

Tips for Talking with Children about the Baptism of a Sibling

Jared and Jennifer Dees

The baptism of a child is a joyful family event. When we are baptized, we are reborn as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. Parents have the opportunity to deepen the faith of the older siblings of the child being baptized through a conversation about the symbols of the sacrament that are experienced through each of their senses. This will help the entire family appreciate and understand more deeply the meaning of their own baptisms and the special gifts the youngest sibling will receive.

Water: We can feel the water of baptism. When we take a bath or a shower, we feel fresh and clean, even a sense of being purified because all the sweat and dirt, maybe even the tiredness we had beforehand is now gone. Like our bodies are refreshed and washed clean in a bath, our souls are washed clean in Baptism. All the old muck or sinfulness is washed away and we are renewed by the sacred water of Baptism. The one being baptized becomes a new person because he or she now belongs to Christ and to his Church. The person is freed from sin and now lives a new life as a Christian.

White Garment: We can see the white garment. After a child is baptized with water, and the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," they are clothed in a special white gown or outfit. This white garment shows how baptized children are now cleansed from sin. Babies and toddlers can sometimes stain their clothes while playing or eating. There are no stains on the white garment just as there are no stains on their souls after baptism. The child is pure and filled with grace.

Candle: We can see the candle burning brightly. We celebrate birthdays with candles on a cake. The baptismal candle reminds us of the new birth of a child who is baptized. The light of that candle is the light of Christ. We blow out candles on birthdays, but the light of Christ in their hearts will never go out. Jesus will be with the child forever.

Chrism: We can smell the scent of Chrism, which is a very holy oil. The smell of a newly baptized baby is amazing! It won't go away for days. In ancient times oil was used as a part of bathing to help clean, soften, and heal the skin. This holy oil of Baptism reminds us of the cleansing of sin in the water of baptism, and the grace of healing that Jesus brings to us. It also expresses the gift of the Holy Spirit that comes upon a baptized child. This is like the Spirit coming down upon Jesus

in the form of a dove at his baptism. Catholics receive this oil again in the Sacrament of Confirmation for a greater outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit.

Sign of the Cross: We can feel the cross and hear the name of Lord. The priest, parents, and godparents will all trace the sign of the cross on the child's forehead. This reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross to grant us salvation. It also expresses the presence of all three persons of the Trinity at baptism: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Be sure to encourage older siblings to pray for their little sister or brother. Take time to do so before the celebration of Baptism and in the days immediately following. While the newly baptized child, and likely your home, still smells like Chrism, light the baptismal candle and pray together. This is a special time in the life of your entire family that is made more special through the power of intercessory prayer.

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