

Baptismal Preparation

This booklet (Originally titled *Immersed*), was written and produced by pastor Jay Wright of New Grace Church in Jacksonville, Florida. Used by permission, we hope this resource will help guide you as you explore the implications of baptism for yourself, or for the one you bring in faith to the waters of baptism! Below is Jay's introduction to *Immersed*.

Kind regards,
Fr. Chris Ditzenberger, Rector
St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church
Cherry Hills Village, Colorado

Congratulations! You have taken an exciting step of faith and have requested baptism for your child or grandchild. We at New Grace Church are thrilled to proclaim to you God's promises for your baptismal candidate and are thankful to receive them into the body of Christ, the church.

Because you are reading this resource, you are among a select few participants chosen to partake in a new aspect of our ministry of Holy Baptism.

Immersed consists of 6 daily readings and meditations. During these days you will prepare for your candidate's baptism by considering the theology of Holy Baptism as expressed in the *Book of Common Prayer*, our worship guide book, and your awareness of the component parts in the service will be raised allowing you to participate fully and meaningfully. This resource is also designed to be a beginning point for ongoing spiritual formation in light of the spirituality of baptism. And, it is written so that you will be able to faithfully fulfill your vow of raising your child in the Christian faith and life growing into the full stature of Christ.

My sincere prayer for you is that God's grace will surround and fill you, your family, and your baptismal candidate so that you might become partakers of the divine nature, that your life would be patterned after Christ's dying and rising again, and that you might be truly *Immersed* in the life of the Holy Trinity whose essence is love and in whose name we baptize.

Jay Wright
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Day 1

The first thing we should notice about baptism is that it is a multifaceted event, and its theology and spirituality could take a lifetime to study and contemplate - indeed, the reality in which baptism immerses us necessitates a lifetime of following Christ. Because of the daunting task before us and because of our limited time in this particular resource, we'll begin with one of the most basic observations of baptism: it takes place during the main, weekly worship service of the church.

Sunday is the first day of creation before which "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2), and from these waters was brought forth life. Sunday is the day of resurrection, when Jesus was raised from the dead. And Sunday became for the New Testament Christians their day of meeting to worship the Risen Christ and his God. Therefore, it is more than appropriate that the mystery of baptism which joins us to Christ's death and resurrection and which brings us new birth by water and the Spirit be celebrated on Sunday, at the main worship gathering of the church.

Not only should baptism be celebrated on a Sunday, it is to be celebrated in the midst of the worshiping congregation. In recent centuries it became customary to have private baptisms where families would "get the baby done" at the church some time during the week, or clergy might even

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make a house call for very important members. Early church practice, however, indicates that baptism was celebrated in the midst of the entire community. This is important for two reasons. First, baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the church, Christ's body. St. Paul says, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). The weight and meaning of the act is robbed if the people into which the child is being received are not even present to receive him. So, it is only appropriate that baptism occur during a corporate worship service of the church.

Second, there are different roles or parts to play in a service of baptism. Obviously, the child being baptized and its sponsors must be present to receive the sacrament, and the priest must be present to perform the baptism; but, the worshiping congregation must also be present to witness the event because this community promises to support the newly baptized in their life in Christ. The worshiping community even takes part in renewing their own baptismal covenant by reciting what is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, the same covenant into which your child will be baptized.

So, baptism occurs on Sunday, the day of creation, the day of resurrection, and it takes place in the context of the worshiping community. In bringing your child to baptism, you are asking God to immerse this child in the life of the church and the life of God Himself, that God would truly make him or her a "partaker of the divine nature" and a part of the "spiritual house" that is the church (2 Pet 1:4; 1 Pet 2:5). This immersion happens supremely in community, and it is in this community you will be raising your child; so,

it is of utmost importance that these people be a part of the service of baptism affirming your faith and receiving your child.

Thoughts for Reflection:

Why is it important that baptism take place during a corporate worship service of the church?

Am I expecting support from my congregation subsequent to my child's baptism? Do I see my child as a viable and important part of the community?

Picture in your mind specific individuals in your congregation who will assist you in raising your child in the faith of Christ. Are you willing to receive their help? How are you helping others?

Prayer:

Pray and ask God to prepare you for your child to be baptized and received into his body, the church. Ask him to give you a heightened awareness of the mystery of his community. And, ask him to use you to build his church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Day 2

As we saw yesterday, the service of Holy Baptism takes place as part of the regular, weekly worship life of your congregation. Over the next few days we will look systematically at the service for

Holy Baptism that will be used on Sunday to baptize your child. We'll take a close look at the service's component parts because we want to see firsthand the theology and spirituality inherent in an Anglican baptismal service so that you can faithfully raise your child and live the baptized life yourself.

Today we will begin with the opening acclamation and presentation and examination of the baptismal candidates found on pages 299-303 in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Like most other worship services in our tradition, this service begins with "Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," and the people respond, "and blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen." This opening statement is appropriate for a service of baptism because it is into the Triune Name that we baptize, and because God's kingdom is the reign and dominion into which we are asking God to receive the candidates. After these opening words announcing God's blessed kingdom, the celebrant and congregation alternate lines,

There is one Body and one Spirit;
There is one hope in God's call to us;
One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;
One God and Father of all.

Let's take a few moments to consider the significance of this extended acclamation. First, we should note that these words are derived from Ephesians 4:4-7. In this portion of scripture, St. Paul urges the Ephesian Christians to bear with one another in love and to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). He reminds them that because of Christ's victorious death, resurrection, and ascension, the church is gifted and equipped

for the work of ministry, "for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:12-13). St. Paul's vision of the church is to be our vision of the church as we prepare for baptism, and so it is only appropriate that this extended acclamation open the service and set the tone for the rest of the worshiping action to take place that day.

Your child is being baptized into the body of Christ for which Jesus died, was raised, and ascended on high. In fact, Christ "ascended on high . . . and gave gifts" to his people so that your child might one day be an active participant in the church. Your child has spiritual gifts as well, and part of the beauty and power of baptism is the journey on which you are about to embark with your child. As you watch this child grow in the grace and knowledge of God, you will see Christ's gifts take shape and form in his life for "building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). What is more, by God's grace and with your help, your child will "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped . . . makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16). This is true all because there is "one Body and one Spirit, one hope in God's call to us; one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; one God and Father of all."

So, as the service of baptism begins Sunday morning, let these words center your heart and mind on God's sacred action in baptism, as He joins your child to the one body and prepares her to be a vital member while growing into her own faith.

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Thoughts for Reflection:

Does St. Paul's vision of the church in Ephesians 4 seem like a description of the church today or a faint picture of what should be? How is the church today different, if at all, from Paul's vision?

Do you hope for spiritual gifts for your child? How do you envision them serving Christ and his church?

Are you personally growing up in "every way into him who is the head, into Christ"? Are you a living member of Christ, helping the "body grow so that it builds itself up in love"? If not, in what ways does your life need to change in order to be faithful to this vision?

Prayer:

Thank God for his body, the church, and for his eternal redemption in Jesus Christ our Lord. Ask him to give you vision for your child, and ask him to teach you to pray even now for your child's participation in the "one body." Ask him to make you more vitally engaged in the building up of his spiritual body on earth.

Day 3

Following the scripture lessons and sermon, the time will come for you to present your child for baptism and for you to be examined on your child's behalf. Today we will reflect on the signif-

icance of the presentation and examination of baptismal candidates found on pages 301-303 in the prayer book.

This part of the baptism service might seem a bit strange or even dated, but the implications of it are quite important. First, when the priest asks you to name the child, you are officially declaring and giving your child to Christ. Perhaps this is a good time to reiterate that in baptism we believe that God in Christ and the Holy Spirit is performing the action of the sacrament. The priest pours the water and leads in prayer, but if God is not involved in the sacrament, we are simply hopeless. So, when you present your child by name to receive baptism, you are giving this child over to Christ and his church in order that he or she might be born anew of water and the Spirit.

Once you have presented your child by name, you will then be asked a few questions pertaining to the seriousness of your own commitment to Christ on your child's behalf. "Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life? Will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?" We might wonder why these questions are being asked. Basically, this is a declaration of your intent to raise your child in the covenant community and to help the child grow into a fully-participating member of Christ's body.

Do you recall the opening acclamation from yesterday's meditation? This second question is taken from the fourth chapter of Ephesians, the same chapter from which the opening acclamation is derived. In other words, the natural end

and hoped-for outcome to “there is one body and one spirit, one faith and one baptism,” is that the baptized child will respond in faith and grow to maturity in Christ, “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Can you imagine a better destiny for your child than the fullness of Christ? This is the beauty of the Gospel and the purpose of baptism.

Following these questions of intent, we come to a momentous event in the baptismal service: you will be asked if you renounce Satan and his forces of wickedness, the evil powers of this world, and all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God. These three renunciations run the gamut of everything wicked in life, everything that separates us from God, everything that displeases God. We are renouncing everything that Adam’s sin in the Garden initiated. This is our “no” to life without God in the world.

After renouncing these things, it is only appropriate that we affirm and put our trust and obedience in Christ and his love. The picture presented is a profound one because after renouncing Satan we are asked to “turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as our Savior.” What better way to dramatize the Gospel? In essence, this event embodies the faith we receive as baptized Christians, and it orients us to the fundamental vision of the baptized life. St. Paul reminds us of this vision: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” and our response of faith to this Divine initiative is a simple “yes.” What is more, in seeing that our children are brought up in the Christian faith and life, we will constantly re-orient them to this pattern of living, this continuous life of “yes” to Christ and his love.

The last thing to occur in this portion of the service is the priest turning to the congregation and asking if they will do everything in their power to support you and your child in your life in Christ. Again we see the unmistakably communal nature of baptism and the true nature of Christ’s body which builds itself up in love as the church responds, “we will.”

The presentation of your child and the examination that follows is a significant and potentially powerful part of the baptismal service. We should not enter into it lightly because we are making promises before God and man that we are obliged to keep. Overall, the examination presents a beautiful picture of the Gospel: a concrete action of saying “no” to Satan, sin, and death, and turning to say “yes” to Jesus Christ and his grace and love.

Thoughts for Reflection:

Picture yourself presenting your child to the priest in the baptismal service. What does it mean to you that you will be giving your child to Christ?

Take a few minutes to ponder what it means to renounce Satan and put your whole trust and faith in Jesus Christ and his love and grace. In what ways is God asking you to say “no” to Satan, sin, and evil, and “yes” to Jesus Christ and his grace?

What does this verse mean to you: “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”?

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What does it mean to you that God takes the initiative in salvation?

Prayer:

Thank God for his great love that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Ask the God and Father of all to speak this inestimable love to your child in and through his baptism. Ask God to help you to continually say yes to him.

Day 4

Yesterday we left our meditation on the service with the congregation being asked if they would support you and your child in your pursuit of Christ. Today we will focus on what is called the Baptismal Covenant where the congregation is asked to participate with you and the other baptismal sponsors and candidates as you and your children not only bind yourself to the Lord in covenant through this service, but the congregation also renews their own baptismal covenant.

The *modus operandi* for entering into and renewing oneself in the Baptismal Covenant is a combination of what we call the Apostles' Creed coupled with five promises of participation in the church. The Apostles' Creed is one of the earliest universal statements of the faith and has been used in services of baptism for nearly two millennia (our earliest proof is 217 in Rome). We

shouldn't take lightly the fact that this creed has been *the* statement of faith for those baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it can be for us a tool and guide for spirituality for in it is the kernel of Christian truth and consequently in it is the seed for living the Christian life.

In the service the Apostles' Creed is posed to you in a question format. "Do you believe in God the Father?" And you respond, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." Then the priest asks, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?" And the creed continues in this fashion. This formula is ancient as it was used in the days before the Roman Empire was Christianized in order that only sincere seekers who memorized this summary of the faith were allowed to receive baptism.

Along with the Apostles' Creed are five questions inviting us into full participation in the life of the church, the covenant community. Let's consider the depth of these questions:

Will you ***continue*** in the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

Will you ***persevere*** in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you ***proclaim*** by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you ***seek*** and ***serve*** Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as your self?

Will you **strive** for justice and peace among all people, and **respect** the dignity of every human being?

Notice the verbs in each of these questions: continue, persevere, proclaim, seek, serve, strive, and respect. Becoming a Christian is not for the sedentary or faint of heart. It is rather demanding to be a vital member of the church, but we know God's commands are not burdensome. Moreover, we should not be intimidated by these questions because our response to each one of these is, "I will, with God's help." Quite frankly, that is the absolute truth. None of us will be able to fulfill any of the above without God's help, without God working in us "to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). For as the scripture says, "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). So God's good, pleasing, and perfect will for us is that we would be vitally engaged in his church, continuing in the Apostles' teaching, persevering in resisting evil, proclaiming the Good News, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, striving for justice and peace, and respecting the dignity of every human being because we were created to walk in these.

Appropriately, following this rigorous interchange of creed and questions, the congregation now prays for you and your child. What a comfort! Again, the worshiping community surrounds you and your baptismal candidate in support this time in the form of prayer. The gathered church asks God to deliver you from the way of sin and death, to open your hearts to God's grace and truth, to fill you with God's life-giving

Spirit, to send you into the world in witness of God's love, and to bring you to the fullness of God's peace and glory, to name a few. Once again, in the baptismal covenant we see a pattern of living; and this pattern is "no" to Satan and sin, and "yes" to Christ and his grace.

The Baptismal Covenant contains the promises that we make on behalf of our children before God and the worshiping congregation. We are responsible for the promises we make here, but God does not leave us to ourselves. He promises to help us because he has made us for a life centered on Christ and his body, a life of mission in expanding his kingdom for the honor and glory of his name. Indeed, we will do all these things with God's help.

Thoughts for Reflection:

The Apostles' Creed is a formula that has been used by Christians in baptism and devotional life for nearly two thousand years. How does that effect your use of the creed in your child's baptism service? And your daily living?

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Imagine yourself in the Roman Empire in Jesus' day. If you saw someone carrying a cross, what do you think they were walking towards? How does this reflect the cost of following Christ?

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Reflect on the five questions asked after the creed is recited. Are these things you aspire to do with God's help? Are you drawn to a particular question?

Prayer:

Almighty God, you have guided your people through the ages and you guide my family and me even today. Please give us grace to continue in the good works for which You have created us. Help us to raise our children in that same grace, and may our household follow Christ no matter the cost; in his name. Amen.

Day 5

Baptism occurs in water. Whether the child is dipped, sprinkled, completely immersed, or poured on (affused), water is used in the action of baptism. Today we'll consider this most basic fact of baptism and contemplate the prayer said over the water in the baptism service found on pages 306-307 in the prayer book.

The prayer begins with the interchange that begins every communion prayer: "The Lord be with you / And also with you. / Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. / It is right to give him thanks and praise." We see here that this prayer is essentially one of praise and thanksgiving.

One reason this prayer is important is because it reminds us of how God has used water in the past to save and bless his people. This demonstrates that God is a God who intervenes in histo-

ry. He is not aloof or uncaring; rather, he is intimately involved in our lives and the life of the church for the sake of a world that does not know him. Also, this prayer is important because it brings God's salvation history into the present action of baptism. Just as Christ's redeeming work on the cross is made present to us in Holy Communion, so also God's redeeming work in saving his people is made present to us in baptism. "We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from bondage of sin into everlasting life."

Remembering these events in salvation history denotes the sacramental nature of baptism, that God uses created matter as agents of his salvation - this is part of a basic Christian worldview. And these saving events are commemorated and celebrated using created matter - water, bread, and wine. The prayer mentions Israel's passage through the Red Sea demonstrating how God acted decisively in their favor by destroying their enemies through water. God uses created matter as agents of his salvation. Christ's Incarnation is another example of this. He became man, the uncreated One put on creation - flesh - in order that in his body of flesh, he might deliver creation from death. God uses created matter as agents of his salvation.

Not only does this prayer key us into the sacramental nature of baptism, it also gives us a clue

into the theology and spirituality of baptism. We read further in the prayer, “We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Those who receive baptism rightly, or in faith as the prayer says, are buried with Christ, share in his resurrection, and are reborn by the Holy Spirit. We do not presume to know what faith your child may or may not possess. But, as you promised earlier in the baptism service, you will raise your child in the faith of Christ (see Day 3) in order that her response to baptism might be one of faith and in order that she may receive baptism rightly.

Moreover, the prayer reminds us that in baptism we are buried with Christ in his death and share in his resurrection. This union grants to us a new paradigm of life, which gives rise to a pattern of continuously dying to sin and rising again to walk in newness of life. It reminds us that we have died, and our life is hidden with Christ in God, and that if we’ve been raised with Christ that we are to set our hearts and minds on things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (See Colossians 3:1-4).

The priest continues the prayer with words of consecration asking God to sanctify the water by the power of the Holy Spirit, “that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.” A doxology giving honor and glory to

God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit concludes the prayer the same way it began, in praise and thanksgiving.

The prayer of thanksgiving over the water of baptism is significant because it gives us a clue to the sacramental nature of baptism and the theology and spirituality of baptism. It reminds us that God has intervened in history by saving his people through water and that in receiving baptism in faith we are united to Christ’s death and resurrection in order that we “may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.” Thanks be to God!

Thoughts for Reflection:

As we ponder the depth of baptism, why is it significant that God has used water in the past to bless and save his people?

Think through God’s interactions with Israel in the Old Testament. How has God used created ‘stuff’ to encounter and save his people?

How can you help your child respond in faith to his baptism?

Prayer:

God of all creation, thank you for creating and redeeming us, your people, by your grace. Thank you that your people Israel were saved from Pharaoh’s army by the waters of the Red Sea, and that you save us by the waters of baptism, joining us to Christ’s death and resurrection, birthing us anew to everlasting life. Teach us to

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raise our children in this knowledge so that they might respond in faith to your work of grace in baptism; through Christ our Lord who became flesh for our sake. Amen.

Day 6

“I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

For those who have been around the church for awhile, these words may have lost their wonder, their mystery, their power. Perhaps you are new to the faith and are curious what it means to be baptized in the name of the Trinity. No matter where we fall in this spectrum, we would be remiss not to sit with these words for a moment and contemplate their depth. These are the words the priest says as he baptizes your child in water. These are the words we hear Christ speaking as he commissions his disciples in Matthew’s Gospel: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . .” These are the words of entrance into the church, the community of the Triune God.

What does it mean to be baptized in the name of someone? Scripture gives us a few hints. Paul describes the people of Israel as being baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea in the Exodus from Egypt. This saving event was so significant for the nation of Israel that it constituted them as a people and identified them with their leader. The fate of their leader would be their fate.

Moreover, Moses was their mediator and advocate. Certainly, we see this in action as Moses intercedes on behalf of the people before God and even begs God to spare them from death. So, their baptism into Moses warrants them some sort of part into the relationship he enjoyed with God.

Now, flash forward to Christian baptism which unites us not to Moses or our pastor, our bishop, or any man, but to Christ. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). In our children’s baptism and subsequent faith, they are joined to Christ’s death and resurrection. They enjoy a special relationship with their mediator, Jesus Christ, the God man. Moreover, they are baptized, by Jesus’ own instruction, into the Holy Trinity. So, as they continue to grow in faith, as they continue to make their “yes” response to God’s initiative of love in their life, they will continue to grow deeper in the fellowship of the Holy Trinity. They will continue to be able to affirm what it is to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

The Trinity is an enigmatic and fascinating reality, but many times theological language can make this Life seem dusty and dull, uninvolved in our lives and distant from us. However, some theologians have likened the life of the Trinity to a dance using the Greek word *perichoresis*, and I think this is a helpful picture. We can then think of our living the baptized life as a participation in the Trinitarian dance. And then our growing and

maturing in faith is a movement deeper into this “living dance of light,” deeper into the waters of the ocean of God’s wisdom, love, and communion. The song “Triune God” by Brian Doerksen and Brenton Brown describes this movement so well: “Draw our lives into the wonder of Your majesty, Your fellowship divine, the Spirit’s liberty, the grace of Jesus Christ, the Father’s faithful love, the sharing of Your life in holy communion, one God.”

This is the unfathomable reality into which you are asking God to immerse your child in baptism. This is the reality in which you will raise your child in baptism. This is simply reality, and in baptism we are called ever deeper into fellowship with this reality, with the Triune God.

Thoughts for Reflection:

What does it mean to you to be baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit?

As your child grows, what are some specific ways you can encourage your child to grow deeper in faith and love in the Trinity?

Prayer:

Living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may I be immersed ever more deeply in your divine life, so that in continually trusting in you and continually turning away from death and turning toward life, my family and I might be partakers of the divine nature, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Conclusion

Baptism is a one-time event, but its implications are to be lived for a lifetime. It immerses us into a paradigm of living - a union with Christ’s death and resurrection, and a place in his church. And, it speaks over us a pattern of living - a life of continuously saying “no” to Satan, sin, and death, and saying “yes” to Jesus Christ and his love and grace. As parents of baptized children, our role is to fulfill with God’s help the promises we make in the baptismal service, and to always orient our children to this paradigm and pattern living.

God be with you as you seek continually to be immersed in the baptized life.

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