



BAPTISM! WHAT IS IT?

I am really glad that you are considering being baptized. Baptism is a really exciting event. It is an announcement to the entire world (your friends, your family, your co-workers, the cashier at Eaton's), that you are unshakable in following Jesus Christ as your Lord for all of your life. Nothing could be more exciting than giving up on the silliness of living your life for yourself (bigger car, more shirts, etc.). Now you get to live it for the King of Kings!

Baptism is also a declaration that you cannot do this Christian life-thing alone and that you need the power of God and the love of His family right along side of you. Being baptized is knowing that you will never have to stand alone again. Just think -- you are the best friend of Jesus and, all together, so are we!

Baptism is a wonderfully community celebration -- we celebrate with your devotion to follow Jesus, and we celebrate that you will walk with the rest of us all the way to heaven! Consider bringing your friends and family to your baptism. In fact, invite them to come to the special service where you will be introduced to the congregation and presented with your baptismal certificate.

I'm glad you're interested in baptism. I'd like to explain it to you, and answer some of your questions if I can.

What Is Baptism?

Baptism is an historical and sacred Christian celebration that has continued for 2000 years. Most of the great saints of all time have been baptized. Even Jesus was baptized. So when you are baptized you follow in this Christian honor roll of saints.

Some semi-cynics call it that "backwards bath" in which believers are immersed backward in water as a sign of their commitment to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is also a statement to the world and to God that you accept Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Do I Need To Be Baptized In Order To Become A Christian?

No, baptism isn't what makes you a Christian. Your trust in Jesus and your commitment to be His disciple is what makes you a Christian. The Bible teaches, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). So you can't say, "I'm better than you are! I'm gonna get baptized!"

Remember the thief on the cross next to Jesus? When he called out to Jesus in faith, Jesus promised him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). He didn't have time to be baptized, and yet he was forgiven and offered eternal life with Jesus. Faith makes us a Christian. Period.

Then Why Should I Be Baptized?

Good question. Baptism is the Bible way of responding to Jesus' call for you to become His disciple. Faith saves you; baptism is your first step of obedience to your new Master.

Notice Jesus' last words to His followers: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15). Pretty strong, isn't it? Belief in Jesus leads to Christian baptism just like working out at Fitness World leads to sweating. (Not a very good analogy but I hope you get the point.)

While faith is what saves you, baptism is pretty closely associated in the Bible. Except for the thief on the cross, there is no record of an un-baptized believer anywhere in Scripture. So if you want to be a follower of Jesus, then baptism is the first step after praying to give your life to Him. If you claim to be a follower of Jesus but have put off being baptized, how do you know you aren't fooling yourself? Jesus' disciples put the highest priority on doing what He said to do.

Also in the Bible you will read, "go and make disciples of all nations," Jesus told His disciples, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). So we at Capilano Christian Community try to do what Jesus taught the Church to do since the very beginning. In calling you to be baptized, we are being as obedient as you are in being baptized.

What Is "Believer's Baptism"?

Some churches baptize babies and children who aren't old enough to understand and believe their own faith in Jesus. I really respect this tradition if there is genuine faith in Jesus Christ in it. Parents are promising through this kind of baptism to raise their children in faith and in the church. But there is a problem with this: a lot of people now baptize out of formality or tradition or even kind of a magic religion. If your infant baptism was like this, then you have not really been baptized.

At Cap, we strongly believe that parents need to dedicate their children to the Lord, and we have a special service for this. However, since the Bible never talks about baptizing infants, we reserve baptism for those who are old enough to make their own faith commitment, hence the term "believer's baptism."

While children who are very young can begin to trust Jesus and have a growing spiritual life, we have found it is best to wait (at least) until children are in the third or fourth grade before they are baptized. This way, when they look back on their baptism in later years, they can see it as a genuine act of commitment and faith.

I also think it is very important for parents to reserve the right of their children to make the choice of faith rather than presume it for them. It is great to dedicate children and to let them ask for baptism when they are of an understanding mind.

What's The Difference Between Immersion And Sprinkling?

The amount of water is not the issue. It is the faith that is at issue. Immersion is a translation of the Greek word "baptizo" which means "to dip" or "to immerse." In Bible days this is how they baptized people, in rivers and pools and streams.

"Sprinkling" probably came about the Second Century in response to the need to baptize elderly and infirm people who might not survive immersion in a cold lake or stream. It spread due to convenience. But sprinkling as a means of baptism loses some of the rich meaning of washing and burial and resurrection (Romans 6:4) that comes with immersion. We baptize by immersion because I think that it is the Bible way and I think it brings out the full meaning of baptism.

What Does Baptism Mean?

It is common to hear theologically educated people (but they probably can't change their car tires) talk about baptism as "an outward sign of an inward grace." In other words, baptism is a symbol of what God has already done in our lives.

These are some of the things that baptism signifies in the Bible:

- ✓ **Cleansing.** In the same way we wash away dirt from our bodies, God cleanses us from our sins. Baptism is a way of saying publicly that we are turning from our sins and receiving Jesus' forgiveness (see Mark 1:4-5 and Acts 2:38). In the New Testament, this is the instruction to a new believer: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16).
- ✓ **Faith.** Baptism is also the Bible way that people identify themselves as Christians. When people put their trust in Jesus, immediately they were baptized. They didn't wait for a month or two. If they could, they went right out and were baptized that very day.
- ✓ **Union with Jesus.** The Apostle Paul speaks of "being united with Him" by baptism (Romans 6:5). "All of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ," the Bible says (Galatians 3:27), much like you might put on a new set of clothing. When we are immersed in water and feel the water all around us, we experience something of this sense of being "united" with Jesus.
- ✓ **New Life.** The Bible also refers to baptism as a symbol of dying to the old life and burying it when the believer goes down under the water. When he or she comes up out of the water after baptism, the Bible likens it to rising from the grave with Christ to a new life (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).
- ✓ **The Holy Spirit.** Immersion in water is also a sign of how we are immersed by Jesus in the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist prophesied, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 3:16). Peter also instructed new converts, "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). When we are Christians, the divine Holy Spirit is in us, around us, over us, and throughout our beings. We are immersed or baptized in the Spirit.

More Questions And Answers About Your Baptism (And if you have more questions, call me.)

Question: I was 'christened' when I was a baby. Do I need to be baptized again?

→ Answer: There is really no such thing as "re-baptism." You either were or you weren't. Your infant baptism was really your parents' way of dedicating you to the Lord, and, as that, it was a wonderful expression of their commitment to God on your behalf. Faith moves in stages. Your parents initiated your initial faith experience. Now it is time to take spiritual responsibility for your own life.

However, if there was faith in that act for them and you have been raised in faith and accept that baptism, then perhaps you have been baptized already (though without your informed consent). I accept this; though you can tell by the convoluted way I write about it, that it is somewhat awkward for me. I believe that these people can reaffirm their faith in ways other than baptism and at Cap we are pretty creative in finding those ways.

Most of you will need to find a way to express your trust in Jesus and your commitment to Him by being baptized as a believer. Nobody can do that for you.

Question: What should I wear?

→ Answer: You might wear a bathing suit with a white T-shirt over it and a pair of sandals or running shoes. No, only the Pastor gets to wear a wet suit (unless for medical reasons). Baptism is supposed to be a chilly, backwards and illogical faith experience. Don't protect yourself from it.

Make sure you bring a towel and a change of clothes, comb, blow dryer, etc. I wonder how people in Jesus' day could be baptized without their blow dryer handy?

Question: I was baptized when I was six or seven and don't really remember it. Should I be baptized again, now that I am a real Christian?

→Answer: You're experiencing one of the problems associated with baptizing children a little too young. Why don't you talk with me about this? I will help you understand what happened when you were a child, and give you good advice on whether you ought to be baptized now.

Question: Will this mean I am baptized "Baptist" or "Presbyterian"?

→Answer: No. You are baptized "Christian." Whatever Christian church you may attend in the future will recognize your baptism as a genuine expression of your faith in Christ.

Question: I am pregnant. Should I get baptized?

→Answer: You sure should! The water is not so cold as to cause any shock to the child. If this is still a concern, we can 'sprinkle' you as you wade up to your knees. You will also be baptized first so that you don't have to stand around and get a chill. Bring a bathrobe to put on after your baptism.

Question: My family is upset about my baptism. What should I tell them?

→Answer: This can be really tough. When I was baptized as a 21-year-old adult, my mother was pretty upset. She felt that it was a judgment on her and my Dad because I found faith outside my family. She even put my 'christening' certificate on my desk as a silent statement that what I was doing did not meet her approval. But she came to my baptism and put up with it. 3 years later she came to know Christ personally and was baptized in the same church! What a joy!

I think that you ought to invite your family to come to your baptism. Tell them it is meaningful to you if they come. Tell them (if this is true) that their early acts of faith and church experience provided the foundation for your adult decision now. If they are genuine Christians (whatever church they attend or did attend) they will delight in your very personal discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the very least, they will respect your convictions.

Question: My family and friends are not Christians. Should they come?

→Answer: Yeah. Faith is not just for the believer. Pre-believers become believers through your faith. Baptism can be a signpost not just for you but also for them. In fact, invite all your pre-believing friends and relatives. Tell them it is a unique opportunity to see a 2000-year-old sociological event. They can even write a paper on it for their SFU classes in anthropology.