

Baptism Symbols



Water

Water is the central symbol of baptism.

The symbol of water is found throughout the scriptures. From the waters of creation to the water of the womb it is an essential part of life. Water is a source of life—it nourishes, soothes, calms, sustains, comforts, cleanses.

Water is used liberally in the act of baptism. In the baptism service, as the water is poured a prayer is spoken. The prayer reminds us of the richness of water throughout the biblical story—the waters of creation, the waters of liberation from slavery in the Exodus experience, water in the desert, the water in the Jordan River in which Jesus was baptized, and of Jesus himself, the “living water.”



Oil

Oil was used in biblical times as a symbol of anointing.

In the baptism service, the newly baptized person is often marked with oil in the sign of the cross. Oil was used traditionally as a sign of reverence and care; anointing with oil signifies the holiness of the baptized person and links him or her to Jesus Christ. Christ and Messiah are the biblical words that translated mean “anointed.”



Candle

In our faith tradition, a candle is a symbol of Jesus, “the light of the world” (John 8:12). The candle can symbolize Jesus’ presence in our lives as a source of support, comfort, challenge and illumination. In the early church, the newly baptized were called “illuminati”—enlightened. The candle of baptism is a symbol of hope and illumination for living.



White garment/stole

In the early church and through many centuries, the newly baptized person put on a new white garment symbolizing the new life found in Christ.



Fish

The outline of the fish was used by the early church as a way of identifying oneself as Christian. The letters for fish in Greek—"ichthus"—are an acronym for Jesus Christ, son of God, Saviour, and are thus a faith statement.



Shell

The shell is often depicted on baptism resources. The shell may be used to scoop up the water that is used in the baptism.



Laying on of hands

In the baptism service, following the water and the oil, the newly baptized person receives the laying on of hands—a symbolic act claiming the gifts of the Spirit for this person. It is a tradition in which church elders, ministers, and/or members of the faith community lay on hands on the newly baptized, conveying the presence of God's spirit.



Dove

The dove is often used as a symbol of baptism reminding us of God's Spirit that descended like a dove on Jesus at the time of his baptism (Matthew 3:16). The descending dove is a symbol of the gift of the Spirit.