

Session 3

Through the Sea

All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that St. Paul explicitly calls the Red Sea crossing a baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1–2), and that he declares the events of the Exodus were written down *for our instruction* (10:11). In doing so they receive, from an apostle's own pen, the warrant for the method this whole study uses: typology is not our invention; it is how the New Testament reads the Old.

Catholic Touchstone. The Catechism singles this crossing out: above all, the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism (CCC 1221), and it teaches that the Church's reading of such figures rests on the unity of God's plan across the two Testaments (CCC 128–130).

What You Need to Know

Tonight the study defends its own method, and it does so from inside the Bible. Twice now the group has watched water and Spirit mark the birth of a world. A fair-minded person can still ask: fine, but who says these Old Testament stories are *about* Baptism? Tonight's answer: St. Paul says so, in writing, using the word itself. 1 Corinthians 10:1–2: our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were *baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*. And 10:11: these things happened to them as a warning, but *they were written down for our instruction*. Typology is not a medieval decoration or a Catholic habit; it is apostolic exegesis.

Set the Exodus scene richly, because the drama matters. Israel is enslaved, powerless, unable to free itself; everything depends on God's initiative. At the sea they are trapped: Pharaoh's army behind, water ahead. God divides the sea, Israel passes through on dry ground between walls of water, and the same water that opened for the slaves closes over the slavemasters. On the far shore stands a free people who did nothing to earn the crossing, singing Israel's great Song of the Sea: *The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation* (Exodus 15:2).

Now watch Paul's two details. First, *the cloud*: the pillar of cloud and fire is God's own presence leading and guarding Israel (Exodus 13:21–22; 14:19–20 shows it moving between Israel and the army). Paul says Israel was baptized *in the cloud and in the sea*: divine presence plus water. The group has now seen this pairing three times, and tonight someone should say it out loud without prompting; if no one does, ask what two elements Paul lists and wait. Second, *into Moses*: baptism incorporates you into someone. Israel came out of the sea belonging to Moses, bound to the mediator God appointed. The Christian is baptized *into Christ* (the group will read Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3 in Session 11); Paul's grammar here is deliberately parallel.

The steelman tonight has two prongs, and both deserve full strength. Prong one, about method: is typology not just reading the ending back into the beginning, finding faces in clouds? Anything can prefigure anything if you squint. Prong two, sharper, from the text itself: Paul's whole point in 1 Corinthians 10 is a warning: nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; they were overthrown in the wilderness (10:5). Everyone was baptized into Moses, and most of them still died in the desert. So, the strong form runs: a warning to the sacramentally privileged settles nothing about what baptism effects; Israel's typological baptism was not Christian Baptism anyway; and a text about falling despite the gifts sits more comfortably with baptism as sign than with baptism as saving instrument.

Sit with prong two before the session until you love it, because it flips. The warning only has force if the gifts were real. Paul's argument to the Corinthians is: you have real gifts of God, and Israel had their very figures (a crossing Paul dares to call a baptism, the supernatural food and drink that prefigure the Eucharist), and those real gifts did not spare presumptuous Israel, so do not presume. If baptism were an empty symbol, do not presume upon it would be a strange sermon. You warn people not to presume on something precisely because it is real and precious. And this is simply Catholic teaching: Baptism truly saves and truly incorporates, and the baptized can still be lost through unrepented grave sin; the sacrament is a gift to be lived, not a talisman. Ironically, 1 Corinthians 10 is a harder text for once-saved-always-saved theology than it is for Catholic sacramental realism.

Pastoral note for a mixed room: the sea closing over the Egyptians can trouble tender consciences, and the Old Testament's warfare texts trouble many good people. Do not wave this away. Two honest anchors: the Church reads these narratives within God's patient pedagogy of an ancient people, and many Fathers, among them Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, and Origen, read the drowned army spiritually, as the sins and slaveries drowned in the font, which is the reading tonight develops. What remains hard may honestly be named as hard; the study does not need to pretend otherwise, and Session 6 and Session 14 give further chances to revisit wounded questions.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

Exodus 14:21–22 (RSV2CE)

Notice even here the wind over the water, *ruach* in Hebrew, dividing the sea as at creation the waters were divided and dry land appeared: Genesis's vocabulary, deliberately replayed. The New Testament seals the reading:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea

1 Corinthians 10:1–2 (RSV2CE)

Voices of the Church

VOICE 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.

Leader note: Source-verified against the NPNF translation: First Mystagogical Catechesis, sections 2–3 (printed as Catechetical Lecture 19 in some collections, which fold the five mystagogical lectures in as Lectures 19–23): “the tyrant of old was drowned in the sea; and this present one disappears in the water of salvation.”

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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.

Leader note: Origen is a Father of enormous influence but not a saint; some of his later speculations were rejected by the Church, and she reads him with discernment while gratefully keeping treasures like this one. Including him honestly, with that caveat, models exactly the intellectual honesty this study wants to form.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1221 states tonight's typology at the highest level: above all, the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism. CCC 1094 confirms the pattern the group has been building for three weeks, naming the flood and the ark and the crossing of the Red Sea as figures of Baptism fulfilled in Christ.

CCC 128–130 is your method anchor if anyone wants chapter and verse for typology itself: the Church, as early as apostolic times and constantly in her Tradition, has read the unity of the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in Christ, while insisting the Old Testament retains its own permanent value. CCC 116 grounds all the other senses of Scripture on the literal sense, and CCC 117 places typology among the spiritual senses, itself naming the crossing of the Red Sea as a sign of Christ's victory and of Christian Baptism. If the phrase *the Old Testament retains its own value* comes up: yes, the crossing really happened to Israel and really mattered as Israel's liberation; typology adds meaning, it does not dissolve history.

Paragraphs for this session: 1221, 1094, 128–130, 116–117

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

Why water? (master thread): tonight's datum is liberation. The water is where slavery ends and a people is born free. Guesses in the sealed boxes are quietly gaining material; four sessions remain until the unsealing.

Water plus Spirit: instance three: the cloud (divine presence) and the sea; even the east *wind* dividing the waters echoes the *ruach*. By now the group should be spotting the pairing unprompted. If someone does, congratulate them and say only: keep counting.

Baptized into someone (planted tonight, resolved Session 11): into Moses now, into Christ then. Plant with one sentence when Q4's answer is shared; do not develop.

The warning thread (developed tonight, resolved Session 14): real sacraments, really given, must still be lived. This becomes Session 14's charge to live your Baptism.

Session Goals

1. The group has read 1 Corinthians 10:1–2 and heard Paul call the crossing a baptism, in his own words.
2. The group can state Paul's warrant for typology from 10:11: these things were written down for our instruction.
3. The group can name what the cloud is and what the pairing cloud-plus-sea repeats.
4. Both prongs of the steelman (typology as wishful reading; baptized Israel still fell) have been given at full strength and answered from the text.
5. The group can say what drowned in the sea and what walked out of it.

Timed Plan (85 minutes)

5 min • Welcome and opening prayer

10 min • Win questions

15 min • Build: Exodus 14 read dramatically; the trap, the crossing, the closing sea; Q1-Q2

15 min • Live discovery: 1 Corinthians 10:1–11, Paul's own words

10 min • Build: into Moses, in the cloud and the sea; Q4-Q5

15 min • Steelman: both prongs

5 min • Send questions

10 min • Live It, memory verse, closing prayer

If you must land at 75 minutes, cut: Q2 (the Song of the Sea; the leader can read Exodus 15:2 aloud in passing) and the Dig Deeper box. Never cut the second prong of the steelman; it is the sharpest objection the study has met so far.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord God, you heard the cry of your people in slavery, and you made a road where there was no road. We come tonight with our own Egypts behind us and our own seas in front of us. Open your word as you opened the waters, and lead us through on dry ground. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win • open the room

QW1. Israel stood trapped: an army behind them, the sea ahead. Describe a moment in your life, as much as you are comfortable sharing, when the way back was closed and the way forward looked impossible.

QW2. What is something you were once enslaved to, in any sense (a habit, a fear, a screen, a grudge), that you are free of now? Do you remember crossing over, or did you look up one day and find yourself on the far shore?

Build • into the text

Have a strong reader take Exodus 14:10–14 (the panic and the promise), and another take 14:21–31 (the crossing). Read it like the rescue it is.

Q1. Before the sea opens, what can Israel actually do to save itself? Look hard at 14:13–14.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Nothing. That is the point of the trap. Moses says: fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD... the LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still. The crossing is pure gift, God's initiative from first to last; Israel's part is to trust and walk. Whatever Baptism is, the story Paul chose as its pattern is a story of salvation no one earned. (This matters for later: the Catholic claim that Baptism saves is not a claim that we save ourselves by a ritual work; the sea did the work, and God did the sea.)

Q2. Exodus 14:21: the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind, and the waters were divided, and dry land appeared. Where has the Bible shown us wind-over-water, divided waters, and emerging dry land before?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 1 (the *ruach* over the deep, waters divided, dry land emerging) and Genesis 8 (the *ruach*-wind over the flood, waters subsiding, dry land). Here the *ruach* is plainly an east wind; the point is the shared grammar, not a hidden identification: three stories in which, when God brings a world or a people to birth, wind-or-Spirit moves over water and a way through opens. Israel is not just escaping; Israel is being created, a nation born that night through the water.

LIVE DISCOVERY

The hunt. Tell the group: St. Paul read this story and made a claim about it so bold that he used a word we would not dare to use if he had not. Give them only **1 Corinthians 10:1–11** and ask them to find the word, and then to find the sentence where Paul tells us why these old stories are in our Bible at all.

The word is baptized (v. 2); the sentence is v. 11, written down for our instruction. Let them find both and read them aloud.

Q3. Paul says all were baptized *into Moses*. Not near Moses or with Moses: into him. What did Israel's crossing bind them to, and if the sea was a baptism into Moses, what does Paul want us to conclude our Baptism binds us into?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The crossing bound Israel to Moses as the mediator God had appointed: they came out of the water as his people, under his leadership, headed where he was headed. Paul's grammar is a loaded parallel: elsewhere he writes that all of us who have been baptized *into Christ Jesus* were baptized into his death, and that as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Baptism is not a certificate; it is an incorporation into a person. (One sentence, then move on: we will spend all of Session 11 inside that truth.)

Q4. Paul names two elements: in the cloud and in the sea. Look at Exodus 13:21–22 and 14:19–20. What is the cloud, and what pairing does cloud-plus-sea complete for the third week in a row?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The cloud is God's own presence: the pillar of cloud and fire that leads Israel and then stations itself between them and the army, presence as guide and shield. Cloud plus sea is presence-of-God plus water: the pairing that echoes Spirit-over-waters in Genesis 1 and the wind of God over the flood in Genesis 8. The language invites the comparison; many readers hear Paul writing with Genesis in his ear. Divine presence and water, together, making a people: count it, three.

STEELMAN • PRESS THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

Two objections tonight, both strong. First, about our whole method: is this not pattern-hunting? Read any ending back into any beginning and you will find foreshadowing everywhere; people find faces in clouds. Calling the Red Sea a baptism is poetry at best, wishful thinking at worst, unless the text itself authorizes it. Second, from inside tonight's very chapter, and this one has teeth: Paul continues, nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness (10:5). All were baptized into Moses, and a generation of the baptized died outside the promise. If baptism can be had by a whole nation that then perishes, what does this passage leave of the claim that baptism saves? A warning to the sacramentally privileged, the strong form runs, settles nothing about regenerative efficacy, and Israel's typological baptism was not Christian

Baptism anyway.

Q5. Take the first prong alone: what would it actually take for typology to be legitimate rather than wishful?

Q6. Now the second: read 1 Corinthians 10:5–12 again. What is Paul warning the Corinthians not to do?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Prong one answers itself the moment we ask who is doing the reading. If we had invented the Red-Sea-as-Baptism link, the objection would stand. But the link is Paul's, in an inspired letter, using the word *baptized*, capped with a general principle: these things happened to them as types (*typikōs*, the word behind the RSV's "warning"), and they were written down for our instruction. Typology done rightly is not our creativity; it is apostolic method, practiced under apostolic constraints: it builds on real history (the crossing really happened, really liberated), it centers on Christ, and it is anchored by the New Testament's own explicit links, of which this study is deliberately built. The Church did not license pattern-hunting; she canonized the patterns the apostles hunted.

Prong two flips in your hand once you ask what kind of warning Paul is giving. You do not warn people against presuming on something worthless; there is no epidemic of people presuming on empty symbols. The Corinthians were presuming precisely because the gifts were real: really baptized, really fed with the supernatural food (Paul's words for the figures of the Eucharist). Paul's logic is: Israel really received God's gifts through cloud and sea, and still fell through idolatry and grumbling; therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. The warning presupposes the reality of God's gifts, theirs in figure and ours in fullness; it demolishes only the presumption. (And yes, Israel's baptism into Moses was the figure, not the Christian sacrament: which is Paul's a-fortiori, not his equivocation: if even the figures were holy enough to make presumption fatal, how much more the realities they prefigured.) And this is, word for word, the Catholic position: Baptism truly saves, truly incorporates, truly frees, and the baptized can still be lost through unrepented grave sin, which is why the sacrament must be lived. If anything, this passage is a problem for once-saved-always-saved readings, not for sacramental ones: the baptized-into-Moses who fell were really God's people, really rescued, and really lost. A gift can be real and still be squandered; that is not a defect in the gift.

DIG DEEPER • OPTIONAL

For a strong group: read Exodus 15:1–2, the Song of the Sea, sung on the far shore: *The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation*. Ask: what is the first thing a people does when it comes up out of the water? It worships. Then note where the Church sings this: the Easter Vigil, the night of Baptism, where, in the Roman Rite, Exodus 14:15–15:1 is the one Old Testament reading never omitted, answered with this very song. The Church has never stopped standing on that shore.

Send • out of the room

QS1. Paul warns the baptized against presumption. Where in your own faith life have you been coasting on a gift instead of living it?

QS2. The Egyptians in the water were, for the Fathers, the old masters: the sins that once owned us. What old master still whispers to you from the far bank as though it had a claim on you? What would it mean this week to believe it drowned?

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)

Closing Prayer

Father, you brought your people out of slavery through the sea, and in the waters of Baptism you have brought us out of a slavery older and deeper. Drown what pursues us. Teach us never to presume on your gifts and never to doubt them. And as Israel sang on the shore, put your song in our mouths this week. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order.

Exodus 14:10-14 • The trap and the promise: stand firm and see the salvation of the LORD

Exodus 14:21-31 • The crossing and the closing sea

Genesis 1:2, 9-10 and 8:1 • Callback: wind over water, divided waters, dry land

1 Corinthians 10:1-11 • Live discovery: baptized into Moses; written down for our instruction

Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-20 • The cloud: God's presence leading and shielding

Exodus 15:1-2 • The Song of the Sea; Dig Deeper and Live It