

BAPTISM FACT SHEET

WHY BAPTISM?

Sacramental – This is one of two rituals commanded by Jesus for His followers. (The second is the Lord's Supper). Both sacraments were observed by the first converts in the Early Church and have continued ever since as acts of obedience to Jesus' commands. Both are closely linked to the saving work of Jesus. In communion we remember his death on the cross and in baptism we identify ourselves with his death and resurrection – *"the old is gone, the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17)."*

Spiritual Landmark – In the Old Testament, God often commanded Israel's leaders to set up altars or monuments to remember important works of God in their lives. As believers, the most important moment in our lives is our conversion to follow Jesus. Baptism marks this moment in a memorable way in front of witnesses. Baptism then, is a resource we can look back on for assurance and a reminder of God's grace in our lives.

Shared Experience for All Believers – All throughout the New Testament, every conversion was accompanied by baptism. Some examples are: *3000 believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:41); Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:12); Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:36-39); Saul in Damascus (Acts 9:17-18); Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:47-48); the Ephesian believers (Acts 19:1-6) to name a few.* Just as every Christian should be able to share their conversion story, we should also have a baptism story – the moment when we "went public" with our faith.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) Obedience to Jesus' Command / Following Jesus' Example

Before Jesus ascended to heaven he gave a final command to His followers – *"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."* (Matthew 28:19-20). According to Jesus, baptism is a symbol of our submission to the fullness of the Trinity, placing ourselves securely under the authority of the Father, Son, & Spirit and trusting Him alone for new life. This was seen at Jesus' own baptism, at the start of his ministry, when the Father's voice was heard affirming his Son, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove. (Matthew 3:13-16).

2) First Step of Discipleship - Identification with Christ's Death & Resurrection

As believers, we identify ourselves with Jesus' cross and empty tomb. The act of immersion (the literal meaning of "baptizo" used in Bible), symbolizes death and resurrection as the believer goes under the water and is brought back out. It gives a physical representation of the Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 2 – *"I have been crucified with Christ... the life I now live by faith in the Son of God"* (Gal 2:20)
See also: *Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12*

3) Public profession of faith in Jesus

Just like the first baptisms performed by John the Baptist, every Biblical account of baptism was done publicly. Often, public testimonies accompany the ritual, as a way of witnessing to friends and family who may not already follow Jesus. ALSO, much like a wedding ceremony, the congregation serves as witnesses to encourage further growth and hold the individual accountable.

4) Union with the Body of Christ & Victory Over Darkness

In his letter to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 12:12-13), the Apostle Paul reminded them that they were united into one Body, through their baptism. In a way, some see this as a New Testament equivalent to Jewish circumcision – a sign of someone living under God's covenant, and an identifying marker of God's People. Paul also says this union with Christ applies the triumph of the Cross, bringing victory over our spiritual enemy! (Colossians 2:11-15)

FREQUENT QUESTIONS:

If baptism doesn't save me, why is it a big deal?

True, baptism is done in response to Jesus' saving work; not the work itself. We are not saved through our baptism. It is outward sign of God's work of transformation and our commitment to the Lord -- similar to a wedding ring worn by a bride and groom to signify their commitment to one another.

What if I was baptized as an infant; is it necessary to be baptized as a believer?

No and yes. The baptizing of infants is done for different reasons. The Catholic teaching is that baptism is necessary for salvation. Infants are baptized (falsely) to ensure their entrance into heaven. Other churches focus on the covenant aspect of baptism – that believing parents should baptize their children in faith, trusting that this work of grace will establish a foundation in their children so they will eventually confess a belief in Christ. (Incidentally, there aren't any clear records of baptism in the Scriptures for anyone not confessing a belief in Christ; and the scriptures clearly say that we are not saved through a ritual, but by faith alone). No, it's not necessary to be baptized again, however, it can be a powerful confirmation of the faithful step of your parents long ago. And, as mentioned above, it is a powerful step in your own faith journey and well as a public witness of your commitment.

How old should someone be in order to be baptized?

The only criteria for baptism is a clear understanding of the Gospel, and a clear commitment to follow Jesus. While children can begin to understand the basics of the faith as a very early age, it is recommended that they are able to clearly express this understanding on their own before taking this step.

What if I'm afraid of water or can't be immersed?

The essence of baptism is the public expression of faith and symbolic leaving of our old lives behind. Water, in some form, is the most relevant symbol, but we can be flexible to accommodate different needs.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO TAKE:

- 1)** *Let one of our leaders know that you are interested. (They can help you to get any necessary forms and schedule a date for your baptism, if not already scheduled.)*
- 2)** *Fill out the "Preparing for Baptism" form. This form will help you think through why this step is important to you. It will also help you prepare to share with others about your faith. It also includes a release form for parents of minors who are seeking to be baptized.*
- 3)** *Return the "Preparing for Baptism" form to one of our leaders, so they can have a conversation with you prior to your baptism date. (They can also help in answering any questions you may have.)*

WHAT TO EXPECT/HOW TO PREPARE

Prepare to share some form of a testimony. (3-5 minutes, can use notes) *How God brought you to this point; Why you love Jesus; What the Gospel means to you; The difference Jesus has made in your life.*

You will get wet. *Bring a change of clothes; wear a darker colored shirt; and bring a towel.*

Invite family & friends. *From an eternal perspective, this is a very important moment in life (second only to your conversion). It's also a natural opportunity to share your faith publicly with those closest to you, especially those who don't yet follow Jesus. ALSO, you may want to invite a significant person in your life to greet you as you come out of the water with a towel.*