

Baptism

Baptism, what's it about?

The Christian church has been baptizing people for almost 2,000 years. It's a practice that flows from some of the very last words of Jesus prior to his ascension.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-19

Baptism is like a pledge of allegiance to Jesus for all that learn about Him, His Kingdom and His life-changing grace. Those who come to faith in Him willingly devote themselves to becoming His followers for life. Baptism is a sign of commitment.

The book of Acts contains the stories of how the first Christian believers responded to the preaching of the apostles and to their invitation to believe and be baptized. See Acts 2, 8, 10, 16, 18, 19. The letters of instruction that the apostles wrote to the early churches similarly assume that those who come to faith in Christ are baptized. Romans 6, I Corinthians 1, Galatians 3, Ephesians 4, Colossians 2 and I Peter 3.

We believe therefore that all that believe the Gospel and are changed by its power should respond with glad obedience to baptism.

The manner of baptism is practiced diversely by different Christian churches. Some baptize by sprinkling or pouring water on the candidate's head and others practice what is called baptism by immersion - a practice that involves immersing the person under water and raising them out of it again.

We practice baptism by immersion for three reasons. Firstly the word baptize itself means to dip or to place into. Secondly, those who were baptized in Scripture were spoken of as going down into the water and coming up out of it - and much water is specifically mentioned. Thirdly, immersion parallels the Romans 6 picture of being buried with Christ in His death and being raised with Him in His resurrection.

If people have been baptized as believers by sprinkling or pouring we do not encourage or insist on rebaptism.

Some churches baptize for reasons other than those given above: to remove original sin, to introduce one to new life or to make one a member of the church. We do not believe there is adequate Biblical support for such approaches to baptism.

Is it for babies, children or adults?

In the New Testament era the Christian Gospel was preached by adults to adults. Those who heard, understood and believed it were baptized. Clearly this could be true of children as well as adults. But it would be difficult to understand how such could be the case for

infants or young children. In fact there are no examples of babies or young children being baptized in Scripture.

Therefore, we encourage all believers in Christ who have not been baptized along with those who may have been baptized as infants to be baptized as believing followers of Christ.

How old is old enough?

The Bible doesn't answer this question but there are some general principles to consider. The conversion and baptism of children should parallel the Biblical teaching and practice regarding adults as nearly as possible. So, baptism should follow a clearly understood and expressed faith in the Gospel. In the event that there is a lapse of time between believing and baptism, the behaviour of the child should express some degree of agreement with their faith.

Our preference is that children should wait for baptism until about their teen years. Why?

Firstly, the Christian Gospel calls people into a counter cultural way of life. Due to the sheltered nature of life for young children they usually do not experience the "against the popular current" element of life till they reach those years.

Secondly, the desire to please is strong in young children. This natural and delightful aspect of childhood makes mixed motives in baptism a strong possibility. Is it a pledge of allegiance to Jesus or a way of pleasing parents, teachers and friends?

Thirdly, the experience of many that have been baptized at an earlier age is that they have difficulty remembering their own baptism and minimize its significance. Or they begin to doubt the validity of their childhood faith as they enter their more independent teen years and request baptism again after reaffirming their faith. Thus baptism may be trivialized.

Should I be baptized?

- Yes if you have recently come to personal faith in Christ and desire to be an obedient follower of His.
- Yes if you have been a believer for some time (but never baptized) and your life has begun to be characterized the following:
 - Prayer
 - Making friends with God's people
 - Reading and enjoying Scripture
 - A Christian lifestyle
 - Sharing the good things God has given you with those who don't know Him yet.
 -
- Yes, if you have never been baptized as an adult believer.

Preparing for your baptism

Baptism is like a pledge of allegiance to Jesus Christ. As you prepare for baptism take time to:

1. Read all the passages in the Bible that discuss baptism.
2. Consider why you want to be baptized so you will be able to explain to your friends and family exactly why you are doing this. Don't do it for wrong reasons!
3. Write out your story of coming to faith so others will be able to learn from you.
 - What was your life like before you became a believer? What were the circumstances that drew you towards the Gospel, other believers or Christ? What was happening in your life that made you aware that you were in need of what He had to offer?
 - How did you encounter Christ or perhaps more precisely, how did He encounter you? Were there people, verses of Scripture or other influences that brought you to the place where you knew that He had given you new life? Was it an experience or an understanding?
 - How has your life changed since coming to know Him? Attitudes? Activities? Friends? Goals?

There is no such thing as a boring story when it comes to faith in Christ. Every believer is an original. And anyone who has Christ living in them is a supernatural miracle and is called to be a walking talking representative of His. What a privilege!

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from GodWe are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

II Corinthians 5:17-21



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