

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