

**TREASURES OF THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL:**  
**BAPTISM : the font and stained glass window.**

By Bernard Lauwyck



The BAPTISMAL FONT donated by F.P. SIMON dated 2th October 1868



Many parishioners have expressed to me their delight that the Cathedral Baptismal Font, which was stored away for more than a decade, has been installed in St. Gerard's Hall, now officially called THE CATHEDRAL CHAPEL.

All these years, I had my eyes on the 3 pieces of white marble, which made up this font: the square base, the beautifully carved column and the extremely heavy round basin. I could not believe that such a meaningful religious artefact and symbol of being a Christian could just be stored and hidden away. This is the font above which thousands of people were baptised since 1868 in the large Roseau parish. Many lost their birth registration in a famous fire, but each knew where they were baptised and got a baptismal certificate to take to the Registry. More importantly, this is the place where their Christian faith journey began, their entry in the Body of Christ, the Church of Christ.

The font is engraving with the following in French:

**“DONNÉ PAR F. P. SIMON 2 8bre 1868.**

A gift of F. P. SIMON on the 2th of October 1868.

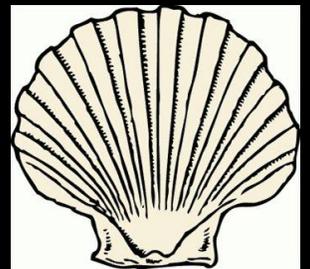
To avoid confusion, I need to explain the Roman dating. The month of August is named after the first Roman Emperor called *Imperator Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus* or in short Augustus, who original name was Octavius, the adopted son of Julius Caesar. The following months are indicated by numerals so September, October, November and December were named after the Roman numbers: 7 or “septem” for the month of September, eight or “octo” for the month of October and so on. So the correct date on the font is the 2th October 1868.

Baptismal fonts come in all shapes and form. For example, an octagonal or eight-sided font represents the eight day, the day of the resurrection of Christ. The Cathedral font is in the shape of a circle, representing continuity and perfection, symbolising heaven.

The soffit of this round circular font reminds us of a scallop shell.

The foundational meaning behind the scallop shell is its allusion to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism . It is the symbol of Christ sepulchre and of His resurrection. As St. Paul wrote in ROMANS 6.4:

*“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. “*



Baptism is a sacrament, practised by nearly all Christians, because Jesus gave a direct command: **“Go, make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the FATHER, of the SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT”** Matthew 28:19.

Baptism is the door to eternal life and to the kingdom of God, which Christ offered to all. The gift of life-giving water is a rich symbol of the grace that God gives us in this sacrament as we are freed from the power of darkness and joined in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. By Baptism we were accepted in Christ's Church, the Body of Christ.

Water is the key symbol of baptism. *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter in the Kingdom of God “John 3.5*

Without water there is no baptism! The amount of water is not important so the baptism rite can be performed in a minimalistic way with a small amount of water or to the fullest extent with a lot of water.

There are 4 different ways baptism can be performed:

- Submersion; where the initiates are completely submersed in water.
- Immersion: the person is dipped three times into the water.
- Affusion; water is poured in large quantities over the candidate.
- Aspergio; a small amount of water is poured on the head of the person.

Each of these presents a valid Baptism, once they are done in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (the Trinitarian Formula). Jesus Himself started his public ministry with being baptised by his cousin John in the river Jordan. The Roseau Cathedral has a beautiful stained glass window depicting this scene, where John the Baptist pours water from a scallop shell on the head of Jesus. This is the ASPERGIO, or minimalistic form of Baptism.



Pope Benedict XVI

John the Baptist





This window depicts Jesus Christ, in white garment, with a cruciform Halo surrounding His head, symbolizing redemption through crucifixion.

Jesus Christ is here portrayed in the now-familiar way, bearded with long hair as a man in his thirties. “His beard is forked and his hair the colour of wine.” This is based on the apocryphal description that was sent to the Roman Senate by a proconsul of Judea, after meeting Jesus. Emperor Constantine the Great caused images of Jesus to be made on the basis of this description from AD 313 on. Before that date, the earliest images of Jesus were as a young man, clean-shaven and with long curly hair.

The dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, appears above Jesus’ head.

Also the position of the Baptismal font in a church has rich meaning and symbolism. In the CATHEDRAL CHAPEL in St. Gerard's Hall, the baptismal font is located near the entrance, visible and accessible to all who enter, so they are reminded of their baptism and how they entered the body of Christ, the Church.

The Baptismal font is lined up with the Altar, representing the source and summit of the Christian Life.

During a funeral the coffin will be placed next to the Baptismal font, during the opening prayers, symbolising the beginning and the end (the alpha and the omega) of the deceased's life. The Easter or Paschal Candle will be placed near the Baptismal font throughout the liturgical year except during the Easter Season.

In 1868 and long after, infant baptism was the norm in the Cathedral. But as we now living in a secular world, many children are no longer baptised. With the restoration of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults that culminates in baptism at the Easter Vigil, a larger baptismal font will be needed in the renovated Roseau Cathedral to accommodate adults and private dressing spaces where the newly baptized can go immediately after their baptism to be clothed in their white garments and to prepare for the completion of initiation in the Eucharist.

While the renovation project of the Roseau cathedral aims to protect and preserve the many treasures as described in my articles and maintain the architectural integrity and features of the existing building, certain minor changes and adaptations, such as described above will have to be considered. But most importantly, the best of the existing Cathedral building will be preserved.