

## Marked

### Scripture Reading — Romans 4:1-12

*He received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the right-eousness that he had by faith. — Romans 4:11*

We all bear marks that identify us in one way or another. We have scars, or birthmarks, or wrinkles, or wedding bands. We have tattoos, or bald spots, or a limp, or a favorite shirt. Those who believe in Jesus are marked with baptism, showing we belong to God.

For the Roman army it was customary to mark recruits as a sign of their enlistment. Their mark was called a *signaculum*, often made by tattooing the hand or the forearm with an abbreviation of the name of their general. Another word, *sphragis*, signified a mark that an owner stamped on her possessions. It also described the sign that shepherds used to brand their sheep to distinguish them from the sheep of others. In Romans 4:11, the Greek word *sphragis* describes Abraham's circumcision.

In the first centuries after Christ, church leaders used these terms to give emphasis to baptism. When someone was baptized, pastors made a sign of the cross on the person's forehead. It was a way to say, "You now belong to Christ. You are now branded as part of the flock of Christ or the army of Christ."

The mark was a seal of protection as well as ownership. John Chrysostom said, "As the *sphragis* is imprinted on soldiers, so is the Holy Spirit on those who believe. Baptism is an enlistment in the service of Christ." How have you shown your branding in Christ?

### Prayer

*Father, let our baptism symbolize to us your holy, perma-nent seal that we are in your care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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