
BAPTISM

A Rite of Initiation

Revised 2016



This leaflet is designed to help you understand something about what Baptism is and why it is administered in the way it is.

Understanding Baptism

Baptism is a SACRAMENT, along with Communion/the Lord's Supper. A sacrament is about swearing an oath, making a pledge. Originally, it was the oath a Roman soldier would make to his Commander. In baptism as a sacrament it has less to do with our main oaths and first and foremost it is about God's oath-making with His people (the Church). Throughout the Bible this is spoken of in terms of God making a 'COVENANT'.

Background

Circumcision - In Genesis chapter 17 a covenant is made with Abraham and a 'sign' of this bond/relationship is

A submitting to God and cutting off from the world. A setting apart/dedicating to God. It is therefore sign of incorporation, a symbol of consecration. This covenant sign is a call to unswerving loyalty and a changed lifestyle to that consistent with faith in this God.

We might well sum it up as being a sign of humble submission to God's will and ways.

Water Baptism - John 'the Baptist'(Mark 1) administered a 'water' baptism is a sign of judgement and redemption, i.e it was concerned to symbolise cleansing from sin (i.e all that separates, that comes between us and God in Christ) and living new moral endeavour. John's message called for a renouncing ways of the world and entering the new covenant relationship and water was the sign of this.

This water baptism was -

- Preparatory - in so far as preparing people for the Kingdom to come.
- About Initiation - as a rite of passage in which a sign is placed on a person to take the first step along the road of faith in Jesus Christ. This being confirmed in us through baptism in the Holy Spirit. Importantly therefore as a rite of initiation, as a form of a rite of passage, it can and should by definition only transpire once in a person's life. As the old saying goes, you can only step into the stream for the first time once.

The symbolism in baptism is therefore concerned with God's initiative of grace for us and secondarily, based on this - our response. In other words, no one in the early church was asking- "should we withhold baptism from some members of this household until they come of age?" for the very good reason that they saw baptism as an outer and visible sign of what God was doing for and in that family, not primarily, a symbol of the human response to God's initiative.

[To distinguish baptism and the Lord's Supper - one is a rite of initiation, the other is a ceremony of confirmation. One is about union with Christ, the other about communion in Christ. One is a passive sacrament, performed for the recipient, the other is a sacrament which requires active participation, active recognising of the Body, and partaking of the elements.]

Baptism is a passive sacrament, primarily depicting God's work more than our faith, which is a secondary aspect, a response to grace.

Noting these understandings in the NEW Testament teaching of Paul taught that baptism is...

- The working of God, whereby we are buried with Christ, made alive as our sins are forgiven, and then raised with Him. [**Colossians chapter 2 v12; Romans chapter 6 v3**]
- How we die to sin as we are crucified with Him [**Romans chapter 6 v4**]
- A resurrection with Christ so we can rise to walk in newness of life [**Romans chapter 6 v4-5**]
- A putting on Christ, thereby becoming a child of God [**Galatians chapter 3 v26-27**]
- A "spiritual circumcision" in which sins are "cut away" [**Colossians chapter 2 v. 11**]

Another important understanding is that that baptism while personal is never private. It is always something significant in the community of faith/the Church. The reason being that it is within the congregation that faith is shared and matured. Baptism does not make anyone or an infant a 'Christian', but it is an initiation, as we have mentioned, into a new life within God's family - the church/local congregation. Hence, when seeking baptism either as an adult or for an infant/child the actual act of baptism, the words and gestures, the signing with water mean a great deal about one's own faith, one's belonging and participation in this family of God who will share in the sacrament.

IMPLICATIONS

Baptism is neither a Christian dedication ritual nor a Christian equivalent to a bar mitzvah-- a rite of passage for a young adult prepared to assume the mantle of his faith consciously and on his own. Baptism in the New Testament is a rite of initiation, and should be practiced on anyone who is at the point of entering the covenant community/church/family of God or has already done so, whatever their age. Once one has crossed the boundary from the world into Christ one should already have the initiation ritual, the rite of passage into the community. As a first step in the journey of the Christian life, not a graduation, baptism is an entry then into the life of the Church as believers in Jesus Christ.

Adults:- When someone who has never been baptised before becomes a Christian, that is enters a relationship with Jesus Christ and begins to live their life in a changed way, they are to be baptised as Jesus instructs.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the end of the age.” Matthew 28 v18-20

For adults, baptism is part of our being received into the Christian community/the church.

All the baptisms in Acts are missionary baptisms. The book of Acts neither raises nor answers the second generation question-- what do we do with children born into and raised in Christian families who know no other way of life? In 1 Corinthians chapter 7 Paul suggests that the children of even one Christian parent is 'holy' i.e, *set apart for God*, and not unclean. Acts and Paul's letters (see 1 Corinthians chapter 1) talk about the baptism of whole households. As mentioned earlier, we learn from the Old Testament the special sign of Circumcision was the mark of believer's children belonging to God within the 'covenant'. It was a reminder of their special relationship called 'covenant' with God. [I will be your God and you shall be my people] In the New Testament this covenant is fulfilled in Jesus. Baptism and the use of water is a sign of God's promises to us and our children in Jesus Christ. Jesus was himself baptised , not that he needed to, but to identify with us. The adult or child being baptised is identified with Jesus and is welcomed into the

Church as one of God's people. When one or both parents are followers of Jesus Christ that child may be baptised as Peter spoke in Acts chapter 2 teaching us;

“repent and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far o – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ACTS 2 v38 –39

For adults it is usually a part of their response of confessing Jesus Christ to be Lord and Saviour. It is about committing ones whole life to Him, and to be part of the Church where we grow in faith as the years go on.

Infant baptism rests upon these promises and recognises the parents faith in Christ and their living as part of the Christian family (usually in the local church), who also assume a shared responsibility for your child and you in being disciples. The Church of Scotland takes the vows of parental, personal, faith confession i.e. commonly called '*joining the Church*' as important in seeking an infant baptised. Indeed, the understanding of infant baptism taken from the Bible emphasised that it is something for those who are part of God's family and who desire and seek to respond to God's grace in Jesus Christ and live the new life and all that that entails and means.

THE SERVICE

In the baptismal Service, whether infant or adult a declaration of God's invitation and promises surrounding baptism are heard through the words of institution and instruction that come from Scripture. The outline is generally as follows:

God's Invitation and Promises - preliminary explanation of baptism

Response (elder introduces) - Having heard God's gracious promises to us in Christ, we come with **A and B** desiring that xxxxxx be baptised among God's people in this place today.

[Water is poured into font] [*child/family pour out into font*]

We pour this water for baptism as a sign of the washing away of sin, a sign of our union with Jesus' death and resurrection, a sign of the promise of new birth in Christ, a sign of incorporation in the church, a sign of the promise of the Holy Spirit, and a sign of the covenant and kingdom of God. All of this a reminder of god's grace towards us and our children.

With all God's people, let us profess our faith in the triune God.

Brothers and sisters, young and old, I ask you to profess together the faith of the Church.

ALL: I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

and born of the virgin Mary.

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.**

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

**and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come
to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body, and the life ever- lasting. Amen. (Apostles' Creed)

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Baptism:

In response to all God has done for us and offers us we come:

XXXXXXXX

I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

As I cup my hand around your head little one, May God hold you and keep you.

As I rock you in my arms little one,

May Christ shield you, and encompass you.

As I bend to kiss your cheek little one, May the Spirit bless you and encourage you.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

—from 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Blessing (child is carried up/down aisle as Congregational Sung Blessing)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be kind and gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favour and give you peace.

And so I invite you **A and B** since you have presented xxxxx for baptism, to declare your own faith, and to make your vows in the presence of God, before God's people in this place.

Do you publicly declare your faith in God as your heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit as your Helper and Guide??

We do.

Do you promise, with God's help, to provide a Christian upbringing for **xxxx** to bring her up in the love and knowledge of God, and in worship, fellowship, and instruction of the Church, and to encourage her faith in every way, so that one day **xxxx** may come to know

Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and in due course confirm this sign with their own declaration of faith?

We do, God helping us.

Welcome - As a congregation we make our vows followed by Prayers.

What the Parents are Doing

Firstly you are confessing your faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. You are saying that you have already committed your life at some point to following Jesus. Additionally, you make certain promises before the whole people of God – the congregation – and God to do all in your ability and power to bring your child up to know the same faith you share and live out.

What the Congregation are Doing

Baptism is a communal act. A key part of the service is the congregation's role with you. As well as witnessing your profession of faith and promises, they make a promise to support you as part of God's family in this particular place and share responsibility to provide opportunity for your child and all children in the fellowship with Christian teaching, encouragement and support and prayer. An example would be -

Brothers and sisters, we now receive _____ into the fellowship Christ's body the church. I charge you, as the church, to nurture and love him and to assist him to be Christ's faithful disciple.

ALL: With joy and thanksgiving, we now welcome you into Christ's Church, for we are all one in Christ. We promise to love, encourage, and support you, to share in the Good News of the Gospel, and to help you know and follow Christ.

Someone from the congregation will therefore be involved in bringing you forward and offering a prayer.

Baptism is more than just words. It is a significant event in the life of your family and for the congregation that involves us in putting these promises of faith into practice. As much as we therefore commit to this, it begins in celebration of all God has done for us.

Photography & video

As your child's baptism is an integral part of a service of worship please advise your family and friends that no photography is permitted during the service. There will, however, be the opportunity to take photographs at the font following the service and you are welcome to do this.

As this is a service of worship, intrusive or distracting video recording is not appropriate.



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