

In the New Testament we read that Lydia was converted by Paul's preaching and that "And when she was baptised, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." (Acts 16:15). The gaoler whom Paul and Silas had converted to the faith was baptised that night along with 'all his' household. We are told that "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptised, he and all his, straightway". (Acts 16:33). And in his greetings to the Corinthians, Paul recalled that, "And I baptised also the household of Stephana" (I Cor. 1:16).

In all these cases, whole households or families were baptized. This means more than just the spouse; the children too were included.

### Practice of the Early Church

Origen wrote in the third century that "according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants" (*Holilies on Leviticus*, 8:3:11 [A.D. 244]). The Council of Carthage, in 253, condemned the opinion that baptism should be withheld from infants until the eighth day after birth. Later, Augustine taught, "The custom of Mother Church in baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned . . . nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic" (*Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 10:23:39 [A.D. 408]).

None of the Fathers or councils of the Church was claiming that the practice was contrary to Scripture or tradition. They agreed that the practice of baptising infants was the customary and appropriate practice since the days of the early Church; the only uncertainty seemed to

be exactly when an infant should be baptised. It is true that Christ prescribed instruction and actual faith for adult converts (Matt. 28:19–20), but his general law on the necessity of baptism (John 3:5) puts no restriction on the subjects of baptism. Although infants are included in the law he establishes, requirements of that law that are impossible to meet because of their age are not applicable to them. They cannot be expected to be instructed and have faith when they are incapable of receiving instruction or manifesting faith. The same was true of circumcision; faith in the Lord was necessary for an adult convert to receive it, but it was not necessary for the children of believers.

*The above text has been prepared by the*

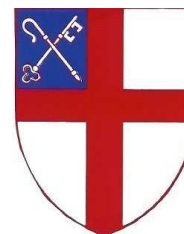
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## Why Baptism ?

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## Why Baptism?

Since the New Testament era, the Catholic Church has always understood baptism to be a sacrament which accomplishes several things, the first of which is the remission of sin, both original sin and actual sin — only original sin in the case of infants and young children, since they are incapable of actual sin; and both original and actual sin in the case of older persons.

St Peter explained what happens at baptism when he said, “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). But he did not restrict this teaching to adults. He added, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call”. (2:39). We also read: “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”. (Acts 22:16). These commands are universal, not restricted to adults. Further, these commands make clear the necessary connection between baptism and salvation, a connection explicitly stated in I Peter 3:21: “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”.

## Infant Baptism?

But the Catholic Church has always held that Christ’s law applies to infants as well as adults, “for I (Jesus) say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”. (John 3:5). His words can be taken to apply to anyone capable

of belonging to his kingdom. He asserted such even for children: “And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God”. (Luke 18:15–16).

Now some might say that this event does not apply to young children or infants since it implies the children to which Christ was referring were able to approach him on their own. But the text in Luke 18:15 says, “Now they were bringing even *infants* to him” (Greek, *Prosepheron de auto kai ta brepha*). The Greek word *brepha* means ‘infants’ - children who are quite unable to approach Christ on their own and who could not possibly make a conscious decision to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

The Lord did not require them to make a conscious decision. He says that they are precisely the kind of people who *can* come to him and receive the kingdom.

## Baptism has replaced Circumcision

St Paul notes that baptism has replaced circumcision (Col. 2:11–12). In that passage, he refers to baptism as “the circumcision of Christ” and “the circumcision made without hands”. Of course, usually only infants were circumcised under the Old Law; circumcision of adults was rare, since there were few converts to Judaism. If Paul meant to exclude infants, he would not have chosen circumcision as a parallel for baptism. This comparison between who could receive baptism and circumcision is an appropriate one. In the Old Testament, if a man wanted to become a Jew, he had to believe in the God of Israel and be

circumcised. In the New Testament, if one wants to become a Christian, one must believe in God and Jesus and be baptised. In the Old Testament, those born into Jewish households could be circumcised in anticipation of the Jewish faith in which they would be raised. Thus in the New Testament, those born in Christian households can be baptised in anticipation of the Christian faith in which they will be raised. The pattern is the same: If one is an adult, one must have faith before receiving the rite of membership; if one is a child too young to have faith, one may be given the rite of membership in the knowledge that one will be raised in the faith. This is the basis of Paul’s reference to baptism as “the circumcision of Christ” - that is, the Christian equivalent of circumcision.

Naturally enough, the people whose baptisms we read about in Scripture (and few are individually identified) are adults, because they were converted as adults. This makes sense, because Christianity was just beginning - there were no “cradle Christians,” people brought up from childhood in Christian homes. Even in the books of the New Testament, written later in the first century, during the time when children were raised in the first Christian homes, we never find an example of a child raised in a Christian home who is baptised only upon making a “decision for Christ.” Rather, it is always assumed that the children of Christian homes are already Christians, that they have already been “baptised into Christ” (Rom. 6:3). If infant baptism were not the rule, then we should have references to the children of Christian parents joining the Church only after they had come to the age of reason, and there are no such records in the Bible.