



# “Take me to the water”: A Baptismal Liturgy

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### About the Liturgy

Before the “Four Spiritual Laws” or the “Roman Road” to salvation, there was baptism. “Take me to the water” is a resource for churches that do not view baptism as a dunking contest but want to live out the ritual’s meanings in deep and abiding ways.

Following Jesus’ lead, his disciples enter the water as a sign of their commitment to his life and teachings (Luke 3:31-32). A symbol of their own death, burial, and resurrection, baptism has been described as a “watery grave.” Titus says baptizands are saved through the water (3:5). Believers come out on the other side with a new life in and through Jesus the Christ.

Womb water, a mysterious entrance and exit strategy, Paul explains to the believers in Rome,

“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 the newness of life” (6:3-4, NRSV).

During baptism, we enter the water and into Christ’s body. Now connected with other believers, we become members of one another— not a building.

Water and the Spirit hovering, baptism is our new creation narrative and in Christ we “live, move and have (our) being.” Baptism must have rippling effects on our lives and if it does not then, take me to the water.



# Galatians

3:27-28, NRSV

“As many of you as were **baptized** with Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer **Jew or Greek**, there is no longer **slave or free**, there is no longer **male and female**; for all of you are **one** in Christ Jesus.”

## The Ritual of Baptism

Jesus asks John to take him to the water (Matthew 3:13-17). The convert's baptism is one of the first steps, evidence of beginning one's walk with Jesus. We follow him there. We take on the water and its meanings: death, burial, and resurrection.

Through the waters of baptism, we are reborn as new creatures in Christ Jesus, as members of his body and of one another. Through the water and in the Spirit, baptism is the convert's new beginning. Baptism is the starting point of one's relationship with Jesus, a reminder that we are led by the Spirit as God's beloved.

### Siblings in Christ:

Baptism, the witness of water and the Holy Spirit, is not a good scrub but “the cleansing flood.” Water rising above our heads, this ritual of baptism renders us dead to one life and alive to the next. Citizens of an undivided “kin-dom” that is coming, we are taken to the water. The portal of new life in Jesus the Christ, our Savior, we take from the waters an uncategorical way of being and only faint memories of who we once were, never to be heard from again. We are called by a new name and are identified by, in and through Christ's body only.

# *A* Centering Prayer

God of bodies watered down,  
diluted by divisions,  
polluted by race and its progeny,  
gather us now.

Christ- followers, who claim his body as our own, bring us together some way, somehow.  
Because that four-letter word has cursed us to our core and to our corners of the world.

Forgive us for segregating the sacred,  
for coloring in Your face,  
for scratching out the Imago Dei in certain human beings,  
for loving prejudicially,  
for practicing mercy selectively,  
for walking away from the marginalized and minoritized—  
rather than walk humbly.

Give us the courage to dive into why the waters of baptism have not troubled the caste system with a good paint job that is race.

Give us “faith seeking understanding” without it.

In the name of the one who stood in line and was baptized as a demonstration of new life, Jesus the Christ, in whose name we gather and behind whom we fall in line, I pray.

Amen.

# Scripture Readings

Matthew 3:13-17, NRSV:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so for now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened up to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"

John 3:5, NRSV:

"Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.'"

Acts 2:38-39, NRSV:

"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.'"

First Corinthians 12:12-13, NRSV:

"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 made to drink of one Spirit."

# “Take me to the water”

African American Spiritual

**Take me to the water,  
Take me to the water,  
Take me to the water,  
To be baptized.**

None but the righteous,  
None but the righteous,  
None but the righteous,  
Shall see God.

**I love Jesus,  
I love Jesus,  
I love Jesus,  
Yes, I do.**

In the name of Jesus,  
In the name of Jesus,  
In the name of Jesus,  
We shall be saved.

**I know I got religion,  
I know I got religion,  
I know I got religion,  
Yes, I do.**

Glory, hallelujah,  
Glory, hallelujah,  
Glory, hallelujah,  
To be baptized.

# Call & Response

*Do you renounce the dehumanizing spirit of this world, refuse to support the structures that aim to break the human soul and our ties to each other as image-bearers of God?*

*I do.*

*Do you reject the notion that you must assimilate to a culture or pledge allegiance to a country to experience God's saving grace, mercy, and love?*

*I do.*

*Do you repent of your sins and turn away from all wickedness, which thwarts your transformation as a new creature in Christ Jesus?*

*I do.*

*Do you accept the kinship as one of God's children, the fellowship as a member of Christ's body and the tutorship as a habitation of the Holy Spirit?*

*I do.*

*Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, teacher and friend, go-to guide and travel companion?*

*I do.*

# Communal Reading

Galatians 3:27-28 contains what many scholars believe to be the church's first creed, its first confession of belief—not about God or even Jesus but who they are in the Spirit. “It is through baptism that these distinctions are exposed as false,” writes Stephen J. Patterson in *The Forgotten Creed*. Undermining the power dynamics of culture, class and gender, the early church was unified in decentering power.

Let us read it together.

**For you are the children of God in the Spirit.  
There is no Jew or Greek,  
There is no slave or free,  
There is no male and female;  
For you are all one in the Spirit.**

\* Source: Stephen J. Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle against Bigotry, Slavery & Sexism*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 24.

# Prayer of Blessing

Baptism was of primary importance to Jesus' ministry and is the universal sign of a Christian. It is subversion by immersion, undermining the systems and structures that once held power over the new believer as one goes under. This is not a religious habit, merely our obedience to the way Jesus did it. But it is the way of Jesus, evidence that we are following in his footsteps. Consequently, a certificate of baptism is not evidence of a finished work and should not be treated as a blue ribbon for righteousness. No, we, Christians, die daily (First Corinthians 15:31). Our former selves were not meant to survive.

Hands laid in prayer are aids in this self- mortification.

## **For the baptizand:**

By the grace of God and upon the profession of your faith, I baptize you in the name of Jesus the Christ.

May all the world's labels float to the top.

May all that hindered the work of the Holy Spirit in this flesh be dead in the water.

Born of water and of Spirit, may you rise with new life and vigor.

Amen.

## **For fellow believers:**

After the baptism, invite members to welcome the new convert with these words:

Through baptism, you are joined to the body of Christ and to his members, who welcome you with joy and thanksgiving into God's re-creating work and witness in us and in the world.



# *A* Closing Prayer

God of bodies watered down,  
diluted by divisions,  
polluted by race and its progeny,  
gather us now.

Christ-followers, who claim his body as our own, bring us together some way, somehow because that four-letter word has cursed us to our core and to our corners of the world.

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# The Raceless Gospel Initiative