

A paraphrased excerpt from "On the Baptism of Christ" by St. Gregory of Nyssa

Through the glorious mystery of the Incarnation, Christ sanctified every human action and, as our chief role model, He left us no doubt in our traditions.

Christ was baptized by John in order to cleanse the defilement of humanity; to bring down the Spirit from above and exalt man to heaven; and to conquer the Devil by raising up those who have fallen. Therefore, Baptism is the purification from sins and regeneration of life.

Regeneration is not the rebirth of an old man into a child as Nicodemus foolishly thought, but it is the transformation of one who has grown old in evil habits and bears the scars of sin to the innocence of a new-born baby. As a child is free from accusations and from consequences, so are the children of regeneration who now have a clean slate, being released from the accountability of sin by Christ's limitless grace. For this reason, it is written, "Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Interestingly, the Spirit alone is insufficient for the completion of Baptism; water is also required. Water serves to express the cleansing power of baptism for, just as water mingled with soap is used to remove dirt from the flesh, water filled with the Spirit is used to cleanse our bodies from the filth of sin. Since man is composed of an invisible soul and visible body, Spirit-filled water is the perfect remedy for our ailment because it also contains invisible and visible elements.

Recall how common bread and wine become the invaluable Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ through the sanctification by the Spirit. So do not take for granted the Divine lather of baptism because it appears to be simple water. The power that is in the water is mighty, and wonderful are the things it accomplishes.

Through Baptism, we are buried into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3-4). However, we are not buried in the ground (as this is the shelter of the body that is physically dead), but we are buried into an element akin to ground: that is water. We are immersed in water just as our Savior was placed inside a tomb. The immersion occurs three times and is representative of the grace of the Resurrection which was completed in three days. We do not receive the sacrament in silence, but we recite the Names of the Holy Trinity on Whom we believe, in Whom we also hope, and from Whom is the basis of our present and future existence.