

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