

Know More About **BAPTISM**



Christians participate in two God-ordained sacraments that celebrate what God has done for us: communion and baptism. Communion is celebrated on a regular basis and baptism is a one-time declaration of a lifetime of devotion to God.

Unfortunately, there is some confusion about baptism among people of faith. This study booklet is designed to offer straight-forward answers about the most commonly asked questions people have about Christian baptism.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

1. It is a public declaration of a person's faith in Christ.

It is a pronouncement of belief. It is like preaching a visual sermon. It is a public way of saying to everyone that you have decided to give your life to Jesus Christ.

2. It is a point of departure from your old lifestyle and the start of life as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13-17) serves as the example of this as his baptism became a point of departure from his life in Nazareth (where he grew up) to the life of a traveling prophet and preacher.

3. It is the means of bringing us into union with Christ and his body, the church.

In Romans 6 we are told that we are "baptized into Christ" (v. 3) and "united with him" (v. 5). First Corinthians 12:13 says that when we were baptized we were baptized into the body of Christ, the church.

4. It is God's claim to ownership over me.

You are baptized "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19-20). To baptize in the "name of Jesus" (Acts 2:38, 8:16), or in the name of the triune God, is one and the same. We use the names of the Trinity since it was our Lord's commission to His disciples and to His church.

The phrase "in the name of" means both to call on the character and power of the one named and it means to become the "possession of" the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?

Christian baptism is rich with beautiful meaning and symbolism. Consider what baptism illustrates:

1. It illustrates Christ's burial and resurrection.

"Christ died for our sins . . . he was buried . . . and he rose again."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

"For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ." Colossians 2:12

2. It illustrates the cleansing of sin.

In Acts 22:16 Ananias instructed Saul (later know as Paul, the Apostle) to "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on the name of the Lord." This is why immersion is so significant, it is a complete cleansing in which we are forgiven of all our sin (cf. Acts 2:38).

3. It illustrates my new life as a Christian.

"When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. The old life has passed away and a new life has begun!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

"By our baptism then, we were buried with him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... so also we may live a new life!" Romans 6:4

Baptism does not make you a believer—you are baptized because you are a believer in Jesus Christ. The act of baptism alone doesn't "save" you. Christian baptism is preceded by personal faith/trust in Christ and is coupled with confession and repentance.

"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned." Mark 16:16

"Repent and be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins." Acts 2:38

"As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the man said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.' and he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the man went down into the water and Philip baptized him." Acts 8:36-38

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Romans 10:9-10

Baptism is like a wedding ring: it's the outward symbol of the commitment you make in your heart. It is the pledge of a good conscience toward God.

"and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 3:21

WHY BE BAPTIZED?

1. Because you want to follow Christ's example.

"At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the river."
Mark 1:9

2. Because Christ commands it.

"Jesus said, 'Go then, to all the people everywhere and make them disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.'" (Matthew 28:19-20)

If it was important enough for Jesus to command, isn't it important enough for us to obey? And if it is important enough for Jesus to do, isn't it important enough for us to follow?

3. Because it demonstrates you are a believer.

". . . many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized." Acts 18:8

4. Because obeying Christ's command shows you know him.

"We know that we have come to know him, if we obey His commands." 1 John 2:3

5. Because it is the appeal we make to God for a clean conscience.

"and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 3:21

6. Because it unites you with Christ in a very special way.

"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Galatians 6:26-27

7. Because you desire to be forgiven.

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has bade this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this, they were cut to the

heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, everyone of you for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 2:36-38

HOW SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

1. Like Jesus was baptized – by being immersed in water.

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water.” Matthew 3:16

2. The Greek word translated “baptize/baptism” is the word *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) and it literally means to “immerse, dip under, or submerge beneath.”

For the first 1200 years of Christian history immersion was the universally accepted mode of baptism. Many of the great churches built during those years, including the Leaning Tower of Pisa, have large pools in which they immersed their people.

Even the Reformation heroes like Martin Luther (Lutheran), John Calvin (Presbyterian), and John Wesley (Methodist) agreed that the accepted New Testament practice was immersion (see page 8).

Canoe Creek Christian Church is committed to “doing Bible things in Bible ways” therefore our practice is to baptize people by immersion.

3. Every baptism in the New Testament was by immersion.

- **When Jesus was baptized, the Bible uses the Greek word *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) to describe that event.**
- **When Jesus commanded that His disciples be baptized, he used the Greek word *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) to instruct them how to do it.**
- **Every baptism recorded in the New Testament was by immersion, consistently using the Greek word *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) to describe the event.**

Example: “then both Philip and the man went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water . . .” Acts 8:38-39

- The Apostles, consistent with Jesus’ example and command, instructed new believers to be immersed into Christ, using the Greek word *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) to describe the action.

Example: “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

4. It is the best way to picture a burial and resurrection.

"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 . . . we too may have new life." Romans 6:3-4

The symbolism of immersion is compelling: just as a person lowers you into the water, Christ lowers you into the pool of his grace until every inch of yourself is clean. Buried in a watery grave, covered from head to foot with God's love, you are washed clean by the blood of Jesus.

Consider the statements from the founders of three denominations and other church historians and scholars:

- **Martin Luther (Lutheran):** "On this account I could wish that such as are baptized should be completely immersed into water according to the meaning of the word and the signification of the ordinance . . . as also without doubt it was instituted by Christ" (Works, Vol. II. p. 75, ed. 1551).
- **John Calvin (Presbyterian):** "The very word baptize signifies to immerse, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive church" (Institutes, Vol. XI., ch. 15, sec, 49).
- **John Wesley (Methodist):** "We are buried with him, alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion" (Notes on N.T., Romans 6:3). "Baptized according to the custom of the first church and the rule of the Church of England, by immersion" (Journal, Vol, 1. p. 20).
- **F. Brenner (Roman Catholic):** "Thirteen hundred years was baptism generally and ordinarily performed by the immersion of a man under water" (Work on Baptism, Augusti. Denkwurd, VII. p. 62).
- **Philip Scaff (Presbyterian):** "Immersion, and not sprinkling, was unquestionably the original form of baptism. Baptism is to immerse in water" (History of Apostolic Church, pp. 568-569).

IS THE WAY OR "FORM" OF BAPTISM IMPORTANT?

Many people find it difficult to believe that the prescribed "form" or way of being baptized is important to God. They would contend that outward symbols are irrelevant to God; He is only interested in what is in the heart. It is true that God is most concerned about our heart condition, but he often uses prescribed forms to test and demonstrate the sincerity of our hearts (i.e. our faith, trust, confidence, loyalty, obedience).

In the Old Testament cases are recorded where people ignored the form of the sacrifice and offered animals forbidden by law or had the form right but their meaning, or hearts were all wrong (Malachi 1:8, Amos 5:21-25).

These truths can be seen in the New Testament as well in Mark 7:8-9, 13 with Jesus' harsh indictment of the Pharisees:

“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.’ And he said to them: ‘ You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!’ ‘Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.’”

Could Jesus make the same charge to us today if we, like the Pharisees, choose to obey those laws or forms we like and ignore the forms that don't suit us? They may differ from our past traditions, be inconvenient, or even humbling . . . but if our Lord prescribed a certain form (i.e. immersion as the way of being baptized) do we have any other choice than exact obedience?

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

1. Every person who has believed in Christ.

According to the Scriptures, those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The Ethiopian Eunuch asked Philip,

“Why shouldn't I be baptized?” Philip replied, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” Acts 8:36

Every person in the New Testament who was baptized first believed in who Jesus was—the Christ, the Son of the Living God. They also believed what Jesus did—died on the cross, was buried in a tomb, and was raised back to life three days later.

Popular author and speaker Max Lucado has written, “We are never told to be baptized and then believe, but to come to belief, to trusting faith, and then display that decision by associating ourselves with Christ in baptism. Baptism is the initial step of a faithful heart. This decision requires significant levels of maturity” (Baptism: The Demonstration of Devotion, 1995). Note these additional passages:

“Those who accepted his message were baptized. . . .” Acts 2:41

“Simon himself believed and was baptized.” Acts 8:13

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the Good News... and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Acts 8:12

2. Those who have repented of their sin.

Closely connected to belief is repentance. Peter exhorted the people at Pentecost to “Repent... and be baptized” (Acts 2:38).

Repentance means to have a change of mind. It means to make a U-turn or to do

an about face. You were going down the road of destruction, death and hell; but you repented, you turned around, changed your direction, changed your mind. Therefore, baptism is for believers who have repented of their sin.

SHOULD AN INFANT BE BAPTIZED?

Since baptism is for those who have believed and repented, we do not practice infant baptism. An infant cannot believe. An infant cannot repent. Therefore, we practice “believer’s baptism.”

Lewis Foster, a respected scholar who was on the translating committee for both the New King James and the New International Versions of the Bible, explains the origin of sprinkling and pouring as forms of baptism:

“Although other practices have been introduced as substitutes, history sustains that these (pouring and sprinkling) are changes from the original practice of immersion. The earliest historical example of pouring occurred in about A.D. 250. this was administered because of Novation’s illness and was later called into question (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 6, 43, 14-15). Earlier references to practices other than immersion either give preference to immersion or do not deny the originality of immersion. The Roman Catholic Church is the earliest source of authority for a change from immersion. Clement V formally recognized sprinkling (but water must flow) as valid baptism in 1305” (New Testament Teaching On Baptism, The Christian Restoration Association, 1960).

The practice of infant sprinkling began because of the development and distortion of two doctrines. One is called “baptismal regeneration” which says that the act of baptism alone actually washes away one’s sins, or regenerates the person.

The other distortion has to do with the doctrine of “original sin.” The church came to believe that an infant was born, not only with original sin, but also with original guilt which meant that an infant was guilty before God, and God would hold him accountable for his sin. Thus, if the child died, then he was doomed for hell. Since the church believed that baptism actually saved the candidate, they began to do the next logical thing, they baptized babies believing that the rite saved the child if it were to die.

We believe the New Testament clearly teaches baptism to be a personal response of a penitent believer in Jesus Christ. This is only possible for someone who has reached an age of accountability and consequently is old enough to hear, understand, believe and repent.

Many denominations continue to sprinkle infants even though there is no example at all in the New Testament of such practice. Some consider it to be an act of dedication for the parents. Others see it as a sort of down payment for the infant’s salvation. They say that the infant is being baptized that he/she may one day be saved, rather than to save him/her.

Others believe infants are children of God because of their parents. We believe

that a child is innocent and if it were to die would be received into the eternal presence of God.

It is appropriate to dedicate a baby (though more appropriate to dedicate the parents). On a semi-regular basis, we offer parents of newborns an opportunity to have their babies brought up front in a church service as they dedicate themselves to raising their child to know and love God. This is also done as a reminder that our church has dedicated itself to partnering with parents in their responsibility to lead their children to faith in Christ. Please keep in mind, however, that this is a dedication ceremony, not a baptism.

WHAT IF I WAS SPRINKLED AS AN INFANT OR CHILD? WHAT SHOULD I DO?*

First, you should be grateful that you had parents who cared enough about you to set you apart for God. Because of their devotion, you have an opportunity to complete their prayer by willingly submitting to adult baptism. Adult baptism is not a sign of disrespect for what your parents did. In fact, it can be seen as a fulfillment of their prayers. Be thankful for the heritage of concerned parents, but don't be negligent of your responsibility as an adult to make your personal commitment and obedience to God in baptism. Many who are now members of this church were sprinkled as infants and then, upon coming to personal faith, were immersed into Christ. God has led you to this point and we pray that you will take this step as soon as possible.

CAN A CHILD BE BAPTIZED?

Yes! However, keep in mind that Biblically speaking, baptism is appropriate only for those who have made a personal decision to trust in Christ alone for their salvation.

At CCCC, we do not baptize children unless they are mature enough to place their faith in Christ and understand the true meaning of baptism and receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. We would be happy to talk with you further on this issue if you so desire.

WHEN SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

1. As soon as you have believed in Jesus Christ as God's Son and Savior of the world.

"Those who accepted his message were baptized . . . that day." Acts 2:41

"Then Philip began with the scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look, here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So they went down into the water and

Philip baptized him.” Acts 8:35-38

There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have decided to receive Christ into your life, you can and should be baptized. If you wait until you are "perfect," you'll never feel "good enough!"

CAN MY FAMILY BE BAPTIZED TOGETHER?

Yes! If each family member understands fully the meaning of baptism, and each one has personally placed his/her trust in Christ for salvation, we encourage families to be baptized at the same time. It is a wonderful expression of commitment. Young children who wish to be baptized are asked to meet with our Children's Minister for a pre-baptism conversation.

However, it is important to remember that baptism is a personal decision, not a family tradition. It is usually not wise to delay your baptism while waiting on other family members to make their own decision to accept Christ, particularly children. This puts an undue pressure on them, and delays your obedience and response to Christ.

DO I HAVE TO BE IMMERSUED TO BECOME A MEMBER OF CANOE CREEK CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

At Canoe Creek, it is a requirement that everyone wishing to place membership must be an immersed believer in Christ. If you were immersed at an earlier point in your life, it is not necessary to be re-immersed. However, if you have never been immersed, we ask that you be baptized the way Jesus commanded and demonstrated himself, even though you may have been "confirmed" as a child.

DOES THE ACT OF BAPTISM ITSELF SAVE A PERSON?*

No. Scripture is abundantly clear that only Jesus saves. The work of salvation is a finished work by Christ on the cross (Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:10-14). Baptism has no redemptive powers of its own. There is nothing special about the water. Nothing holy about the river or pond or baptistery.

Tragically, some people believe they are going to heaven when they die just because they have been baptized. They have no genuine personal faith, have never made a personal decision to receive Christ as Savior and Lord, and are banking on a hollow ceremony to save them. If baptism itself could save, why did Jesus die on the cross? If we could be saved merely by being sprinkled or immersed, would Jesus have had to die for our sins? No. If a person's faith is in the sacrament and not the Savior, they are trusting in a powerless ritual.

WHAT IF A PERSON IS NOT BAPTIZED? CAN THEY BE SAVED?*

The Bible never specifically answers or addresses this question. It is never answered because no one ever asked, “Do I have to be baptized to be saved?” After the Gospel was an accomplished fact (i.e. Jesus had been crucified, buried, and raised back to life), the pattern of teaching in the New Testament is clear: upon placing their faith in Jesus Christ, people were instructed to be baptized. It is noteworthy that each time they responded without questioning the necessity of baptism.

This being true, consider this question, “Why isn’t the person baptized?” There are three possible answers:

1. “I never understood baptism.”

Perhaps you were never instructed to be baptized. Maybe you’ve never been challenged to consider the issue. That’s entirely possible. If this is the case, we urge you to give thought to what God says about baptism. This doesn’t negate your faith up to this point. Part of maturity is an openness to understand and be obedient to new areas of the Christian walk.

2. “I don’t want to.”

Let’s analyze this response for a moment. God humbles himself by leaving heaven and being born in a feed-trough. The God of the universe eats human food, feels human feelings, and dies a sinner’s death. He is spat upon, beaten and stripped naked, and nailed to a cross. He takes our eternal condemnation on himself in our place. He then offers us the forgiveness of all our sins as a free gift and asks that we say yes to him in baptism and someone responds, “I don’t want to.” Such logic does not add up. Such resistance spells trouble of the soul. It reveals a problem of the heart. Such a person does not need a study of the sacrament. He needs a long, hard examination of the soul. The incongruity puzzled even Jesus. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things I ask?” (Luke 6:46).

Believers not only offer their sins, they yield their wills to Christ. In a real sense then, baptism could be viewed as the initial test of a believing heart. If one won’t obey Christ in baptism, what will he do when Christ calls him to obey him in prayer? Or evangelism? Or giving? Or service?

The highest motive of doing anything is because God asks you to do it. The heart of the repentant believer says, “If you want me to be baptized in a pile of leaves, I’ll do it. I may not understand every reason, but neither do I understand how you could save a sinner like me.” If one is resistant on the first command, one might wonder if there is genuine faith and a spirit of repentance.

3. What if I die before I can get baptized?

What of the ones who die before they have a chance? What if I place my faith in Christ to save me and then before I can be baptized a swarm of killer bees attacks me and I die?

The answer to these kinds of extreme and hypothetical questions can be found in the character of God demonstrated to the thief on the cross (cf. Luke 23:39-43). Is it *possible* for an un-baptized believer to be saved? Yes, it is *possible*. However, it is extremely rare that an individual is unable to be baptized because they die right after placing their faith in Christ.

Should every believer be baptized? Yes, absolutely. Should someone placing their faith in Christ be baptized as soon as possible (cf. Acts 2:41, 8:35-38, 16:30-34)? Yes, absolutely.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR WHEN I AM BAPTIZED?

You can wear a bathing suit (or something similar) and a shirt. For women we suggest wearing a bathing suit under your shorts and shirt.

WILL I HAVE TO SAY ANYTHING?

Yes. You will be asked to repeat the words of the Good Confession as a public profession of your personal faith in Jesus Christ: *"I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, my Lord and my Savior."*

Prior to the start of the worship service you will meet in the Baptism Prep Room (behind the stage) where you will receive further instruction. To help commemorate the occasion a baptismal certificate will be given to you.

WHAT IF I HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS?

All of our pastors can perform a baptism before a smaller, more intimate group (a few friends, family members, etc.) in special circumstances. We will be glad to work with you whatever the reason.

I'M READY, NOW WHAT?

To schedule a baptism, call the church office at 407-891-1492, go online and fill out the online form, or mark baptism on a connect card in one of our worship service.

Baptisms are performed in any of our worship services. We can also schedule

baptisms immediately following the last service on Sunday morning, or if more convenient, during the week when it is best for you.

If you would like to be baptized in front of a smaller, more intimate group (a few friends, family members, etc.) you can schedule your baptism for any day/evening of the week. We are very flexible and eager to help in any way that we can.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS*

We want to teach and practice everything the Bible teaches about baptism. We are not interested in making it more important than God's Word does. On the other hand, we are not willing to make it any less important, either. We believe that the answers provided in this study aid reflect what the Bible clearly teaches in regard to this sacrament.

Don't allow baptism to be something it is not. Apart from the cross it has no significance. If you are trusting being placed under water to save you, you have missed the message of Grace. Beware of dogmatism. No one this side of heaven can fully understand the majesty of baptism. Watch out for the one who claims to have a corner on the issue, especially if that person is in your mirror.

Don't prevent baptism from being what God intended. It is a precious symbol of God's grace. It is a beautiful illustration of our union with Christ. It is a willing plunge into the power and promise of Christ. In baptism God signs and seals our conversion to him. This is no optional command of Christ. This is no trivial issue.

So, remove your shoes, bow your head, and bend your knees: baptism is a holy event. It is not to be taken lightly. The ritual of washing (Acts 22:16) signifies our admission that apart from Christ we are dirty, but in Christ we are pure. The ritual of burial (Romans 6:1-5) signifies that we are willing to die to sin and self and that we can be made alive again because of him. Christ's death becomes my death. Christ's resurrection becomes my resurrection.

For all we may not understand about baptism, we can be sure of one thing: it is a holy moment commanded by Jesus to be obeyed by all who place their faith in him.

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