

Sunday 13th July 2025 - Baptism Testimonies

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 July 2025

Preacher: Natalie Allen, Shaz Stephens, Holly Beresford

- [0 : 0 0] So to be baptized literally means to be immersed. And it's an ancient ritual that followers of Jesus have followed for nigh on 2,000 years now.
- ! Something that Jesus tells us to do. And being baptized with water, this substance which is crucial for life, is symbolic really of us offering ourselves afresh to God.
- To be cleansed and refreshed as we seek to live life in line with the ways of God. But although we just use ordinary water for this act, it's more than just a symbol though.
- Indeed baptism is called a sacrament. As in some profoundly mysterious way, it's an outward sign that something more is going on inside.
- You know, an inner working of God's grace and love. And that grace and that love means that in baptism, we simply come before God as we are.
- [1 : 0 1] But wanting to publicly declare our trust in God and to ask for God's spirit to come and shape our lives. That desire to know and to trust God, that's enough for baptism.
- There's no test to pass, no qualification to achieve, no expectation. That will have everything there is to know about God worked out as if that could ever happen anyway.
- Rather, baptism is a simple but hugely significant step on our journey of following Jesus. Good news is today, we've got various members of an extended family unit who have been with us here at St. John's for a good few months now.
- And who are going to be taking either the plunge in the pool today or being sprinkled at the font instead. So we've got Natalie. Natalie's going to be baptised at the font along with Shaz.
- Shaz is going to be reaffirming her baptism vows at the font. And then we're also going to be baptising Holly and Chuck's youngest son, Sydney, at the font as well.
- [2 : 1 2] Then Holly is going to come in the pool with us. She's going to reaffirm her baptism vows and she'll also be bringing their son, Evra, to be baptised in the pool as well.
- And Holly's dad, Ed, is going to come and help us do the plunging in the pool. Ed is also Shaz's partner and Natalie's partner, Charlie's dad. So there's a whole big family connection going on here.
- And if you're not quite sure of the connections, you'll get there, I'm sure, I'm sure. I know for me, it's been a privilege to begin, really, to get to know them over these recent months.
- And it's a privilege, too, for us now to witness and be with them on this special day as their faith journey unfolds. Indeed, when people come forward for baptism or reaffirming baptism vows, it's always encouraging to hear something of their story and the way that God has been leading them to this day.
- So I'm very grateful that Natalie and Shaz, they've written some words, which I'm going to happily read on their behalf today as public speaking isn't their thing, which is totally understandable, believe me, on that one.

[3 : 24] And then Holly, she's going to share something in her own words of her testimony in a little bit, too. So, she's going to share some words from Natalie. And Natalie and Charlie are expecting a baby girl, and that gives us some of the context.

So Natalie says this. She says, As I prepare to welcome a daughter into the world, it's given me a new sense of purpose and clarity.

I realized I didn't want to keep waiting for the right time to grow my face. Today, I'm being baptized because I want to welcome her into a home centered on love, peace, and faith.

I want to be the kind of mother who leads by example and lives with kindness and forgiveness. Every day, I pray that she will be healthy, happy, and that her delivery in October will be safe.

I pray she'll feel surrounded by love the moment she enters this world, the same love I'm choosing to embrace today. I want my daughter to see that I choose hope, that I'm not afraid to grow, and that I turn to God in both joy and struggle.

[4 : 44] And I believe this baptism is the best first step I can take for both of us. Thank you. Top words, Natalie.

Top words. Well done. Well done. Well done. And then Shaz has prepared. So we're getting emotional already, aren't we here?

I tell you, this is good. Shaz has prepared some words for us today as well. Again, it's my privilege to read them on Shaz's behalf. She says, Being here today, I want to share something deeply personal.

It's not easy for me, especially as an introvert who usually avoids the spotlight. But my desire to reaffirm my focus on God is stronger than my fear of attention.

He is the reason I step forward, and I feel a great urge to do this for him. Throughout my life, especially during my childhood and teenage years, I've faced many challenges and battled dark thoughts that only a few know about.

[5 : 56] Despite these struggles, I've always felt his presence in my heart, offering strength, no judgment, unconditional love, and guidance.

He is my rock. For me, God is the father I never had, and I speak to him daily. I know he is there for me around the clock, ready to listen to any concern, no matter how small.

His commitment to me has never been in doubt, even when I've doubted myself and felt unworthy. He's always lifted me up, showing me my worth, and granting me peace when I needed it most.

He's shown me on many occasions that I am indeed worthy. I thank him every day for giving me a second chance at life, and for the new opportunities I am now experiencing through him.

One of my favorite sayings is, God is good. I want to thank him for the patience and guidance I have received throughout my life.

[7 : 07] And so as a small gesture of gratitude, love, and my commitment to him, I want to be baptized again, reaffirming my dedication to God.

Splendid words. Well done, Shaz. Great stuff. Great stuff. And then the third story we're going to hear is from Holly.

She's going to come up in front. Let's give Holly a round of applause then. Well done. Well done. I'm going to hand the mic to you. Thank you. Hello, everyone. As Matt mentioned, it's a reaffirmation of faith for me.

I was baptized as a child and grew up pretty lukewarm. As I got older in my teenage years, I fell into a pretty deep depression. Turned my back on everybody, even God.

And I'll be honest with you all, I mocked religion. I mocked God and denied myself the very connection that my soul was craving. At 29, I decided that enough was enough.

[8 : 11] I wanted to fight for my peace, my joy, and to be able to enjoy the blessings that I've been given in my life, like my three wonderful children and my stunning husband. And so one night, I found myself praying.

Nothing fancy, just raw emotion pouring from within my soul. And as I felt the Holy Spirit fill me, I felt the most immense joy, peace, and comfort.

Soon after this, I felt compelled to buy my first Bible, and I began to study the word hard. And at some point, something within me just clicked. I realized without any doubt or conviction that Jesus loves me unconditionally.

Despite my failures, despite my wondering, I am still his child, as are all of you. He loves me anyway, and that will never change.

Since then, my life has transformed, and I'm really happy to say that I have peace. That is why today, I choose to reaffirm my faith, and have two of my children be baptized with me so they can grow up knowing God's love.

[9 : 17] As I move forward, eyes fixed on Jesus, with this amazing church family behind me, I just want to say thank you for standing here with me today, and that I am living proof that Jesus absolutely saves.

Well done, Holly. Fantastic, fantastic to hear those words as well.

Yes, so good.