

Waters of Creation

What We Found

- Before God makes anything, Genesis 1:2 shows the Spirit of God moving over the waters: water and Spirit together from the first page.
- On day five, God commands the waters to bring forth life (Genesis 1:20); in Scripture water is where life comes from, not just what washes things.
- Titus 3:5 describes salvation with the same pairing: God saved us *by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit*.
- St. Paul calls anyone in Christ a *new creation* (2 Corinthians 5:17), an echo of Genesis: and Baptism is how we come to be in Christ (Galatians 3:27).

Voices of the Church

Tertullian • *On Baptism, ch. 1*

“Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life!”

With this sentence, verified word for word against the standard English translation, Tertullian opens the earliest surviving treatise on Baptism, written around the year 200: joy before argument. In the chapters that follow he teaches, in substance, that water has been the seat of the divine Spirit since Genesis 1:2, and that this ancient partnership is why water, of all creatures, is fitted to carry sanctifying power.

St. Ambrose of Milan • *On the Mysteries; On the Sacraments*

St. Ambrose, catechizing the newly baptized of Milan in the fourth century, teaches in substance that the Spirit who *was moving over the face of the waters* at creation already pointed toward the font, and that water by itself heals no one: it is the Spirit's presence, invoked over the water, that makes Baptism a new creation rather than a bath.

The Church's Liturgy • *Blessing of Baptismal Water, Easter Vigil (Roman Missal)*

Every Easter Vigil, before anyone is baptized, the Church prays over the font to the God “whose Spirit in the first moments of the world's creation hovered over the waters, so that the very substance of water would even then take to itself the power to sanctify” (Roman Missal, Blessing of Baptismal Water).

This is not a private theologian's opinion; it is the Church praying her faith aloud: the font's whole family history recited over the water in one prayer.

My Guess • sealed until mid-study

Why do you think God chose water?

Write your honest guess below, fold this page closed, and bring it back every week. We will open it together at Session 7.



Live It This Week

- Once this week, bless yourself with holy water slowly and deliberately, and as you do, say in your heart: *the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.*
- Find out the date of your own Baptism if you do not know it (a parent, a baptismal certificate, the parish office). Write it somewhere you will see it.
- Read Genesis 1 straight through once, alone, listening for water.

Memory Verse

he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit

Titus 3:5 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Genesis 6:5–9:17, the story of Noah and the flood. Notice what the water destroys and what the water carries.

Catechism references: 1213, 1217–1218, 694

The Flood

What We Found

- The flood is creation replayed: the deep returns (Genesis 7:11), God sends a *ruach*, a wind, the very word for the Spirit of Genesis 1:2, over the earth so that the waters subside (Genesis 8:1), and a new world emerges with Noah blessed as a new Adam (Genesis 9:1).
- St. Peter himself reads the flood as the pattern of Baptism: eight persons were *saved through water*, and *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you* (1 Peter 3:20–21).
- Peter's qualification does not point away from Baptism; it tells us what Baptism is: not a removal of dirt from the body, but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, with all its power from Christ's resurrection.
- The flood water judges and carries at the same time: in Baptism, an old self is drowned and a new self is carried.

Voices of the Church

St. Justin Martyr • *Dialogue with Trypho*

St. Justin, writing in the mid-second century, teaches in substance that the flood was already a mystery of salvation: righteous Noah, saved with his family through water and wood, prefigures the new humanity saved through the water of Baptism and the wood of the cross, and the eight persons point to the eighth day, the day of Christ's resurrection.

St. Cyprian of Carthage • *Letters*

St. Cyprian, the third-century bishop and martyr, teaches in substance that the ark of Noah was a type of the one Church: as those inside the ark were saved through the water that destroyed the world outside, so the saving water of Baptism belongs to the Church, the ark God has built for the salvation of the human race.

St. Augustine • *City of God, Book 15*

St. Augustine teaches in substance that the ark is a figure of the Church sojourning through the flood of this age, and he lingers over one detail: the door set in the ark's side, through which every saved creature entered, signifies the wound opened in the side of the crucified Christ, from which flowed the sacraments by which those who believe enter the Church.

Live It This Week

- Pray for the dead of your family by name once this week, entrusting them to the mercy of the God who remembered Noah.
- Read 1 Peter 3:18–22 once more, alone, slowly, and sit for two minutes with the sentence *Baptism now saves you* without arguing with it in either direction.
- Next time you enter the church, touch the holy water and remember: this is ark water. Something drowns; someone is carried.

Memory Verse

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

1 Peter 3:21 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Exodus 14, the crossing of the Red Sea. Notice where the water is, where the cloud is, and who does not make it across.

Catechism references: 1219–1220, 845, 701

Through the Sea

What We Found

- St. Paul himself calls the Red Sea crossing a baptism: all were *baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea* (1 Corinthians 10:1–2).
- Paul gives the warrant for reading the Old Testament this way: these things were *written down for our instruction* (1 Corinthians 10:11). Typology is apostolic method, not our invention.
- The pairing held for the third time: the cloud of God's presence plus the water of the sea, echoing the Spirit over the waters of creation and the wind of God over the flood.
- The crossing was pure gift: Israel could only stand firm and walk; the LORD fought for them. And the gift was real yet had to be lived: the generation that presumed on it fell in the wilderness.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyril of Jerusalem • *Mystagogical Catecheses, Lecture 1*

St. Cyril, catechizing the newly baptized in fourth-century Jerusalem, teaches in substance that the Exodus is the map of every Baptism: as the tyrant Pharaoh pursued the people of old to the sea, so the devil, the tyrant of sin, pursues each soul right up to the saving water; and as the one was drowned in the sea, so the other's power over us is destroyed in the water of salvation.

St. Gregory of Nyssa • *The Life of Moses, Book 2*

St. Gregory, the fourth-century Father, teaches in substance that the army drowned in the sea images everything that tyrannized the soul before Baptism: the passions, the habits of sin, the whole armory of the old slavery, plunged into the water and left there. What crosses with us is the free person; what pursued us was never meant to survive the crossing.

Origen of Alexandria • *Homilies on Exodus*

Origen, the brilliant third-century interpreter, teaches in substance that the Egyptians pursuing Israel to the sea are the sins of our former life chasing us to the font, and that the one who comes up from the water may look back and see the old masters powerless behind him.

Live It This Week

- Each morning this week, before your feet hit the floor, say Exodus 15:2 once: *The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.*
- Identify one act of presumption in your week (a skipped prayer, an ignored nudge of conscience) and replace it, that day, with the thing it displaced.
- If you can, find the Easter Vigil readings in a missal or online and read the third Old Testament reading (Exodus 14:15–15:1) with the prayer that follows it: hear the Church pray Exodus 14 over the font.

Memory Verse

Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come.

1 Corinthians 10:11 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Genesis 17:1–14 and Colossians 2:8–15.

Catechism references: 1221, 1094, 128–130, 116–117

Circumcision Made Without Hands

What We Found

- In the covenant with Abraham, God binds promises to a God-chosen sign in the flesh: for the covenant's newborn sons, given at eight days old, received as pure gift before any choice or understanding (the grown men of Abraham's household received it too, the day it was given: Genesis 17:23–27).
- The Old Testament itself promised a greater circumcision, performed by God on the heart, so that we would love him (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28–29 agrees).
- St. Paul names the fulfillment: in Baptism we received *a circumcision made without hands... the circumcision of Christ*, stripping off the whole old self, buried and raised with him (Colossians 2:11–12).
- In Colossians 2, *without hands* marks the work as God's rather than man's: at the font, human hands pour or immerse, and God's hands act.
- The Lord himself received the old sign at eight days old (Luke 2:21), and the Church reads his circumcision as prefiguring that *circumcision of Christ* which is Baptism (CCC 527).
- Real circumcision was always aimed at the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28–29).

Voices of the Church

St. Justin Martyr • *Dialogue with Trypho*

St. Justin, whom the group met at the flood, teaches in substance that Christians have received the true, spiritual circumcision promised by the prophets, and that we receive it through Baptism: the sign given to Abraham has found the reality it always pointed toward, and it is now open to every nation.

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on Colossians*

St. John Chrysostom, preaching through Colossians in the fourth century, teaches in substance that Paul deliberately calls Baptism the Christian's circumcision: performed not by human hands but by the Spirit, and removing not a small piece of the body but the whole *body of flesh*, the old sinful self, stripped off and buried in the water.

St. Thomas Aquinas • *Summa Theologiae III, q. 70*

St. Thomas, treating circumcision directly, teaches in substance that circumcision was the figure and preparation of Baptism: a true covenant sign professing faith in the Christ who was to come, while Baptism is the sacrament of the Christ who has come. What the old sign promised from a distance, the new sacrament confers in fullness.

Live It This Week

- Pray one line each morning this week: *Lord, circumcise my heart; cut away what keeps me from loving you.*
- If you were baptized as an infant, thank (in person, by call, or in prayer if they have died) the people who carried you to the font.
- Read Colossians 2:6–15 once, alone, and underline every verb whose subject is God, not you.

Memory Verse

and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:12 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Joshua 3–4: Israel finally enters the promised land, and notice what leads them into the river and what the water does.

Catechism references: 527, 1150

Crossing the Jordan

What We Found

- The rescue has two halves: the sea took Israel *out* of slavery; the Jordan brought Israel *into* the inheritance. Baptism is both: out of slavery to sin and into the inheritance whose image is eternal life (CCC 1222); what Baptism brings us into, the Church and the life of grace, is named at CCC 1265 and 1271.
- For the fourth time, God's presence and the water were paired: the ark of the covenant stood in the riverbed and the Jordan yielded (Joshua 3).
- The man who led Israel home bears, in the Greek Bible, exactly the name Jesus: Moses the lawgiver brought them to the border; Joshua brought them in.
- Elisha crossed the Jordan at Elijah's side and, on the far shore, received the spirit he asked for (2 Kings 2): a story-shape Christian memory has cherished.
- The New Testament opens the sacrament's story at this exact river: John baptized in the Jordan, and Jesus came to it (Matthew 3).

Voices of the Church

St. Gregory Nazianzen • *Oration 39*

St. Gregory the Theologian, preaching on the feast of the Lord's Baptism, teaches in substance that salvation history is strung together by baptisms: Moses baptized in water, in the cloud, and in the sea, as a figure; John baptized unto repentance, a bridge; and Christ baptizes in the Holy Spirit, the perfection. The crossings of Israel were the schoolroom in which God taught the world what he would one day do at a font.

St. Gregory of Nyssa • *Sermon on the Baptism of Christ*

The other Gregory, preaching on the same feast, teaches in substance that the Jordan's story was always pointing forward: Israel did not enter the promise until Joshua its guide had brought it through the Jordan's passage, and the twelve stones Joshua set in the stream anticipated the twelve disciples, the ministers of Baptism; while Elisha, washing Naaman the Syrian clean in this same river, clearly indicated what was to come. The river's history, for Gregory, is prophecy written in water.

Origen of Alexandria • *Homilies on Joshua*

Origen, whom the group met at the Red Sea, teaches in substance that the book of Joshua is the Christian's own itinerary: having left Egypt through the first water, the soul must still cross the Jordan behind the true Joshua, Jesus, to enter the inheritance; the first crossing lies behind; the inheritance still waits across the second river, behind the true Joshua.

Live It This Week

- Once this week, read Psalm 114 aloud, ideally outdoors: sixty seconds of the Bible's own theology of the two crossings.
- Do one act of homemaking in the Church this week: greet a stranger at Mass, or return to a parish habit you have let lapse. You are not a visitor there; the Jordan is behind you.
- If you know a catechumen or a family preparing for a baptism, pray for them by name at the riverbank of your evening prayer.

Memory Verse

The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back.

Psalm 114:3 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read 2 Kings 5, the story of Naaman: a foreign general, a little servant girl, and the same river. Notice what almost keeps him from being healed.

Catechism references: 1222, with 128–130 held over from Session 3

Naaman and the Waters of Cleansing

What We Found

- What nearly kept Naaman from his cure was not the command's difficulty but its humility: *My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?* (2 Kings 5:13).
- The cure came through the appointed means: the Jordan and not the finer rivers of Damascus, seven washings, *according to the word of the man of God*: word and water together: the pattern Baptism will fulfill.
- He came up with *the flesh of a little child* (2 Kings 5:14): not repaired but reborn.
- Jesus himself preached Naaman as a sign that God's grace reaches the outsider (Luke 4:27), and the Church holds both truths together: God has bound salvation to Baptism, and he himself is not bound by his sacraments (CCC 1257).
- Christian tradition reads Naaman's leprosy as a figure of sin, never as a verdict on the sick: Jesus refused the inference from suffering to guilt (John 9:3).

Voices of the Church

St. Ambrose of Milan • *On the Mysteries*

St. Ambrose, whom the group met at the waters of creation, sets Naaman before the newly baptized and teaches in substance that the story exposes the eye's poverty: Naaman saw ordinary water and doubted; he obeyed, and was cleansed. Not every water heals, Ambrose insists, but the water that carries the grace of Christ; what matters at the font is not what the eye sees but what the word of God does.

A fragment under the name of St. Irenaeus • *Fragments* (no. 34 in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* collection)

An ancient fragment handed down under the name of St. Irenaeus reads Naaman as the Christian's own biography, teaching in substance: as Naaman the leper was cleansed of his leprosy by washing, so we, lepers in sin, are cleansed of our old transgressions by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, being spiritually regenerated as newborn babes.

The Church's Lectionary • *Monday of the Third Week of Lent*

Each Lent, on a single weekday morning, the Church sets tonight's two texts side by side at Mass: the first reading is Naaman's cleansing in the Jordan (2 Kings 5), and the Gospel is Jesus at Nazareth holding Naaman up as the sign of grace reaching the outsider (Luke 4). The pairing this session builds is not the study's invention; it is the Church's own lectionary, praying the two scenes together over her people.

Live It This Week

- Go to Confession this week if you are able: the humblest appointed mercy in your reach. If it has been years, tell the priest exactly that; you will be received like Naaman at the river.
- Each day this week, pray the servants' question over one resistance of yours: *if he had commanded some great thing, would I not have done it?*
- Find your parish's baptismal font before or after Mass, put your hand on it, and thank God that grace has an address.
- Bring your sealed My Guess page next week. We open them together.

Memory Verse

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

2 Kings 5:14 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Ezekiel 36:16–38. And bring your sealed My Guess page from Session 1: next week we open them together.

Catechism references: 1216, 1218, 1257

Sprinkled Clean, A New Heart

What We Found

- Our sealed guesses were opened, and every one caught a facet: cleansing, drowning, life, humility, birth. Then God answered in the first person.
- Ezekiel 36:25–27 is the promise the whole Old Testament pattern was building: *I will sprinkle clean water upon you... a new heart I will give you... I will put my spirit within you*. Water, heart, Spirit: every verb God's.
- The renewal is for the sake of God's holy name, not our merits (Ezekiel 36:22): no foothold for boasting.
- Deuteronomy's promise that God would circumcise hearts (Session 4) is resolved: same surgeon, same organ, and now the instruments are named.
- Hebrews 10:22 says it of Christians in the present tense: *hearts sprinkled clean... bodies washed with pure water*. The promise kept its own vocabulary.
- The answer is complete except for one thing: the promise still had to be kept in person. That is where we are headed.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyril of Jerusalem • *Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 3*

St. Cyril, preparing candidates for the font, teaches in substance that Baptism works on both levels the prophets promised: the water cleanses the body while the Spirit seals the soul, so that, hearts sprinkled and bodies washed with pure water, we may draw near to God. For Cyril the font is not a picture of Ezekiel's promise; it is the appointment where the promise is kept.

St. Cyprian of Carthage • *To Donatus*

St. Cyprian, describing his own adult conversion, teaches in substance that before his baptism he thought a new heart impossible: he despaired that a man so entangled in his habits could ever be different. Then, he says, the birth of the new man in the water of regeneration washed away the stains of his former life, light poured into a reconciled heart, and what he had thought impossible became, by God's gift, what he could do. The heart of stone was not persuaded out of him; it was taken out of him.

The Church's Liturgy • *The Sprinkling Rite (Asperges)*

On Sundays the Church may replace the penitential act by sprinkling the whole assembly with blessed water while they sing words drawn from tonight's promise-world, above all Psalm 51: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Week after week, the Church walks through her congregations recalling Baptism in Ezekiel's own gesture: clean water, sprinkled on the people.

Live It This Week

- Keep your opened My Guess page somewhere visible this week (a Bible, a mirror, a dashboard) as a record that God answers carried questions.
- Pray Ezekiel 36:26 once each day over one specific stone in you, naming it: *A new heart give me, O God, here*.
- At Sunday Mass, if the sprinkling rite is used, or at the holy water on entering, receive the water deliberately as tonight's promise in motion.

Memory Verse

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Mark 1:1–11 and John 1:19–34. After five centuries of waiting beside the promise, someone appears at a river.

Catechism references: 715, 1215, with 694 held over from Session 1

The Voice in the Wilderness

What We Found

- Israel knew ritual washing, and the prophets had taught her to hope for a cleansing from God himself (Ezekiel 36:25–27; Zechariah 13:1); the delegation's question (John 1:25) suggests the expectation that the decisive figures might baptize.
- John appeared in dress evocative of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8; Mark 1:6), at the river of Elijah's story (2 Kings 2): the promised final preparation, where spirit follows water.
- John drew the line himself: *I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit* (Mark 1:8). His water carried half of Ezekiel's promise and pointed at the Carrier of the other half.
- In Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7), the apostolic Church met devout disciples who had only John's baptism, and they received Christian Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, and, with Paul's laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit came on them (Acts 19:5–6): the two washings differ in kind, and the difference is the Gift the new one carries.
- In every valid Baptism, whoever's hands pour the water, it is Christ who baptizes: the sacrament's worth never depended on the minister's worthiness.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on Matthew*

St. John Chrysostom teaches in substance that John's baptism stood between the Jewish washings and our own: more than ritual purification, for it summoned real repentance; less than the sacrament, for it could not yet confer the Spirit or remission. Its whole office was to lead people by the hand to the One who could, which is why John's constant preaching was not himself but the Coming One.

St. Augustine • *Tractates on the Gospel of John*

St. Augustine, commenting on the Baptist's testimony that the Spirit's descent revealed *he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit*, teaches in substance that this is the standing difference between every minister and the Lord: John baptized in his own baptism, but no Christian minister baptizes in his own; whether Peter baptizes, or Paul, or even Judas, it is Christ who baptizes. The power of the font was never delegated away; the hands change, the Baptizer does not.

St. Thomas Aquinas • *Summa Theologiae III, q. 38*

St. Thomas, treating John's baptism directly, teaches in substance that it was a divinely given preparation rather than a sacrament of grace: it did not itself confer what our Baptism confers, but accustomed Israel to the rite, gathered crowds to hear of Christ, and disposed hearts by repentance, a schoolmaster's washing, walking its pupils to the font it could not itself be.

Live It This Week

- Pray the Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79), Zechariah's canticle over the infant John, once this week, slowly: the Church prays it every single morning.
- Practice one act of decrease: give away credit, yield the last word, or let someone else be preferred, and offer it silently: he must increase.

- If you have never read your own baptismal rite, find the Rite of Baptism text this week and read what was actually said and asked over you.

Memory Verse

I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Mark 1:8 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Reread Matthew 3:13–17 slowly, several times.

Catechism references: 523, 720, 1223

The Baptism of the Lord

What We Found

- The sinless One stood in the sinners' water on purpose: not to be cleansed by it but to fulfill all righteousness at the head of the penitent, and, as the early Church confessed, to sanctify the water itself: he cleansed the river; the river did not cleanse him.
- The threads the study has counted arrive together here, as the Church has traditionally read the scene: the Spirit over the waters (Genesis 1:2), the dove over the waters (Genesis 8), the Jordan of entry, water then Spirit, and the heavens standing open.
- The Spirit descended *and remained*, and the Baptist drew the conclusion: *this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit* (John 1:32–33).
- The Father's voice declared identity before any performance: *This is my beloved Son*. Father, Son, and Spirit were all present at the water: the Trinity manifested together at a baptism, which is why we are baptized in the threefold Name.
- Through Baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Jesus (CCC 537): the Jordan scene is what every font confers: opened heavens, the Spirit, adoption as beloved sons and daughters (CCC 537, 1265).

Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch • *Letter to the Ephesians, ch. 18*

“For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God's plan... He was born and baptized, that by his passion he might purify the water.”

St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch and disciple of the apostolic generation, wrote this on the road to his martyrdom around the year 107: within living memory of the apostles, the Church already confessed that the Lord's baptism was for the water's sake, and ours.

St. Maximus of Turin • *Sermons on the Epiphany*

St. Maximus, a fifth-century bishop, teaches in substance that Christ went down into the Jordan not to be made holy by the waters but to make the waters holy: the river did not wash him; he washed the river, and in it every font to come, and the Church's Epiphany preaching extended the thought to the font: the water of Baptism carries the power of his sanctification.

The Church's Liturgy • *Preface of the Baptism of the Lord (Roman Missal)*

On the feast of the Lord's Baptism the Church prays that in the waters of the Jordan the Father revealed with signs and wonders a new Baptism: by the voice from heaven we might believe the Word dwelling among us, and by the Spirit descending as a dove we might know Christ anointed to bring good news to the poor.

The Church's own prayer illuminates tonight's whole approach: the Jordan event revealed a new Baptism; CCC 537 completes the application to us.

Live It This Week

- Find out or confirm the date of your Baptism (Session 1's assignment, now with its full meaning) and put it in your calendar as a yearly feast. If you found it then, tell someone this week what happened on it.

- Each morning, at water (a shower, a sink, a font), say once: I am a beloved son / a beloved daughter; heaven was opened over my Baptism.
- Read CCC 535–537 slowly once this week and underline every phrase that says the Jordan scene is about you.
- If there are children in your life, tell them the story of their own baptism day this week: who was there, what was said, how the water was poured. Give them a memory of the voice.

Memory Verse

and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:17 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read John 3:1–21. A teacher of Israel comes to Jesus by night and hears the sentence this whole study is named for.

Catechism references: 535–537, 1223–1224, 701

Born of Water and the Spirit

What We Found

- The Lord's own sentence gathers the whole study: *unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (John 3:5): one birth, from water-and-Spirit joined, the pairing we have counted since Genesis 1:2.
- Nicodemus's *how can a man be born when he is old?* was answered in advance by Naaman, who dipped seven times in the Jordan and whose flesh was restored like a little child's (2 Kings 5:14).
- Jesus expected Israel's teacher to recognize the promise (John 3:10), a rebuke the Church has always heard against the background of Ezekiel 36's water, new heart, and Spirit.
- The context answers the controversies: after this conversation, Jesus went into Judea, where his disciples baptized (John 3:22; 4:2).
- The Church's Tradition has consistently received the verse as baptismal: one of the earliest surviving accounts of Baptism (St. Justin, mid-second century) already appeals to the Lord's new-birth saying, and the Catechism says Baptism *signifies and actually brings about* this birth (CCC 1215), while God himself remains free beyond his sacraments (CCC 1257).
- Entry is by birth, not achievement: the new birth, like the first, is received.

Voices of the Church

St. Justin Martyr • *First Apology, ch. 61*

St. Justin, writing one of the earliest surviving accounts of how Christians baptize (mid-second century; the Didache's brief instructions are earlier still), teaches in substance that candidates are brought where there is water and are regenerated there, born again as we were born again; and the warrant he gives Rome's pagan readers is the Lord's new-birth saying, in the compressed form Justin cites, that unless you are born again you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on the Gospel of John*

St. John Chrysostom, preaching through this chapter, teaches in substance that in the font the water becomes to the believer what the womb is to the child: in it the new person is fashioned and formed, and what the Spirit works there is a true generation, not a metaphor for one. For Chrysostom, Nicodemus's mistake was not taking birth too literally but taking God too weakly.

St. Ambrose of Milan • *On the Mysteries*

St. Ambrose, catechizing at the font where this study began with him, teaches in substance that the Lord's sentence binds the two together: not water without the Spirit, and not the Spirit without the water, for the one birth is of water and the Spirit; whoever would divide what Christ joined must answer to the plain shape of his words.

Live It This Week

- Memorize John 3:5 completely this week; it is the study's namesake and the shortest summary of everything we have traced.
- Pray for one Nicodemus you know by name: someone circling the faith cautiously, at night. Ask for the chance to be safe daylight for them.

- Read the whole Nicodemus arc in one sitting (John 3:1–21; 7:45–52; 19:38–42) and write one sentence about what changed him.

Memory Verse

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

John 3:5 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Romans 6:1–14.

Catechism references: 1215, 1225, 1257

Buried and Raised

What We Found

- St. Paul says what happened in the water without imagery: *baptized into Christ Jesus... into his death... buried with him... that we too might walk in newness of life* (Romans 6:3–4). Into and with: incorporation, not commemoration.
- Paul answers *shall we go on sinning?* with a fact, not a rule: *you died*. The ethics of the baptized stand on an event with a date.
- The decisive verbs are passive: *were baptized, were buried*: received, not performed; and the risen life is God's doing, promised and begun (Romans 6:4–5; Colossians 2:12). A sacrament is God's work arriving, and receiving it is faith's whole posture: *justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith* (CCC 1992).
- The Red Sea thread resolved: Israel was baptized into Moses; we were baptized into Christ: his death ours, his rising ours, his sonship ours by adoption.
- The font is tomb and womb at once: *the saving water was at once your grave and your mother* (St. Cyril of Jerusalem).
- *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Galatians 3:27): the white garment says it over every font, and the pall repeats it over every casket.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyril of Jerusalem • *Mystagogical Catecheses, Lecture 2*

Explaining to the newly baptized what had just happened to them in the font, St. Cyril teaches that the water was “at once your grave and your mother”: in the same moment, dying and being born, the tomb of the old self and the womb of the new. What nature keeps separate, a lifetime apart, grace accomplished in one immersion.

St. Basil the Great • *On the Holy Spirit, ch. 15*

St. Basil teaches in substance that Baptism holds death and life in one action: the water receives the body as a tomb receives the dead, imaging the putting away of the old life, while the Spirit pours in life-giving power, renewing the soul from the death of sin into the life it was made for. Neither element carries the sacrament alone: the tomb without the Spirit would only drown; the Spirit uses the tomb to raise.

The Church's Liturgy • *Rite of Baptism, the Clothing with the White Garment*

After the Baptism, following the anointing with chrism, the Church clothes the newly baptized in white and tells them why in Galatians' own grammar: you have become a new creation and have clothed yourself in Christ. The garment is Scripture made wearable; returning at the end as the pall spread over the casket, it brackets the whole baptized life in the same sentence: this person put on Christ.

Live It This Week

- Pray Romans 6:11 each morning as an act of accounting, aloud if you can: I am dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- If anything grave stands between you and your baptism's grace, take the second plank this week: go to confession, and tell the Lord you are reclaiming the life the font began.

- At the next baptism or funeral you attend, watch for the white garment or the pall, and pray for that person by name in Galatians' words: they have put on Christ.

Memory Verse

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read John 19:31–37 and John 7:37–39.

Catechism references: 1214, 1227, 1265, 1992

Blood and Water

What We Found

- John marks the spear-thrust with his most direct eyewitness testimony (compare 21:24) and two Scripture fulfillments: the blood and water carry extraordinary emphasis (John 19:34–37): the Church has never stopped contemplating why.
- The Gospel had carried the promise since chapter 7: rivers of living water from his heart, glossed by John himself as the Spirit, released at his glorification: and in John, the glorification is the cross. The note came due at 19:34.
- His body is the temple (John 2:21), and Ezekiel saw the water issuing from beneath the temple's threshold, deepening and healing as it goes (Ezekiel 47): the Church still sings it at the Easter-time sprinkling: all to whom this water came were saved.
- As Eve was formed from sleeping Adam's side, the Church was born from the opened side of the new Adam: blood and water, Eucharist and Baptism, the sacraments of new life (CCC 766, 1225). Every font is filled from a birthplace.
- The apostle kept preaching it: *the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree* (1 John 5:8): present tense, abiding witnesses.
- Nicodemus, who came by night, ended his recorded story at the Lord's burial, openly, with a hundred pounds of spices: slow journeys are allowed, and they can end magnificently.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine • *Tractates on the Gospel of John (Tractate 120)*

St. Augustine, closing the circle he opened for us at the ark, teaches in substance that here a door of life was opened in the side of the second Adam: as Eve was formed from the side of sleeping Adam, so from the side of Christ, asleep in death upon the cross, flowed the sacraments from which the Church, his bride, is formed. The door in the ark, through which the saved entered, was this wound's shadow; the wound is the door's truth.

St. John Chrysostom • *Baptismal Catecheses*

St. John Chrysostom, instructing candidates for the font, teaches in substance that the blood and water are the symbols of the Eucharist and of Baptism, and that the Church is born from both: as God formed Eve from Adam's side, so Christ from his own side formed the Church, giving her birth in the water and nourishing her with the blood. And his catechesis urges the baptized to revere the font and the chalice as gifts flowing from that side.

The Church's Liturgy • *The Vidi Aquam (Eastertide)*

Throughout Eastertide, when the priest sprinkles the assembly with baptismal water, the Church sings Ezekiel's vision: I saw water flowing from the temple, from its right side, and all to whom that water came were saved. The antiphon names the temple; the Church's tradition, taught by John 2:21 (the temple of his body), hears Christ, and in the right side his opened wound: so the parish being sprinkled on an Easter Sunday stands, in the tradition's hearing, in the river from the wound.

Live It This Week

- Pray before a crucifix for ten minutes once this week, saying nothing for the first five: only looking on him whom we have pierced.

- Pray the short invocation the Church has long loved, once each day: Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
- If you can reach a Mass this week, receive the wound's other gift: and if you cannot receive, make the spiritual communion prayer at the moment of the chalice's elevation.
- Light a candle for someone who is grieving or dying, and entrust them by name to the opened heart.

Memory Verse

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

John 19:34 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Acts 2.

Catechism references: 766, 1225

Baptism in Acts

What We Found

- The apostles treated Baptism as urgent: about three thousand at Pentecost that day, the Ethiopian's *see, here is water*, Saul told *why do you wait?*, the jailer baptized the same hour of the night: and Acts names what the washing brings: forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38; 22:16).
- Peter's first sermon attached forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the washing (Acts 2:38), and declared the promise in covenant grammar: *to you and to your children and to all that are far off* (Acts 2:39).
- When the Gospel entered Europe, it baptized households: Lydia's, on her recorded faith, and the jailer's family at midnight (Acts 16): the covenant unit since Abraham's house received the sign.
- The covenant's newborn sons had entered by its sign at eight days old for two thousand years (Genesis 17:12); Scripture records fierce controversy over the old sign (Acts 15) and none over children losing access to the new: a silence that weighs.
- The surviving early memory runs one way: Origen called infant baptism a tradition received from the apostles; the ancient church order queued the little ones first with parents speaking for them; St. Cyprian's council ruled babies need not wait even eight days: and Tertullian's counsel to delay presumes the very practice he cautioned about.
- An infant at the font is the study's whole lesson in miniature: empty hands, everything received: *the sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism* (CCC 1250).

Voices of the Church

Origen of Alexandria • *Commentary on Romans*

Origen, whom the group has met at the sea and the Jordan, writing in the early third century, heir to churches of apostolic foundation, teaches that “the Church received from the apostles the tradition of baptizing infants,” and he reasons from the practice: those entrusted with the divine mysteries knew that there is in all persons the stain the water washes.

St. Cyprian of Carthage • *Letters*

St. Cyprian, with a council of sixty-six bishops gathered at Carthage in the year 253, answered a bishop who wondered whether infants should wait until the eighth day, as circumcision had: they teach in substance that the mercy and grace of God are to be denied to no one born, and that the infant, newly born, having contracted no sin of his own, should be brought to the washing without delay. When a council of that century took the question up, the debate was over whether eight days was too long to make mercy wait.

The Apostolic Tradition • *the ancient church order under the name of St. Hippolytus*

The ancient Roman church order handed down under the name of St. Hippolytus, a document whose date, provenance, and authorship scholars debate (it is commonly placed in the early third century), directs in substance: baptize the little children first; those who can speak for themselves, let them speak; and for those who cannot, let their parents or someone from their family speak for them. The rubric is unargued, the tone administrative: the rubric legislates for infants as a matter of course: an administrative witness to settled practice, whatever remains debated about the document itself.

Live It This Week

- If there is an unbaptized child in your family's orbit, commit this week to one gentle step: a conversation with the parents, an offer to help, or begin praying for that child by name daily.
- Thank your own godparents this week if they are living; pray for them by name if they are not. Someone once spoke for you.
- Read Acts 2 straight through in one sitting and count the verbs of urgency.
- If you were baptized in another Christian community and questions stir tonight, bring them next week: the study's final session is built for them.

Memory Verse

For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.

Acts 2:39 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Ephesians 4:1–6 slowly, twice.

Catechism references: 1226, 1250–1252

One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

What We Found

- Baptism stands in the foundation of Christian unity: *one Lord, one faith, one baptism* (Ephesians 4:5): a shared birth, not a shared opinion: which is why the baptized of every Christian community are truly our brothers and sisters, and why the Church never repeats a valid Baptism: one conferred with water, in the threefold Name, with the intention of doing what the Church does.
- Baptism seals an indelible character that no sin, desertion, or decade can erase (CCC 1272): the deserter still carries the King's mark, and the way home is confession, never a second font. The seal is not maintained by the quality of our grip; the grace it calls us to live is restored, when lost, in confession.
- The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) is the Jordan scene become the Church's errand: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the theophany now the Name spoken over every font, for all nations.
- God has bound salvation to Baptism and is not bound himself (CCC 1257): the baptism of blood, the baptism of desire, salvation possible for the sincere seeker who never knew Christ, and real hope for children who die without the sacrament, entrusted to the mercy of God and the tenderness of Jesus (CCC 1258–1261). The exceptions orbit the sacrament; they do not replace it: the font remains the one means that assures.
- The baptized share Christ's threefold anointing: priest, prophet, and king (CCC 1268): worship to offer, truth to speak, service to order: a life lived in a white garment, under an open heaven.
- We ended as the Church always renews the baptized: standing, promising, believing: I do.

Voices of the Church

St. Gregory Nazianzen • *Oration 40, On Holy Baptism*

St. Gregory the Theologian, in the ancient Church's greatest sermon on Baptism, teaches in substance that the gift has as many names as it has splendors: we call it gift, grace, baptism, anointing, illumination, garment of immortality, bath of regeneration, seal: gift, because conferred on those who bring nothing; grace, because given even to debtors; bath, because it washes; seal, because it guards us and marks God's ownership.

St. Augustine • *his writings against the Donatists*

St. Augustine, defending the unrepeatable seal across his anti-Donatist works, teaches in substance that Baptism marks the soul as the military brand of his age marked the emperor's soldier: the deserter who flees the ranks still bears the mark; it convicts him while he wanders and identifies him when he returns; and no one re-brands a returning soldier. So the Church receives back the lapsed with penance, never with a second font: the seal outlasts every desertion, waiting.

The Creed of the Church • *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*

"I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins."

Sixteen centuries of Sundays, and the whole of this study, in nine words: one (Ephesians' unity, the unrepeatable seal), Baptism (the water God chose), for the forgiveness of sins (Peter's Pentecost promise, effected, not merely pictured). The group has been professing the conclusion of this study aloud since before it began.

Live It This Week

- Celebrate your baptismal anniversary this year as a real feast: the date is in your calendar since Session 9; plan the meal, light your baptismal candle if you have it, tell the story.
- Exercise each office once this month: offer one intentional act of worship beyond Sunday (priest), have one honest conversation about the faith (prophet), take up one hidden act of service (king).
- Bless yourself with holy water at every entrance and exit of the church from now on, deliberately: you now know the water's whole biography, from Genesis 1:2 to the opened side to your own forehead.
- Pass it on: pray about leading, hosting, or inviting someone into the next study: baptizing and teaching belong together, and formation is how the baptized keep walking.

Memory Verse

one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:5–6 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: The study ends; the baptized life does not. This week, reread John 3:1–21 with fourteen weeks of eyes, keep your baptismal date on the calendar as a feast, and consider whom you might invite when this study runs again. The promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off (Acts 2:39).

Catechism references: 1257–1261, 1268, 1271–1274