

Baptism

Baptism is one of the sacraments (mandates of Christ) of the church. Baptism involves two components, really. It is 1) a historical fact that is 2) accompanied by a personal faith. The historical fact is that Jesus came to earth, died for my sin, was buried in the ground and rose for our salvation. That's a fact. And baptism is the personal faith demonstrating the historical fact. If you've never seen a baptism, come on August 19. In baptism, the one who is being baptized is saying, "Here's who Jesus is and here's what He's done for me. He died for my sins, was buried, and rose again for my salvation. My old life is buried with Him. My new life is lived for Him.

Why Should I be Baptized?

1. **Because Jesus was baptized. READ Mark 1:9.** That was John the Baptist. We call him that because he baptized a lot of people and one of them was Jesus.
2. **Because Jesus commands it. READ Matthew 28:19-20.** So, He was not only an example. He told us that we should be baptized.

Now, notice that there is an order there. First, make them my disciples, then baptize them, and then teach them about the Christian life. Many people think, "I really need a better Christian before I'm baptized. I need to memorize some Bible verses and pray at least once on my own." No, the truth is, baptism is like the initiation into the Christian life. It's not the graduation. It's the initiation. And every Christian should be baptized as soon as possible after he/she believes in Jesus.

3. **Because it demonstrates that I am a believer. READ Acts 18:8.** In the New Testament, *believing* and *baptism* were always put together. In fact, 1 John 2:3 says, "We know that we have come to know Him, if we obey His commands." In other words, if we really believe, we'll obey Him. And Christ's first command is to be baptized, as a symbol to the world that we *really* know Christ.

What is the meaning of baptism?

1. **It illustrates Christ's burial and resurrection.** Jesus Christ died on the cross, was buried in the ground, and then rose from the dead on a Sunday. That's why we call it "Resurrection" Sunday. **READ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4** then **Colossians 2:12**, "For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ."

So, baptism is a visual metaphor (a picture, object lesson, symbol) of what Christ has done for us). Just as Jesus Christ died, was buried in the ground for three days and then stepped out of the tomb on Sunday, we take a person, put them under the water, leave them there for three days, ☺ and bring them up again.

But in all seriousness, I can't possibly think of a better way to illustrate Christ's death and resurrection than by taking a person under the water and bringing them back up.

2. **It illustrates my new life as a Christian.** 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. The old life has passed away and a new life has begun."

When you become a Christian, all your sins are washed away. You start over. So baptism is also a symbol of all of your sins being washed away. It says: I'm pure. I'm no longer dirty. I'm clean.

Look at **Romans 6:4**.

Now, here are a few more important points. Baptism doesn't make you a believer. It simply shows everyone else that you believe. Baptism doesn't save you. Our sins don't float on top of the water. Some denominations at one time believed this. They'd skim the surface of sins before baptizing the next guy. They'd try to save the most rotten people until the end--like saving the dirtiest dish til last.

To be clear, your faith in Christ is what saves you. Baptism shows others that you've placed your faith in Christ.

Why Immersion?

There are many churches that practice baptism by putting a little water on the forehead. Other churches will sprinkle some water. We do baptism by putting a person totally under the water—by immersion. Why?

1. **Because Jesus was baptized that way.** Matthew 3:16 says, "As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water."
2. **Because everyone else was baptized that way.** Every Biblical example of water baptism that we have is by immersion. Look at **Acts 8:38-39**.
3. **Because the word baptism means "to dip under the water."** The literal meaning of the Greek word, *baptizo*, is "to immerse."

Here are some quotes from the founders of various denominations that no longer immerse but originally practiced immersion:

- **Martin Luther** (who founded the Lutheran church) says, "I would have those who are baptized to be entirely immersed, as the word imports and the mystery signifies."
- **John Calvin** (who founded the Presbyterian church) says, "the word 'baptize' signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church."
- **John Wesley** (who founded the Methodist church) said, "Buried with Him, alludes to baptizing by immersion according to the custom of the first church."

Who Should be Baptized?

Every person who has believed in Jesus. Acts 2:41 says, "Those who *believed and accepted His message* were baptized." Acts 8:12 says, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news... and in the name of Jesus Christ, they were *baptized*, both men and women. Notice that in both cases, belief is prior to baptism.

And this helps to explain *why* we baptize older children as opposed to infants. We wait until the children are old enough to believe and understand the true meaning of baptism before we baptize them.

So, the natural question that follows is: *If I was baptized as an infant, should I be baptized again?* I'll offer a few thoughts. Remember that baptism has no influence on your status with God: saved or unsaved.

Look at 1 Peter 3:21.

You see, some believe that if they have their baby baptized and if anything happens subsequently to the baby that the baby will wind up in heaven. People hurry to baptize their babies even though there isn't any evidence of this in the Bible. Peter says it isn't the removal of dirt (or the baptism itself) that saves you at all. Rather, you are saved by putting your faith in Jesus, or as Peter says it, "pledging your conscience." "God, my conscience is clean. I've repented of my sins. I appeal to you for salvation," etc.

Again, it's not the getting wet that saves you. It is your faith in Christ. You can't stand before God and say, "Look God, I'm yours, I'm wearing flip-flops. I'm one of the wet ones, Lord." So if you were once baptized, but didn't have faith in Jesus, all you got was wet. Don't trust in the "removal of dirt from the body." Trust in "pledging a clean conscience towards God." Don't trust in your baptism, trust in Christ.

So, if you committed your life to Him as an older child or adult, it makes sense to celebrate and announce your commitment as an older child or adult. Baptism is a beautiful expression of your trust in Jesus. It will mean a lot to *you*. And, it makes sense to want to be baptized the way Jesus and all of the other early Christians were baptized. And when we say early Christians, we mean the earliest of Christians—the very first to be baptized, before various other customs and traditions of man were practiced.

When Should I be Baptized?

The Biblical answer to this question is as soon as you have believed. Acts 2:41 says, "Those who believed... were baptized... that day!" They didn't have to go through weeks of education and Bible study. They didn't have to clean up their act. They needed only to put their faith in Jesus Christ. So, if you're a believer, then there's no reason to delay. As soon as you have decided to receive Christ into your life, you can and should be baptized. So, the next natural question that follows is: "Why don't we baptize every time someone commits their life to Christ at North Ridge Church | Stratford?" And the answer is purely practical—because we don't have a baptismal as a fixed part of our rented space.

I'd like to tackle a few practical questions about baptism...

Can My Family be Baptized Together?

In the strictest sense of the word "together," no. You can't. If I were to baptize five Denfeld's at once, I'd probably leave Sandy under the water. But in terms of succession, one after the other, absolutely! We encourage that. And if there are young children, again, we want to make sure that they understand the meaning *behind* what they're doing.

What Should I Wear?

Anything that is dark and modest. I would encourage pants and not shorts. Likewise, up top, don't give away any secrets. I would also encourage you to bring a change of clothes, a towel, and a plastic bag for your wet clothes. We do have restrooms for you to change in.

Will I have to Say Anything?

No. Here's what's going to happen. We'll ask you if you've confessed your sins and surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. We'll have music playing during this time and no one's even going to hear you except for the pastors. Then (I have some helpers to illustrate this), we'll lower you under the water and bring you back up. Then you can leave the baptismal tank, dry off, and watch the others who are there to be

baptized.

I would like to encourage you to invite your relatives and friends who need Jesus to attend this event. This is huge. If you think about it, baptism is like a big advertisement for Jesus. It's a billboard. It's saying, "I'm not ashamed to say that I'm a Christian. I'm not ashamed to tell everyone here, publicly, that I believe in Jesus Christ!"

What if I have a Special Need?

If you, for whatever reason, have a special circumstance, and cannot be baptized at a public service, our leaders will baptize you privately.