

What does baptism mean?

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[0 : 00] Well we're in Acts chapter 2 verse 36 which was just read to us. And this took place right at the beginning of the history of the Christian church.

! Jesus had been crucified and he'd risen from the dead. And Peter was speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem, some of whom might well have seen Jesus' death and some of them might even have been involved in it because they were shouting out, they might have been the ones shouting out, crucify him, crucify him.

And as you will have noticed, they say to Peter, what shall we do? And Peter says, 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.

So let's think about baptism a little bit with that as our starting point. Baptism is a marking point done by a meaningful action.

So I suppose one example of this in our culture would be marriage. For a marriage, something happens in your life and it's marked by an assembly of a lot of people.

[1 : 26] By the saying of particular significant words, in a marriage the bride and groom usually have special clothes and there's usually a meal.

In a wedding there's sometimes the exchange of tokens like a wedding ring or if it was an Indian or Sri Lankan marriage there would be a gold tali. And before you have this ceremony you're not married and after you have the ceremony you are married.

So it's a meaningful action which marks a change in life. And baptism is rather like this. The action is to plunge somebody under the water.

There will be some words explaining this and committing to it. There is a significance which is related to Jesus Christ.

But there are some differences. For example, you can be a Christian without being baptised.

[2 : 37] And you can be baptised without being Christian. The two things aren't linked quite as strongly as in the marriage ceremony.

And yet there is this link. And I had three things to say about it. Number one, it is a mark of a new beginning.

It looks a little bit like a bath. And having that symbolism isn't too far wrong. In a bath you go in dirty and come out fresh and clean.

And in baptism one is saying that one is dirty with one's sins. The things one's done wrong in one's life.

And in Jesus Christ there is a cleaning up. He can clean us, cleanse us from sin. So the idea of baptism as going down dirty and coming out clean through Jesus Christ is a fair enough understanding.

[3 : 52] It's like having an old life. Going under the water. Coming out with a new life. Or like crossing a river. You go in on one side and come out on the other side.

And when Peter explained this on the day, in the reading that we read, the people started off unforgiven. And he said, repent and be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And receive forgiveness. So there's that sort of beginning. And he also said, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So there's a life without the Spirit of God.

Without his help and support and strength. And then afterwards there's a new life. With the promise of the Holy Spirit. And so Maureen and Aaron are saying this.

They're saying once my life was different. And now my life. Sorry. Once my life was one way. And now my life is different. It's a beginning. It's a new beginning.

[4 : 53] And it's marking this new beginning through baptism. Once my life was in all sorts of complications. Of various sorts. But now the Lord has helped me get straight.

Once I was outside Christ. I didn't have it all in focus. But now I've got a purpose and a meaning. And a structure in my life through Jesus Christ.

So Maureen and Aaron. This is for you to mark a new beginning. A new beginning. Secondly it is belonging.

When Peter speaks back in the bit that we read. He was saying. He said to them. Leave.

What he actually says is. Save yourself from this corrupt generation. And those who accepted his words were baptized. And about 3,000 were added to their number that day.

[5 : 53] So it's about belonging. He used to belong to the group of people. Who saw things in a certain way. And lived in a certain way. And had certain values and expectations. But now you belong to a different.

A different way of thinking. A different community. The community of Jesus Christ. You didn't belong to him. But now you do belong to him. You are. As the Bible would put it.

In Christ. And you used to belong to that community. And now you join the community of Jesus Christ. The people of Jesus Christ.

The church of Jesus Christ. And so. Maureen. And Aaron. You are. Saying. That I now belong in a new way. I've got a new group of people.

Who I would say. Are my brothers and sisters. In a. In a real way. And I've left. One world. And I've joined.

[6 : 49] A new community. The community of Christ. Where there is his presence. And his power. A community where prayer. Is what people do.

A community with new values. With hopes. That stretch beyond this world. Into the world to come. So baptism is a new. Belonging. And thirdly.

It's via believing. It's not. Just. Something that you do. And it works like clockwork. The. There is a spiritual.

Reality to it. Which works by faith. So although in the bit that we read. You. That Julia read to us. It didn't. I don't think it used the word faith.

And yet it does say. Those who accepted his message. Were baptized. That's important. There is a Christian message. Says all sorts of things.

[7 : 47] And to become a Christian. You need to accept that message. To take it on board. To say. I'm not disagreeing with this. As I used to. But I accept it.

I take it into myself. It's faith. And faith put into action. It's important to try. To convey.

That Christianity. Is not. A list of rules. That you say. I'm going to do this. And do this. And do this. It is first of all. Faith. It's saying.

God has done this. God has said this. And I'm accepting that. It's a religion. In which God does. What humanity. Cannot do. And our job.

Is to receive this. To receive. What he offers. By faith. So Maureen. And Aaron. As you.

[8 : 44] Go down into the water. And come. Out again. You're expressing. I believe this. I accept. The message of Jesus Christ. Christ. And I am. Putting.

My life. Into the hands of the Lord Jesus. I'm trusting him. And those are three things. Which I hope will be helpful to understand. About baptism.

It's a new beginning. It's a new belonging. And it's. Via. Believing.

By faith. Thank you.