

JANUARY 31—FEBRUARY 6

The readings for this week come from the New Testament passages about baptism. Baptism is absolutely central to the New Testament's understanding of what it means to become a Christian. Because you were baptized as an infant, you face the special challenge of trying to make an event you cannot remember a central part of your identity as a child of God. Passages such as these can help us begin to understand the importance of what was done to us so long ago.

Date: _____

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority on 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

This is known as the Great Commission, Jesus final instructions to his disciples before ascending into heaven. Think about the central place of baptizing new members into the community; do you think we do a good job of following this Great Commission in the church today? Why or why not?

Date: _____

Acts 3:21-22

Now when [the crowd] heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

This is the result of the first Christian sermon ever preached. Pray for all those people for whom the promise was made, but who have not yet heard the call of the Lord our God.

Date: _____

Romans 6:3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

St. Paul is quite clear that the purpose of our dying in baptism was to live, as he puts it, to “walk in newness of life.” What does “newness of life” mean to you?

Date: _____

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called into the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Think about this great statement of the unity of faith in Christ Jesus. How can we best live in unity with other Christians, given that there seem to be so many types of Christians?

Date: _____

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

As this passage indicates (like the one above it), though we are all baptized into the one Church, the one body of Christ, we still are differentiated by being different parts (members) of the body. What are your special gifts that you bring as a member of Christ's body?

FEBRUARY 7—FEBRUARY 13

This week's readings are from various leaders of the early church, writing about baptism as it was first practiced. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of baptism to the early church. Since we live in a time when most of us cannot even remember our own baptisms, their passion for it may help recapture our own sense of how important baptism is to our life as followers of Christ.

Date: _____

Justin Martyr, *First Apology*

The apostles taught us the reason for this ceremony (of baptism). Our first birth took place without our knowledge or consent because our parents came together, and we grew up in the midst of wickedness. So if we were not to remain children of necessity and ignorance, we needed a new birth of which we ourselves would be conscious, and which would be the result of our own free choice. We needed, too, to have our sins forgiven.

Justin's church does not seem to have practiced infant baptism. Because you were baptized at birth, your situation is somewhat different. How so? And how might you apply parts of Justin's description of baptism to confirmation?

Date: _____

Leo the Great, *Sermon 6 for Christmas*

Every believer, in any part of the world, who is reborn in Christ quits the old paths of our original nature and passes into a new person by being re-born. Henceforth, we are no longer reckoned by our earthly parents' lineage, but among the seed of the Savior...

Leo makes an interesting observation about being reborn: when born, you have parents, so when reborn, we get new parents, in this case God. Think about the way in which you choose to behave in a certain way because you know how your parents feel about certain behaviors; how would you act if you were always thinking of having God as your parent?

Date: _____

Gregory of Nanzianus, *Oration 39*

Be cleansed entirely and continue to be cleansed. Nothing gives such pleasure to God as the conversion and salvation of human beings, for whom his every word and every revelation exist. He wants you to become a living force for all humanity, lights shining in the world. You are to be radiant lights as you stand beside Christ, the great light, bathed in the glory of him who is the light of heaven.

Draw a picture of this.

Date: _____

Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentaries on John*

This spiritual birth [of baptism] is the present figure of the resurrection and of that regeneration which will be fully actualized in us when we leave this present life. That is why baptism is also called regeneration.

Here Theodore connects the new life in baptism to the new life to come, the final resurrection, the object of our Christian hope. Write your thoughts and hopes for resurrection.

Date: _____

Jerome, *Sermon on Psalm 41, to the newly baptized*

'As the deer longs for running water, so my soul longs for you, my God.' Just as the deer longs for running water, so do our newly baptized members, our young deer, so to speak, also yearn for God. By leaving Egypt and the world, they have put Pharaoh and his entire army to death in the waters of baptism. After slaying the devil, their hearts long for the springs of running water in the church.

Have you felt that longing and thirst for God? Have you ever felt you thirst quenched? How so?