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Baptism: Symbol of New Life - Part 2

By Tal Davis

Take a quiz. Look at the following descriptions and see if you can identify what they are and what they are associated with:

1. Golden arches on top of a mostly glass building.
2. Rectangular piece of cloth with white stars on a blue field beside red and white stripes.
3. Two pieces of wood, one standing up-right with a shorter one attached perpendicular to it about two-thirds up.
4. A funny looking donkey.
5. A funny looking elephant.
6. A mark on a shoe that looks something like check mark.
7. A big eyeball in the middle of your TV screen.
8. A Native American man (or woman) wearing war paint and a feather in a garnet and gold circle.
9. A large metal woman holding a large metal torch in the middle of New York Harbor.
10. A brilliantly colored fanned-tail peacock

Do you recognize any of those things? In and of themselves they don't necessarily mean anything. But because they are associated in people's minds with other things they have special meanings. They are what we call symbols. If you do recognize those things, then you probably know that they are symbols for something other than just themselves.

Let's review and see if you got them just from the descriptions (I'm sure you would have gotten them if you could have seen them).

1. The Golden Arches - symbol for McDonald's Hamburgers;
2. The United States flag - symbol of our country;
3. The cross - symbol of Christianity;
4. The donkey - symbol of the Democratic Party;

5. The elephant - symbol of the Republican Party;
6. Check mark - symbol of Nike shoes;
7. Eyeball on TV - symbol of the CBS television network;
8. Native American in Garnet and Gold - symbol of the Florida State University Seminoles;
9. Metal woman holding torch - The Statue of Liberty symbolizing freedom;
10. Fan-tailed peacock - symbol of the NBC television network.

Yes, symbols can have great and important meanings to people. It all depends on if people know what they symbolize. Take what you are looking at right now on this page or screen. What are they? Actually they are nothing more than ink or pixels that are scribbled arrangements of symbols. They only have meaning because your brain is trained to interpret what they mean when arranged in specific ways. That's what symbols do. That's how our brains work.

In part one of this two installment series, we looked at baptism as a special symbol that God gave of new life. We explored how it: 1) signifies our cleansing from sin to serve in a holy priesthood and; 2) represents our acceptability to God. Go here to read part one: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2023/09/baptism-symbol-of-new-life-part-1-tal-davis/>

In this part two, we continue to look at two other important principles symbolized in baptism.

Third - Baptism symbolizes our identification with Christ's death.

When I was young I loved to go swimming. My favorite place was Wakulla Springs in north Florida. I also

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loved the ocean. Snorkeling was especially fun particularly on the reefs in the Florida Keys. I was always amazed by the diverse life teeming beneath the water. Sometimes I saw beautiful things. The last time I went I saw a cute baby dolphin. Sometimes I saw scary and ugly things – like barracudas or sting rays. In any case, in those few minutes I sort of identified with the underwater life.

In baptism we go under water. Not to snorkel or swim, but to make an identification of eternal significance.

In Romans 6:3-4a, the Apostle Paul gives a clear indication of what baptism means. He says:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death...

In baptism we identify with Jesus' death on the cross and His burial. That's why some churches put people under the water. That why pastors often say as they put the candidate under: "Buried with Christ in baptism...." It indicates that the person is dead to their old sinful self. Obviously a person cannot be actually crucified and buried like Jesus. Neither is that necessary, nor would it even have any saving effect. Only Jesus was sinless and able to die for our sins. But in baptism we symbolically identify with what He did for us, and demonstrate our acceptance of His sacrifice on our behalf. It is a testimony to the church, and to those who do not know Christ, of the reality of our faith in Him.

But just as Jesus' death was not the end of the story, Paul did not end his analogy of baptism with our identification with Christ's death only.

Fourth - Baptism also symbolizes our identification with Christ's resurrection.

So while Jesus died for our sins, He was, of course, raised from the dead through the glory of the Father. That is the essence of the gospel message. As Paul told the Corinthians:

Now I make known to you, brothers and sisters, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, by which you also are saved, if you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

But Paul says in Romans 6:4b-5, we are to symbolize that gospel in baptism.

...so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.

Likewise, in Colossians 2:12-13, Paul says:

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.

Jesus did not stay dead. He arose! Likewise, we shall rise, also. But meanwhile we identify with His resurrection in baptism. When a new believer comes out of the water it symbolizes

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his or her new life in Christ (which he or she already possesses by grace through faith in Jesus - Eph. 2:8,9). He or she symbolically becomes a new creature.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Baptism is a symbol. An important symbol of our faith. It symbolizes our cleansing from sin to serve God in a holy priesthood. It symbolizes our acceptability to God regardless of who we are, where we come from, or what our limitations may be. It symbolizes our identification with Jesus' death on the cross for our sins and

acceptance of His sacrifice on our behalf. And it symbolizes our identification with His resurrection from the dead and our new life in Him. Of course the final aspect of that identification is yet to come at our own resurrection when He shall return and we will also will be raised.

So next time you see a baptism in your church, or someone else's, perhaps this short study will help you to understand the full meaning it has for a believer in Christ. Perhaps you need to ask yourself, "Have I been baptized?" Or, if you were, "Did I really understand what it meant?" If the answer is "no" or "I'm not sure" to either question, perhaps you need to talk to your pastor.

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