

Baptism and Confirmation

From the earliest times, Christians have been made members of the Church through Baptism.¹ It is from this that we have developed the secondary name of *Christening* for Baptism, since in Baptism we are made people of *Christ*.

The practice of Baptism predates the incarnate life of Jesus Christ. We know that a man called John the Baptist was baptizing people as Jesus began His teaching and preaching.² It is at least possible that Baptism was incorporated into the life of the Church through John's influence in one way or another. All of the Gospels record that Jesus was baptized by Saint John the Baptist.³

Baptism has a number of elements to it. The candidates renounce the grip of sin on their lives and make a profession of Faith. In response to these, the candidate is marked with the sign of the Cross, washed in water and has hands laid on her or him. It is also likely that at a very early stage anointing with oil⁴ – often in conjunction with the sign of the Cross – entered the rite.

In Eastern Orthodox Churches, the rite in its entirety is generally celebrated at the same ceremony, whatever the age of the candidate. In the Western Church, for various reasons, the rite was split between the washing with water (and the sign of the Cross) on the one hand and the laying-on-of-hands on the other. This former part, which we still call **Baptism**, was for centuries usually administered to babies, whilst the latter part, which we call **Confirmation**, waits until the candidate is able to understand what is happening. What age this is varies considerably from place to place and time to time. Nowadays, many fewer babies are baptized; and when older young people or adults are baptized they are usually confirmed at the same time. It is certainly the expectation that people, who have been baptized, will be confirmed at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

Coming for Baptism

Adults and older young people, who come for Baptism, are usually presented by two sponsors. These are generally regular members of the congregation⁵ or another congregation. Babies and infants are presented by their parents/legal guardians and their godparents. Children can only be baptized with the consent of their parents or others, who have legal custody of them. They will need three godparents, who should, at least, have been baptized themselves.

Parents and godparents speak for the babies/infants they present for Baptism. They are also asked to make a couple of preliminary commitments to ensure that the child is raised in the knowledge and practice of the Christian Faith.

¹ I Corinthians 12: 13

² Matthew 3: 1 - 12. He is also mentioned by the Roman/Jewish historian Josephus - Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 18.5.2.

³ Matthew 3: 13 - 17; Mark 1: 9f; Luke 3: 21 - 23; and more obliquely John 1: 29 - 33.

⁴ It is uncertain whether a verse such as I John 2: 27 is figurative or alludes to a concrete practice.

⁵ The group of people who regularly attend church and have been baptized and confirmed themselves.

The Rite of Baptism

The Baptismal rite begins with the **Renunciation of sin**:

Do you reject the devil and rebellion against God?

R.\ I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

R.\ I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

R.\ I repent of them.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

R.\ I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

R.\ I submit to Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life?

R.\ I come to Christ.⁶



The Renunciations

The candidate is then marked with the sign of the Cross, sometimes with Holy Oil.

Usually, there will then follow readings from the Bible

⁶ Sometimes a shorter form of these questions is used.

Sometimes, the water for the Baptism will be blessed⁷ in the Font before the **Profession of Faith**:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father?

R.\ I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth.

Do you believe and trust in His Son, Jesus Christ?

R.\ I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

He descended to the dead.

On the third day He rose again.

He ascended into Heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and He will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit?

R.\ I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

+ and the life everlasting. Amen.⁸

The candidates are baptized with the formula:

I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



The Baptism

⁷ If it has not already been blessed.

⁸ Sometimes a shorter form of these questions is used.

These words are important, because they are the ones we learn from the Gospels:

Jesus came and said to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."⁹

This washing with water is the central part of the rite and the element from which it takes its name. "Baptism" comes from a Greek work for "washing." It is our sins and our sinful nature, which are washed away by Baptism.

After this there will be some prayers before the service ends. Sometimes the Baptism takes place during the High Mass. This is a rather longer service and includes several other elements.

There are some things, which you should have in mind.

- ❖ Baptism can only be administered once – you cannot be baptized twice.¹⁰
- ❖ You cannot give back Baptism – once you have been baptized it is indelible.
- ❖ The Baptism will be entered into the Baptismal Register, which, in the Church of England, is a statutory document.
- ❖ A certificate of Baptism will be issued.

Confirmation

A person who has been baptized but not confirmed is a member of the Church, but not a full member. It is difficult to explain this distinction: not because you have to be clever to understand it, but because the Church has never really defined what the difference is. Some individuals have firm opinions, but they do not always agree with one another.

When the practice of splitting Baptism and Confirmation emerged, this did not really matter, because nearly everyone was confirmed before adulthood and former generations viewed childhood differently from how it is understood nowadays. In our own days, there are many (perhaps the majority), who are baptized but not confirmed.

In the Church of England, only a bishop may administer Confirmation. Bishops visit parishes periodically for the purpose. Usually, nowadays, Confirmation takes place at Mass, since Confirmation signifies admission to Holy Communion.¹¹

The rite of Confirmation itself is quite simple. The candidates will be asked to make for themselves or reiterate the renunciations and profession of Faith made at Baptism unless the Baptism and Confirmation occur at the same service.

⁹ Matthew 28: 18f.

¹⁰ However, you may need to undertake a Baptism rite again if there was something significantly wrong with the first rite (eg the proper baptismal formula was not used.)

¹¹ Though in some places in the Church of England (and habitually in the Roman Catholic Church) unconfirmed baptized people are admitted to Holy Communion.

The laying-on-of-hands is preceded by a prayer, asking for the gifts of the Spirit:

Almighty and everlasting God,
You have given this Your servant new birth
In Baptism by water and the Spirit,
And have forgiven him all his sins.
Let Your Holy Spirit rest upon him:
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding;
The Spirit of counsel and inward strength;
The Spirit of knowledge and true Godliness;
And let his delight be in the fear of the Lord.
Amen.

The bishop then lays hands on the candidate with prayer. There are references to this practice in the New Testament.¹² Often the candidate is then anointed with Holy Oil. Opinions differ as to which of these two (laying-on-of-hands or anointing) constitute the substance of Confirmation.

N. God has called you by name and made you his own.
Confirm, O Lord, Your servant with Your Holy Spirit.

¹² Acts 6: 6; Acts 8: 17 &c