsis* may be sung just after the opening versicles and before the salutation and Collect.

Following the Lessons and Sermon the service continues with the presentation and examination of the candidates for baptism.

Two forms of presentation are given—one for adults, the other for children. The present Prayer Book assumes adult baptism as the norm. This is in conformity with the Early Church as a missionary community whose primary converts were adults. If the candidate is a child then questions are asked of the parents and godparents. If the person is an adult, or old enough to answer for himself or herself, then they are addressed directly. If old enough to answer for himself or herself, the candidate is presented and asked immediately: Do you desire to be baptized?

The renunciations follow the initial question to the candidate. Since the Early Church the candidate has been asked to renounce Satan, the world, and sinful desires (the flesh) which draw one from God. In the Early Church the person made the renunciations facing west, then turning toward the east made the affirmations. The west symbolizes death and the east symbolizes new life and resurrection. These are followed by the question to the congregation to support these persons in their life in Christ. This question is a formal recognition of one's incorporation in the church and the church's responsibility to the newly baptized.

The Baptismal Covenant is the "Apostle's Creed" in interrogative form. This Creed has from its very beginning been associated with Baptism. Its evolution is its setting in Baptism. It is derived from the three-fold interrogation at the time of Baptism. As issues of the faith came to the fore, the Creed grew to cover the issues of God the Creator, the person of Jesus, the place of the Spirit, and the church. The Creed is followed by five questions whereby all pledge to be faithful in the apostolic faith, to participate in the worship of the community; to resist evil, and repent when one fails to do so; to proclaim the Good News by one's life; to serve others; and to strive for justice and peace respecting the dignity of every person.

The Thanksgiving over the Water recalls Salvation History from Creation to the saving acts of Jesus. The prayer recalls the archetype of water in Creation, in Israel passing through the sea, and in Jesus' baptism at the hands of John. It also recalls that as we die with Christ, so are we raised with him in his Resurrection. Here we are reborn by the Holy Spirit, which recalls Jesus' talk with Nicodemus in John's Gospel. The crossing of the Red Sea by Israel is a major archetype of Baptism. Here is movement

from bondage and death to freedom and life.

Justin Martyr, who wrote in the middle of the second century of the Common Era, has a description of the rite of Baptism in his *First Apology*. "Lest we be judged unfair in this exposition, we will not fail to explain how we consecrated ourselves to God when we were regenerated through Christ. Those who are convinced and believe what we say and teach is the truth, and pledge themselves to be able to live accordingly, are taught in prayer and fasting to ask God to forgive their past sins, while we pray and fast with them. Then we lead them to a place where there is water, and they are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated. In the name of God, the Father and Lord of all, and of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ said: 'Unless you be born again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.' Now, it is clear to everyone how impossible it is for those who have been born once to enter their mother's wombs again And this is the reason, taught to us by the Apostles, why we baptize the way we do."⁸⁷

The rubrics of the Prayer Book set immersion as the preferred form of Baptism with pouring as secondary. It has long been customary to pour the water over the person's head rather than dip or immerse them in the water. In the Eastern Orthodox Churches immersion is still the practiced form of administering baptism. From the *Didache*, a writing of around 85-90 CE we receive instructions on how to Baptize.⁸⁸ The practice that is described is already by the time of the writing the customary form. This means that this practice is twenty to thirty years older than the text describing it. Hence, this places the practice in the time of Paul, 55-60 CE.⁸⁹ "Regarding baptism, baptize thus. After giving the foregoing instructions, 'Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' in running water. But, if you have no running water, baptize in any other; and, if you cannot in cold water, then in warm. But, if the one is lacking, pour the other three times on the head 'in the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.' But, before the baptism, let the one who baptizes and the one to be baptized fast, and any others who are able to do so. And you shall require the person being baptized to fast for one or two days."⁹⁰

At the time of the Baptism the candidate is called by name. This signifies the uniqueness of each person and is emblematic of God calling us each by name. This is this person's own unique moment as he or she experiences new birth and new identity. In previous Prayer Books the priest declared, "Name this child," and then baptized the child by the name given.

Following the Baptism the person may be given, by rubric, a candle (p. 313 in the Prayer Book).

87. Thomas B. Falls, Translator. *Saint Justin Martyr: First Apology*, Christian Heritage, Inc., New York (1948), p. 99.

88. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, Harper, San Francisco (12991), p. 431.

89. Michael W. Holmes, Editor. *The Apostolic Fathers, "The Didache (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)"*, 2nd. Edition, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids Michigan (1992) pp. 247-48.

90. Francis X. Glimm; Marique, Joseph M.; Walsh, Gerald G., translators. *The Apostolic Fathers, "The Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"*, CIMA Publishing co., Inc., New York (12947), p. 177.

This symbolizes the new light that has come over the person. Justin Martyr speaks of the illumination that comes in Baptism. "This washing is also illumination, since they who learn these things become illuminated intellectually. Furthermore, the illuminated one is also baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who predicted through the Prophets everything concerning Jesus."⁹¹

The prayer that follows the Baptism draws attention to what has just happened in Baptism. In Baptism we receive the forgiveness of sins. We die with Christ in his death and are raised with him to new life. In the new life we are called to have an inquiring and discerning attitude to life, much like the new born baby does to the life that is experienced in a world full of wonder and surprises.

Following the Baptism the person is signed with the cross on the forehead.

Alternately, the bishop or priest may use oil for the *signation*. The sign of the cross derives from the Hebrew Taw (T) that was signed on the forehead of the proselytes following their Baptism. It is a "branding" of the person with the sign of Christ. In the ancient world a slave was branded, much as cattle are today, with the sign of their master. So we are "branded" with the sign of our Master, an indelible mark.

The oil used in this rite is the oil of *chrism* or *new birth*. In the ancient world the baby was anointed with oil at birth. In the rite of Baptism the one who is born anew is anointed with the oil of new birth. Oil was also used in the anointing of kings and priests. This anointing is seen in the story of Saul, David, Solomon, and others throughout the Scriptures. Our anointing at Baptism signifies our life in the new community of priests and kings. We are "christened". This term carries the double meaning of anointing and being in Christ. The Hebrew word Messiah and the Greek word Christ mean "the anointed one." This seems to be the source for Paul's use of "in Christ." The use of the chrism further reinforces the presence and place of the bishop in the life of the church. "Because the chrism can be consecrated only by a bishop, its use in the absence of a bishop signifies the relationship of that office to baptism."⁹²

It is from the *signation* that we derive the devotional use of the sign of the cross. This goes back to the Early Church. "In the early church the devotional use of the sign of the cross was a reminder of one's baptism."⁹³ Today each time we make the sign of the cross it still has a relation to our baptism. The sign is made upon entering or leaving the church or chapel as we make use of the holy water stoop in some churches or chapels signifying our recalling of our Baptism and entrance into the church, the Body of Christ. It is made at the mention of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whose name we are baptized. In the Creed at the mention of the Resurrection of the dead we make the sign because in baptism we were buried with Christ and raised with him in his Resurrection. The same is true with the Prayers of the

91. Justin Martyr, p. 100.

92. Hatchett, p. 281.

93. Hatchett, p. 280.

People when we pray for those who have died. It occurs at the time of absolution when our sins are pronounced forgiven. It is in Baptism that we receive the forgiveness of sins; in the *Sanctus* at the *Benedictus qui venit* (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord) for through our baptism we stand without fear or shame at the coming of the Lord. At the time of receiving the Bread and Wine the sign of the cross is made for it is through baptism that we are admitted to the Table of the Lord. Finally, when the blessing is given, we make the sign of the cross as we appropriate the blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to our self. The devotional use of the sign of the cross is never required. But for some, it is an aid to worship. When used devotionally it is always a recalling of our Baptism, the vows that we have taken, and the one to whom we belong.

The newly baptized person is now welcomed by the community into the household of faith. This welcoming outlines the characteristics of the life we have taken upon ourselves in Baptism. We are to confess Christ crucified. We are to proclaim his Resurrection. We are to share in his eternal priesthood into which we have been anointed. Following the welcoming the Peace is exchanged.

In the Early Church this point was the first time that the candidates had received the Peace. Until now they were dismissed from the services. Now they received the Peace and offered their gifts of bread and wine along with the other members of the community in preparation for the Eucharist. This would have been their first Eucharistic celebration.

The newly baptized are the newest members of the community of faith. The community now gathers to offer the Eucharist. Baptism is full admission to the Eucharistic celebration and Table. Thus their first official act as members of the household is to eat at the Table of the Lord. This includes the children as well as adults.

ALTERNATIVE ENDING TO THE RITE

In the alternative ending to the rite when there is not a celebration of the Eucharist, the prayer which is said reminds us that we are adopted children of God. It is through our Baptism that we become children of God. Not only are we incorporated in the church, we now bear the reality of being children of God who have been born through baptism.

Baptism is to be administered only once to a person. We need not be re-adopted over and over again. From the earliest times, the administration of Baptism was once for all. In our tradition we understand that anyone who has been baptized in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit has been properly baptized and does not need to be repeatedly baptized. This is dependent on our understanding that baptism is a sacrament, *i.e.*, an act whose chief actor is God. For this reason if there is some doubt as to whether a person has been baptized or that their baptism was valid (in water in the name of the Trinity), then they may be conditionally baptized. The difference occurs in the words

used in the administration of the sacrament: "If you are not already baptized, I baptize you " In conditional baptism the intent not to re-baptize is upper most. Thus, if one's baptism is not known for sure, then by being conditionally baptized the person is assured of baptism.

FOR FURTHER READING

Davies, J.G. *The Architectural Setting of Baptism*. London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962. Eliade, M. *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

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