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### Baptism in Art, Ritual, and Symbol

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**Texts from PowerPoint, Robin M. Jensen, Workshop C17**  
**“Baptism in Art, Ritual, and Symbol”**  
**Calvin Worship Symposium, January 2013**

**Tertullian, *On Baptism*, ca. 200**

We, being little fish, just as Jesus Christ is our great fish (IXTHYS), are born in the water. And we are safe only so long as we remain in the water.”

**Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Lecture 2.4-5* – ca. 380**

In that same moment (while you are dunked in the water), you were dying and being born, and that saving water was at once your grave and your mother. What Solomon said in another context is applicable to you: a time for birth and a time for dying – except here it is a time for dying and then a time for rebirth.

**Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon on the Day of Lights (Epiphany)* – ca. 375**

You, Lord, are the font of eternal goodness, who justly turned away from us, and in loving kindness had mercy upon us. You hated us and were reconciled, you cursed and blessed, you banished from Paradise and then recalled us; you stripped off the fig leaves (an unseemly covering), and put costly garments on us instead. You opened the prison and released the condemned. You sprinkled us with clean water, and cleansed us from our filthiness. No longer shall Adam be confounded when called by you, nor hide himself, convicted by his conscience, cowering in the thicket of Eden. Nor shall the flaming sword encircle Paradise and make the entrance inaccessible. All is turned to joy for us, the heirs of sin. Creation, once at variance with itself, is knit together in friendship and we join the angels in song, offering praise to God.

**Ambrose of Milan, *On the Font* (ca. 375)**

This eight-sided temple has risen for sacred purpose, the eight-sided font is worthy for this task.

It is seemly that the baptismal hall arise in this number, by which true health has returned to people.

We see the light of the resurrected Christ, who loosens the bonds of death and revives the lifeless from their tombs.

He absolves the penitent accused from their sordid crimes and he washes them in the flow of the purifying font.

**Augustine of Hippo, early 5<sup>th</sup> cen., Sermon 227**

Then came baptism in which you were , in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread. But it's not yet bread without fire to bake it. So what does the fire represent? That's the chrism, the anointing. Oil, the fire-feeder, you see, is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

**Lateran Baptistery Inscription (Rome, ca. 430 - attrib. to Leo the Great)**

Here, born from fruitful seed is a sacred tribe to be consecrated – citizens which the Spirit draws from fertile waters.

Plunge sinner, to be purified in the flow. Whom it receives old, the water makes new.

No differences exist among those who are reborn - whom one font, one Spirit, one faith makes one.

By virginal delivery, Mother Church bears children in the stream whom she conceives by the breath of God.

If you wish to be innocent, be purified in the bath, whether you are burdened with ancestral sin or your own.

This is the fountain of life, which washes the whole world, having found its origin in Christ's wound.

Reborn ones, by this font have hope for the kingdom of Heaven. The blessed life does not admit those born only once.

Neither the number nor the kind of your sins should frighten you. The one born in this river will be holy.