

Baptism

The Demonstration OF Devotion



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Just as the exchange of rings adds a seal of completeness to a wedding ceremony, a person's decision to become a Christian becomes sealed when that person is immersed in baptism. Baptism is a gift that God has given us to physically express our love for Jesus Christ for providing forgiveness for our sins, and express our desire to follow and obey Him as leader of our lives.

An Essential Element in Becoming Saved

Whenever a person understands that he or she is a sinner, and can do nothing on their own behalf to change that, one of the first questions that comes to mind is, "What do I have to do to be saved?" The best place to find this answer is in the New Testament book of Acts, which was written to record the history of the early church. Acts contains many instances where people became followers of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. When we study what these people did to become saved, there are five actions in common:

1. They Heard God's Word: But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. ACTS 4:4 (NIV)
2. They Believed What They Heard: Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. ACTS 18:8 (NIV)
3. They Repented of (Turned From) Their Sins: Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." ACTS 2:38 (NIV)
4. They Accepted Jesus Christ as Leader and Forgiver: Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ACTS 2:41 (NIV)
5. They Were Baptized into Christ: But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ACTS 8:12 (NIV)

An Opportunity to Imitate Christ:

The reason baptism was so important to Christians in the early church is because it was important to Jesus, himself. In Matthew, chapter 3, we see that Jesus ushered in his ministry on Earth by being baptized:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." MATTHEW 3:13-17 (NIV)

Some things we may conclude from this passage:

- The choice to be baptized was Jesus' own decision.
- Jesus did not need baptism for forgiveness, but was baptized as an act of submission.
- Jesus' baptism was one of immersion (He went up out of the water)
- God expressed His approval when His son was baptized.

An Opportunity to Identify With Christ:

Or, don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. ROMANS 6:3-4 (NIV)

Immersion / Sprinkling/Pouring: How Should I Be Baptized?

In today's world, Christians come from a wide variety of heritages and traditions. You may be reading this information because you are a Christian who grew up in a church that practiced sprinkling or pouring as its form of baptism, and you are now considering belonging to a church that only recognizes baptism by immersion. So, what does this mean? If you were sprinkled, did your baptism not count? Arguments and hurt feelings sometimes erupt between Christians over such questions!

The important thing to remember if you come from such a tradition is that a rich, spiritual heritage is a gift from God! Your decision to become immersed is no admission that you or your family were wrong in the way you chose to follow Christ. When you were sprinkled as a child, it was your parents' prayer that you would become an adult

who would serve the Lord. Your conscious decision to become an immersed believer is God's way of answering that prayer. If you already consider yourself a devoted follower of Christ, becoming immersed will serve as a means of establishing common ground for fellowship with other believers in your new church; or, if you like, as a powerful tool for spiritual re-dedication.

Churches that practice immersion do so because it is the tradition of baptism that is recorded in the New Testament. We have already taken a look at passages from Matthew 3 and Romans 6, which mention baptism as immersion. The word "baptism" finds its roots from the Greek word baptizō. Literally translated, this word means, "A dipping in water" (Liddell & Scott) or, "immersion" (Smith's Dictionary). To become immersed is to be baptized the way Jesus, himself, and all the believers in the first century church were.

Baptism and Children: When is the Right Time?

Some church traditions hold that, because of the concept of Adam and Eve's "original sin", that all of us are literally born as sinners, and should be cleansed from sin, or baptized, soon after birth. Other infant baptism traditions take the form of christenings, or dedications. Their parents make the decision for children to be baptized, and these children then make their conscious choice to follow Jesus Christ during confirmation classes at a later age.

But, what does the Bible say about the spiritual condition of children? The Gospel of Matthew records a conversation between Jesus and his disciples:

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' MATTHEW 18:1-4 (NIV)

Scripture indicates that little children are safe in God's arms when it comes to their salvation. Additionally, there are no recorded instances in the book of Acts, or anywhere else in the New Testament, where small children were baptized. Baptism is a conscious decision of an individual who realizes that he or she has sinned, and has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in order to have forgiveness for their sin.

You Should Consider Allowing Your Child to be Baptized if:

- He or she is of an age in which they understand why Jesus died on the cross for them. (This age varies, depending on maturity, from child to child.)
- If he or she approaches you about wanting to be baptized. (Once again, they should be able to explain why baptism is necessary.)
- If your child has been regularly participating in children's church, or children's ministry activities. In this case, our children's minister can help assess your child's readiness for baptism.

You Should Wait for your Child to be Baptized if:

- His or her being baptized is your own idea.
- You think it would be a great "family moment" for you, your spouse, and your children to be baptized at the same time.
- You are, for whatever reason, in a hurry for it to happen.
- He or she cannot explain the meaning of baptism to you.

So, You're Ready for Baptism?

After you have prayerfully made the decision to be baptized, the first thing to do is contact a minister. Creekside schedules baptisms as part of weekend worship services, or mid-week services. Your baptism will not only encourage fellow believers in Christ, but also serve as an example to others in the audience who may also be considering immersion. If, however, you are really uncomfortable in front of large groups of people, or if you just cannot wait until the next service, you can arrange to meet with a minister to be baptized in a private setting.

Congratulations on your decision to be immersed! May the memory of being bonded with Christ warm your heart for all eternity!