



Awake, you slumberers, from your sleep, and rouse yourselves from your lethargy.

Search your deeds, return in repentance... Look to your souls, mend your ways and actions, leave your evil path and unworthy purpose, seek the way of the Lord.

On the purpose of the shofar

The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan

What happens in Baptism? What do we hope for from Baptism? In simple words, we might say: we hope for a good life, the true life, for these children of ours; and also for happiness in a future that is still unknown. We are unable to guarantee this gift for the entire span of the unknown future, so we turn to the Lord to obtain this gift from him. through Baptism each child is inserted into a gathering of friends who never abandon him in life or in death because these companions are God's family, which in itself bears the promise of eternity.

Jesus steps into the Jordan River and into His mission of redemption through this public religious act. The descent of the dove symbolizes the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus receives as the Christ, Greek for "the Anointed One."

This group of friends, this family of God, into which the child is now admitted, will always accompany him, even on days of suffering and in life's dark nights; it will give him consolation, comfort and light.

Baptism inserts us into communion with Christ and therefore gives life, life itself.

Baptism is a gift; the gift of life. But a gift must be accepted, it must be lived. A gift of friendship implies a "yes" to the friend and a "no" to all that is God's family, with true life in Christ.

For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one spirit.

In the dialogue of the baptismal rite there are three "noes" and three "yeses" spoken. We say "no" and renounce temptation, sin and the devil. What are we saying "no" to? This is the only way to understand what we want to say "yes" to.

In the ancient Church these "noes" were summed up a renouncing of the promise of life of abundance, that false and seductive life that seemed to come from the pagan world, from its permissiveness, from its way of living as one pleased.

It was therefore "no" to a culture of death. It was "no" to those spectacles in which death, cruelty and violence had become an entertainment. It is a rejection of death and a choosing of life.

Remember we are talking about a literal life and death for those early Christians. They were living in a world where people were set on fire like living torches. Cruelty and violence had become a form of amusement, a true perversion of joy, of the true meaning of life.

This culture of death was a corruption of joy, it was love of deceit of fraud and the abuse of the body used as a commodity for trade. If we think about it now, we can say that in our own time we need to say "no" to the widely prevalent culture of death, a spiritual death, a death to the human person as one living in the image and likeness of God.

There are times when we have to step into the darkness in faith, confident that God will place solid ground. beneath our feet once we do.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Baptism, as we have seen, is a gift; the gift of life. But a gift must be accepted, it must be lived.

The Gospel represents an "anticulture" of our times, rejecting a culture where, for example, drugs are sought after as a flight from reality from, it wallows in what is illusory, in pursuit of a false happiness expressed in deceit, fraud, injustice and contempt for others, for solidarity, and for responsibility for the poor and the suffering; it is expressed in a sexuality that becomes sheer irresponsible enjoyment, that makes the human person into a "thing", so to speak, no longer considered a person who deserves personal love which requires fidelity, but who becomes a commodity, a mere object.

This is what baptism rejects when we proclaim "Yes" to life in Christ. The Christian "yes" is from ancient times to our day, a great "yes" to life. It is our "yes" to Christ, our "yes" to the Conqueror of death and the "yes" to life in time and in eternity. These are declarations we make with sense of triumph that originates in God Himself.

Jesus' baptism was a descent into the perils of mankind, for there is no other way to lift up the fallen humanity. Jesus has to enter into the drama of human existence, for that belongs to the core of his mission; he has to penetrate it completely, down to its uttermost depth, in order to find the "lost sheep" to bear it on his shoulders, and to bring it home.

Pope Benedict

Just as in this baptismal dialogue the "no" is expressed in three renunciations, so too the "yes" is expressed in three expressions of loyalty: "yes" to the living God, a God who gives meaning to the cosmos and to our lives; "yes" to Christ, that is, to a God who did not stay hidden but has a name, words, a body and blood; to a concrete God who gives us life and shows us the path of life; "yes" to the communion of the Church, in which Christ is the living God who enters our time, enters our profession, enters daily life.

The content of our great "yes", is expressed in the Ten Commandments, which are not a list

of prohibitions, of "noes", but actually present a great vision of life, a pathway to life, a way to a fullness of human living.

They are a "yes" to a God who gives meaning to life (the first three Commandments); a "yes" to the family (Fourth Commandment); a "yes" to life (Fifth Commandment); a "yes" to responsible love (Sixth Commandment); a "yes" to solidarity, to social responsibility, to justice (Seventh Commandment); a "yes" to the truth (Eighth Commandment); a "yes" to respect for others and for their belongings (Ninth and 10th Commandments).

This is the philosophy of life, the culture of life that becomes concrete and practical and beautiful in communion with Christ, the living God, who walks with us in the companionship of his friends, in the great family of the Church. Baptism is a gift of life.

The symbols used in Baptism remind us of the power of the sacrament. Water is the symbol of life: Baptism is new life in Christ. The oil is the symbol of strength, health and beauty, for it truly is beautiful to live in communion with Christ. Then, there is the white garment, as an expression of the culture of beauty, of the culture of life. And lastly, the flame of the candle is an expression of the truth that shines out in the darkness of history and points out to us who we are, where we come from and where we must go.

The real novelty is the fact that he—Jesus—wants to be baptized, that he blends into the grey mass of sinners waiting on the banks of the Jordan. He proclaims He is one with us in all things but sin.

Along with Jesus' obedience as the true Israel, his baptism also sets his course towards the cross. Jesus declared "*I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!*" For Christ, baptism is also a judgment. The trajectory of his ministry was not aimless, but always defined by the cross.