

Baptism: an Act of Faith

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Date: 20 July 2025

Preacher: Rev Carol Rattenbury

[0 : 00] Let's pray for a moment. Father, open our ears to hear what you have to say to us.! Open our hearts to be changed by your Holy Spirit!

If we were living in New Testament times, we could use the word baptism for each of these.

Because the Greek word baptizo means to immerse, to drench, to douse, to dung, basically to get very wet. So that's the root of the word.

But what goes behind that word when we have a baptismal service? As a church, we're firmly in the Reformed tradition.

And we use something that's called covenant baptism. It's whereby Christian parents bring their children to the Lord, and those parents and God parents ask to affirm their belief in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, just as we've done, as we said, the creed together.

[1 : 39] And then they make promises to bring up their children or their child. With the help of us, the local church, in that faith.

And that they promise to sustain their children by praying for them, so that in the fullness of time, they too will become committed to the Lord, and take their place in the worshipping community.

In baptism, anyone, whether it's an adult or a child, is seen to enter into what we call the covenant of grace.

That's that new covenant between God and his people. So in baptism, we become part of the visible people of God. Something we do need to bear in mind, is that covenant baptism, particularly for infants, is not part of salvation.

It isn't a guarantee. Anymore, in the Old Testament, circumcision guaranteed that every Israelite was going to be faithful to God.

[2 : 56] And as we don't have to read very far in the Old Testament to see that, very often, not many of them were faithful to God.

So, the act of baptism isn't a guarantee. But it is a sign that we are in the covenant community. Paul knew that we often don't live up to the promises we make, and he wrote this to the church in Corinth.

I don't want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud, and in the sea.

And all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Being part of the covenant community doesn't actually guarantee anything.

[4 : 17] It's a good place to start. Nowadays, as fewer people are Christians, fewer parents see baptism as something that's important.

And when we once had, probably just about every babe born in Invergorb and being brought for baptism, baptizing children has become quite an uncommon event.

So we end up having the joy of baptizing adults, bringing them into the covenant community, into the people of God, when they have found faith for themselves.

But baptism, whenever it happens, whether it's as a baby, or as a child, or as an adult, it's part of an amazing journey of faith that we embark on as followers of Jesus.

And no one is ever too old to take that step. If you were baptized as an infant, and you feel that call on God on your life, it's a wonderful joy at any age to be baptized.

[5 : 39] And if you were baptized as a baby, you don't need to worry that there isn't anything special for you. We do have special services to renew those baptismal promises and to welcome you into a full and active role within Christ's body.

Prompted by Dean's baptism, I was tasked with looking at a little bit more, in a few more details, at what baptism is.

And as we've seen, baptism starts in the New Testament. It starts with John's baptism, a way of proclaiming that Messiah was coming, telling people to get ready, telling people to repent of their sins, to repent of their unfaithfulness to God, to get themselves right with God.

And so, people took, it was a hard message, but the people took it to heart. And it would have been very uncomfortable, not a little bit humiliating, to come and to be baptized in the Jordan, in front of all your peers.

But they did it, because they knew they wanted to be right with God, and that they weren't right. It was a physical act, representing the repentance of their hearts.

[7 : 15] It was an outward show of the inward repentance. But John knew that even his baptism wasn't going to be enough, and that they would need the baptism that Jesus promises, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to really deal with what we're like on the inside.

As we've seen, the Gospels, all the Gospels tell us that Jesus was baptized. He wasn't baptized as an act of repentance, because clearly, he didn't need to repent.

He was without sin. So, why was he baptized? So, he could identify with us, and we could identify with him.

He wanted to show just how, how much of a human being he was, that he was totally human. And so, he joins with us, in baptism.

And then, as we've also heard, read to us, Jesus tells his followers to go and make disciples of all nations. Not to stay inward looking, but to go out, and one of the things to do when you have made a disciple is to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[8 : 49] that's what he commissions us to do too. Not just those gathering of his intimate circle when he was alive. It's what we're supposed to do with his disciples.

But what is baptism, apart from an opportunity to get very wet? It's a rich picture of spiritual realities.

The obvious one is washing, of being cleansed, of being cleansed from our sin. It isn't the water that's used that does the cleansing. It's Christ's death and resurrection that makes our being clean possible.

baptism itself symbolizes our dying to self, dying to sin, and being made alive in Christ.

Again, the Apostle Paul writes, this time to the church in Rome, what shall I say then? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means.

[10 : 00] We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it anyway? I don't know. But 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.

Baptism by immersion is a particularly strong picture of this. If you think about it. Going into the water and going under the water is like dying to our old life, burying it, getting rid of it.

like Jesus himself died and was buried. And in coming up out of the water, we are reborn, a new creation, resurrected like Jesus.

We have a new life. And we have baptism as a sign. This new birth, new birth, this new birth by water and the spirit.

[11 : 17] It's a visible demonstration of our new life in Christ Jesus. It's a visible, tangible way of showing that we have turned from darkness and sin and we are going Jesus' way.

We are going the way of his light and his forgiveness. As we are baptised, we are baptised into the body of Christ.

It symbolises our inclusion in God's family. It reminds us that together we are one in Christ. We all share in that.

We are part of this interdependent community that has the responsibility for sharing Christ's work on earth now that he's with his father.

I'm quoting from Paul again this time in his letter to the Galatians. So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

[12 : 27] There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free. There are neither male or female and you are all one in Christ Jesus. Being baptised is an inclusive thing.

It shows our oneness that we all start from the same position. We all start as needy sinners needing forgiveness. And in all this the Holy Spirit plays an active part.

John said that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit in a sense a better baptism than the one he was performing. Jesus will saturate us through and through with the Holy Spirit.

And it's that Holy Spirit within us and around us that helps us to live the way God wants us to. And I think the operative word is he helps us to live the way God wants us to.

He doesn't force us to. He doesn't compel us. Although sometimes it feels I can do no other. He's there to help us particularly when things get difficult.

[13 : 50] And when we get baptized as an adult it's a way of saying I believe that Jesus is Lord.

That Jesus is the most important person to me. I submit to him and to whatever he wants me to do. It talks and demonstrates our dependence on him.

And that's why we do it in public. It's a public declaration. It's not something that's done in a corner in the cupboard. It's something that we do in front of people so that we can make it a public declaration of faith.

Baptism has an ongoing purpose. If we want to live faithfully and we have times of struggle we can look back to our baptism.

The New Testament calls us to remember our baptism when we're tempted or even when we've sinned or when we're just simply discouraged.

[15 : 06] It's something that we've been through. It's something we can cling to and say yeah, it was real. I was there. I was baptized. And it will give us that strength to know that we are who we are in Christ.

That we have been made whole and forgiven in him. That we have been put into God's family. It reminds us of our identity in Christ.

That we are God's children. We are rescued and redeemed through Jesus' death and resurrection. And our hope is that at the final resurrection of the dead, when Christ returns, everything will be made completely new.

So, however we are baptized, whether we are sprinkled or doused or dunked or any other method, or whenever it happens, whether as an adult or as a child, the really important thing is the spiritual reality behind it.

That faith in the gospel, that faith in Jesus, that acceptance of him as saviour, and that thing to cling to as we pursue to live faithfully for Jesus day by day, as we welcome him into our lives through baptism, as we go forward with him into the rest of our lives.

[17 : 02] We don't go along, he comes with us. What blessing that is.