

The Shape of Christian Identity
 Class 2 Ambrose: Baptism, identifying with the sacramental life of Jesus
 Outline

- Psalm 65
 - God blesses the Creation and fills it with his goodness and pleasure.
 - The sacraments help to retrain us to see this reality.
- Ambrose, Bishop of Milan
 - His life
 - How he was made bishop
 - His work as bishop
- Baptism profoundly reorients and fulfills human identity.
- A lesson on how Ambrose reads the Bible to help us understand him.
 - Literally, Christologically, Anagogically, Allegorically
 - An example of allegory: Noah and baptism (supplemental texts)
- Key texts for Ambrose: Genesis 24, Song of Solomon, John 4.
 - Baptism unites us with God.
 - Baptism restores us body and soul.
- In union with Christ and purified in soul and body, we may now “draw” from the waters of baptism:
 - (1) the teachings of pure wisdom
 - (2) moral instructions
 - (3) love
 - (4) understanding
 - (5) virtue
- The power of the sacramental life

Questions:

- 1) What is intriguing for you about the teaching and life of Ambrose?
- 2) What is challenging to you about the life and teaching of Ambrose?
- 3) What does Ambrose's teaching about baptism say to you about your life in Christ?
- 4) What steps would you like to take in your Christian walk based on the things you heard tonight?

Ambrose on the timeline:



Abraham
(c. 2000 BC)

Peter & Paul
(c. 60)

Gregory
(d. 394)

Ambrose
(d. 397)

Bernard
(d. 1153)

Theresa
(d. 1582)

Us
(2019)

Ambrose on the map:



Supplemental texts

Psalm 65. The New Coverdale Translation

- 1 You, O God, are to be praised in Zion, *
and unto you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem.
- 2 You who hear our prayer, *
unto you shall all flesh come.
- 3 My misdeeds prevail against me; *
O be merciful and blot out our sins.
- 4 Blessed is the man whom you choose and receive unto yourself; *
he shall dwell in your courts, and shall be satisfied
with the pleasures of your house, even of your holy temple.
- 5 You shall show us wonderful things in your righteousness,
O God of our salvation, *
for you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the isles that are far away.
- 6 You in your strength set firm the mountains, *
and are girded about with power.
- 7 You still the raging of the seas, *
the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples.
- 8 Those who dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth
shall be in fear of your wonders; *
you make the morning and evening to shout with joy.
- 9 You visit the earth and bless it; *
you make it very plenteous.
- 10 The river of God is full of water; *
you prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth.
- 11 You water its furrows; you send rain into the little valleys; *
you make it soft with the drops of rain and bless the increase of it.

12 You crown the year with your goodness, *
and your paths overflow with plenty.

13 The fields of the wilderness are rich in pasture, *
and the little hills rejoice on every side.

14 The folds shall be full of sheep; *
the valleys also shall stand so thick with grain that they shall laugh and sing.

Ambrose. On the Mysteries.

“11. The **water** [of the flood], then, is that in which the flesh is dipped, that all carnal sin may be washed away. All wickedness is there buried. The **wood** [of the ark] is that on which the Lord Jesus was fastened when He suffered for us. The **dove** is that in the form of which the Holy Spirit descended, as you have read in the New Testament, Who inspires in you peace of soul and tranquility of mind. The **raven** is the figure of sin, which goes forth and does not return, if, in you, too, inwardly and outwardly righteousness be preserved.” (emphasis is added)

Gerald Boersma. From *Sources of the Christian Self*.

“Rebecca’s desire for the Word’s [Jesus Christ’s] kiss expresses the desire of both the soul and the Church for spiritual union with [him]. Indeed, the longing of the catechumens for the kiss of [Jesus Christ,] the Word in baptism – ‘to be infused with God’s presence’ – is identified with the desire of the Church throughout the ages. This desire finds expression in the amorous language of the [Song of Solomon].” (p. 179)

“The original, created constitution of body and soul was a harmonious one, and in baptism this created composite it set on the path of reintegration for eschatological perfection. ... Baptism, maintains Ambrose, restores the proper [orientation of both the body and the soul as well as their] integration of [which was] distorted by sin” (SCS, p. 177-8).

“[Quoting Ambrose]: [L]et your souls say, “I take hold of you and I will lead you into my mother’s house and into the chamber of her that conceived me.” (Song of Solomon 3:4) that I may know your mysteries and drink in your sacraments. And so take Eve, not now covered with the leaves of fig tree [as Adam and Eve were in the garden after the Fall], but clad in the Holy Spirit and glorious with new grace.’ ... Baptism undoes the cataclysmic wounds of sin that mar the human condition; in baptism, explains Ambrose, Eve’s primordial innocence is restored. In baptism the catechumens are to ascend, clinging to Christ’s feet.” (p. 186)

Flannery O'Connor. From *Wise Blood* as quoted in *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, p. xxvi.

“The black sky was underpinned with long silver streaks that looked like scaffolding and depth on depth behind it were thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving very slowly as if they were about some vast construction work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all time to complete. No one was paying attention to the sky. The stores in Taukinham stayed open on Thursday nights so that people could have an extra opportunity to see what was for sale.”