

Baptism

at Woodlands



why it's important, what's involved
and how to prepare for it

Thank you for expressing an interest in getting baptised. This booklet has been put together to help you understand what baptism is and how we go about it at Woodlands.

We'd recommend that you go through this material with a Christian friend or leader, so that you're well prepared for baptism and all it means.

It's my job as Baptism Coordinator to make sure that this process works well for you, so if you have any issues, questions or thoughts, do get in touch.

Nigel Savage

nigel.savage@woodlandschurch.net



Contents:

Understanding Baptism	1
Exploring the Bible	8
Getting Ready	12
Getting Practical	14
Making the Most of It	16

You can find more materials, resources and video online at our Baptism site www.woodlandschurch.net/baptism

Understanding Baptism

To help us understand baptism and what it means, we're going to look at three things - **Why** is Baptism Important, **What** Does the Bible Say about it and **How** Do I Apply these Principles?



Why is Baptism Important?

Right from the first pages of the New Testament, baptism has been a part of the Christian story. Indeed, it's one of just two symbolic acts, along with the Breaking of Bread, that disciples of Jesus are commanded to practice. Baptism is an outward step of obedience, launching us into a lifetime of inner obedience to the teaching of Jesus and the promptings of his Holy Spirit.

Done right, baptism can be one of the most powerful and memorable experiences in the life of a follower of Jesus. It's a simple matter of Show and Tell.

1. Show...

People come to faith in Christ in all kinds of ways. For some it's a dramatic moment, for others a gradual progression. Meeting with God is something that happens on the inside, often in private - and not witnessed by those around us.

Baptism, though, is the public part of coming to faith. It's an outer sign of an inner faith.

Just as a marriage ceremony declares a couple's love, so baptism declares a new believer's decision to repent and follow Jesus. You might not be able to physically see the love two people have for each other, but when you hear the vows and see the rings, flowers, veils, hats and weeping mothers - you pretty much get the picture. The confetti and camcorders make an invisible commitment visible. In the same way, nobody can see your faith in Jesus, but baptism shouts the message loud and clear.

That's why people in the Bible were always baptised when they came to faith. In fact the church began on the day of Pentecost with 3,000 baptisms. (Acts 2)

2. ..And Tell.

There's another side, though. Baptism is not just a nice excuse for a party. It's a command.

In Matthew 28 Jesus laid out his Great Commission for the church. He told us to

*"go and make disciples of all nations, **baptising** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you".*

The process of becoming a disciple of Jesus has three distinct components. First, someone has to go to you and share the good news of God's love with you. Next, you need to be baptised as a public sign of your new life and faith. After that it's a life long journey of being taught to obey the commands of Jesus.

Baptism is not an optional extra. It's right there, sandwiched between coming to faith and growing in faith.

That's why when the early apostles preached the Good News they commanded people to "repent and be baptised". It wasn't up for debate or discussion. It was a simple, straight forward, 'do-it-now' command.

What Does The Bible Say About This?

1. Fake Your Own Death

Read Romans 6:1-12

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

Just Imagine

Just Imagine a woman whose life has gone bad. She's in debt up to her eyeballs, and currently on the run from the law after committing a particularly serious crime. Worst of all she's trapped in an abusive marriage, and her husband tells her he'll never ever let her go because they made a commitment "till death us do part".

She decides death is indeed the only way she'll be parted from her troubles. If she's dead, she won't owe anyone anything, she can no longer be prosecuted by the law, and her marriage is legally and morally finished.

Trouble is, there are also down sides to being dead.

So she hits on the perfect course of action. She fakes her own death.

Baptism means burial with water, and there's no burial without a death.

The Bible tells us that when we surrender our lives to Jesus we get the full benefits of death - his death. We are no longer liable for our own sins and failures. We are released from the law of having to please God by doing good things. We are set free from our slavery to the world system and the kingdom of darkness.

Baptism isn't about simply faking a death, a *physical fantasy*. It's about acting out a truth, a *spiritual reality*. We are literally counted dead to sin and the hold it once had on us. We are baptised into the death of Christ.

Baptism symbolises burial. When we go into the water we're acting out, and identifying with, the death of Jesus. Rather than being buried under six feet of soil, we're submerged under water. Being raised out of the water is a victorious demonstration that we have risen with Christ to a whole new kind of life. It's a hugely powerful picture.

But it's even more than that.

Just Imagine

Two people greet you at a party. The first one shakes you by the hand with no display of emotion whatsoever. The hand is rigid and cold, the eyes are empty of feeling and the shake is polite but formal.

The second person, however, grabs hold of your hand and shakes it vigorously with great enthusiasm. In fact they take hold of your hand with both of theirs. They don't say anything, but their body language communicates a tremendous excitement to meet you. You can't help but smile.

Both of those hand shakes were symbolic acts. The difference is, though, one had a positive, powerful impact that *communicated* welcome and acceptance, instead of merely symbolising it. The other was simply a formal ritual, meaning little. Symbolic acts in the Bible are never meant to be empty rituals. God actually wants to embrace and touch us through these things. A spiritual communication through a physical act. In this sense, baptism is like the rest of the Christian experience. It needs faith to give it meaning.

That's why the Bible can talk about us being buried with Christ in baptism and being united with Christ - in a new, resurrection life - and actually mean it. Baptism becomes more than just a photo opportunity when you mix it with faith. It becomes a powerful encounter with a spiritual reality.

2. Make Your Own Stand

Read Acts 8:26-38

"The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him."

Just Imagine

It's your seventeenth birthday. Your father proudly gives you a beautifully presented package. You rip the wrapping to reveal a couple of "Learner" plates. "Here you go," says Dad. "I've got your provisional license. Put these plates on the car and you can take me for a spin!"

You decline the offer. "No, thanks," you say. "I'd rather get some lessons first, then take my test. Once I've passed that I think I'll develop my technique and get a few years experience under my belt. Then I'll put on these plates!"

Not only is this totally missing the point - it's also against the law of the land. "L" plates don't signify an experienced or qualified driver, but rather one who is starting out. In the same way, baptism isn't a sign that you've arrived as a Christian, but rather that you are starting out. It's your signal to the world that you've started motoring and they better watch out. Like a wedding ceremony - it's something you should do at the start of your new life, not half way through it.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that they must reach a certain level of spiritual maturity before they get baptised. Some people want to wait for the perfect moment when they feel they've arrived as a Christian. But the Bible is clear that as soon as people made the decision to turn from their old lives and to make Christ their Lord, they were baptised. Even if that meant that some of those who'd been baptised ended up turning their backs on their faith in Jesus. One individual earlier on in Acts 8 was criticised for his "wickedness" and "bitterness" shortly after he'd been baptised. He was very much a 'learner'.

In this passage of the Bible the Ethiopian was left in no doubt that if he wanted to follow Christ he should be baptised. It's part of the package. It's putting your money where your mouth is. It wasn't particularly convenient, and it certainly wasn't pretty, but it was the way that he - and every other convert to Christ - celebrated and demonstrated faith in Jesus.

Faith, if it's true, cannot be separated from 'works' - practical demonstration. It's not always easy to tell people that you've become a Christian, but baptism doesn't just tell others - it shows them.

It's the way you make your own stand for Jesus.

3. Take Your Own Place

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

We've talked about baptism being a symbol of commitment to Christ, rather like

a wedding ceremony symbolises a couple's commitment to each other. But a woman doesn't just get a husband on her wedding day. She gets a whole new family! In the same way, baptism signifies not only a covenant to Christ, but also to his body - a whole new family.

That's why it's good where possible to be baptised in a public church setting, because we're being baptised into Christ's body, as well as his death and resurrection. Maybe this is one of the reasons Jesus commanded us to be baptised. It's a great leveller. It doesn't matter what social or racial, economic or intellectual background we come from - we all go through the same baptism. There's one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one Father, one faith and one baptism. (*Ephesians 4:5*) And that makes us all equal.

So when you get baptised the whole body celebrates with you the fact that you have found your own place in this wonderful God-inspired family.



How Do I Apply These Principles?

1. Faith for a Personal Encounter

Jesus never asked us to do anything just for the sake of it. A kiss is a sign of affection, but if it's not mixed with real emotion then it's in danger of being counterproductive. Baptism that is not mixed with real faith will just leave you wet.

Paul said in Colossians 2:12 that we are buried with Christ in baptism, and raised with him through our faith in the power of God. It's faith that gives baptism its meaning and its power. Without faith, it's pointless.

When you go into your baptism there's something you should definitely expect, and something you definitely shouldn't. What you should expect is an encounter with God, and a new experience of the reality behind the ritual. For some it's an overwhelming emotional experience. For others it's an end to doubts and worries over their new faith. Some feel like crying, others feel like laughing. For Jesus, baptism meant a personal affirmation of his worth to his Father, as well as the start of some very difficult testing and temptation.

It may take many forms, but expect a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit.

What you should not expect, however, is one particular emotional experience. You are an individual and God will always treat you as such. Don't look at others, and don't go chasing someone else's experience. Come with faith and an open heart, and expect God to do something unique and individual and personal to you.

2. Faith for a Powerful Effect

In real terms, your baptism represents one of the most dynamic opportunities for you to share your faith with those that know you. That's why baptism is so compelling. Not only is it an act of spiritual defiance to the powers that be, but it is also a powerful statement to family and friends. You act out not only your own change of life direction, but also the death and resurrection of Jesus.

You should take the opportunity to invite as many people as you possibly can to witness your baptism. For many this may be the only thing that will bring them into a church setting. A thought through and simply presented testimony will help visitors make sense of the symbol. Just as baptism acts out Old Life, Death, New Life - so your story should outline your old life without Jesus, your experience of coming to faith, and the new life you've now embraced.

They both end with parties and food, but you should really think of your baptism more in terms of wedding than funeral. Work out a way in which your family and friends can be included in and join in your celebration. Most of all, make sure that they have the opportunity to make their own response to a clear presentation of the gospel.

You need to have faith that God will powerfully effect your friends and family through your stand. Believe that God will bring others to faith at your baptism.

3. Faith for a Practical Event

At some point the rubber has got to hit the road. You're going to have to talk to someone about practicalities and you're going to need to put a date in the diary. Go for the earliest opportunity possible. Don't put this off.

Don't get hung up, worked up or stressed up - just make sure you're prepared. As well as finding faith for the spiritual impact on yourself and your visitors, have faith that God will take care of the practical details of the event.

We'll discuss how to handle the practicalities of getting baptised at Woodlands in the final section, after some Bible studies to help ground things a bit more.

Exploring the Bible

It's always a good idea to investigate the Bible for yourself. We've put together four simple Bible studies for you. There's a short passage of the Bible for you to read and then a series of questions to think about.

First of all pray about what you've read and then take some time to consider the questions. You might want to make notes as you go.

Don't rush through these studies, but maybe try tackling one a day. We'd recommend that you meet up with the person who's helping you prepare for your baptism once you've completed them. Talk through the things you discovered, as well as the things you found confusing or challenging. Expect God to speak to you in the process.

There are four studies:

The Baptism of **John**

The Baptism of **Jesus**

The Baptisms of **Philippi**

The Baptism of **Paul?**



The Baptism of John

Read Luke 3:1-20

John's Baptism was about the past - repenting and receiving forgiveness for sins committed. How did baptism signify a person's repentance? How did it symbolise forgiveness?

John's Baptism was also about the future, preparing the way for the Messiah. How do you think baptism symbolised the coming of Jesus?

What sort of people came to be baptised by John and what spiritual state were they in?

What did John emphasise should accompany baptism?

The Baptism of Jesus

Read Matthew 3:11-4:1

If John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance," then why was Jesus baptised when he had nothing to repent of?

What most impresses you about Jesus' attitude during his baptism?

Why do you think that Jesus chose to make himself an example of baptism, rather than the exception?

What happened as a result of Jesus' baptism - can we expect similar experiences?

The Baptisms of Philippi

Read Acts 16:10-34

Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, was obviously a wealthy and influential business woman. Why did she need to be baptised when she already believed in God and worshipped him?

What were the circumstances surrounding Lydia's conversion - formal and informal? And what does her immediate baptism tell us about her, and about Paul? On what basis was she considered a "believer in the Lord"?

Read the jailer's story through and try and estimate the time of night that he was baptised with his family. What conclusions do you draw from this?

How was the jailer's family affected by his conversion? What did he experience after his baptism?

The Baptism of Paul?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-18

When disagreements and quarrels arose in the Corinthian church what did Paul bring them back to?

Whose name are we baptised into, and what does that signify?

Why do you think Paul avoided baptising people himself? Is it necessary for us to be baptised by the most spiritually mature person available?

Are You Ready?

Time for a bit of self reflection. Use these questions to think through the implications and importance of baptism for you. It's a good idea to go through your responses with the person that's helping you prepare. Make sure you're honest with them and with yourself.

1. Why do you want to be baptised and why is now the right time for you?
2. If baptism symbolises dying to your old life - and to the power of sin over you - what things do you specifically want to 'die to'? (Negative patterns of thought and behaviour, addictions, regrets etc.)
3. Baptism signifies that you want to make Jesus Lord of your life and live life his way. What will this look like for you in the different aspects of life - finance, work, relationships, sexuality, values, time, discipline etc.
4. What do you want out of your baptism? Is there anything you want God to do in you through it?
5. What message do you want to communicate to your friends and family through your baptism?



When you get baptised, these are the questions that we'll be asking you:

"Do you believe in God the Father who made you, in Jesus the Son who died for you and in the Holy Spirit, who comes to live in you?"

"Do you make Jesus Christ your Lord, committing yourself to him and seeking to follow him from this day on, as he gives you strength?"

Getting Practical

Before the Day



1. Choose your Date

Once you've decided to get baptised, you need to agree a date that works for you and any friends and family you're planning to invite. We tend to hold Baptism Services monthly, usually on the fourth Sunday of the month. You can choose to get baptised during one of the morning services or at the evening service, depending on which service you usually attend. You can even arrange to have your Baptism at a Pastorate meeting midweek, if you're looking for something a bit more low key.

2. Choose your Team

It takes two people to baptise you. At least one of them needs to be a Woodlands Church leader, but the other person could be a significant friend, family member or Pastorate leader. Just as long as they're a strong Christian - both physically and spiritually!

You'll also need someone to hold your towel. Please let the Baptism Coordinator know who you want these people will be.

3. Choose your Worship Song

You may request a particular worship song to be sung during the service. If you could recommend a couple of songs that you like, we'll let the worship leader know and they'll try and include one of them in the worship set. Just let the Baptism Coordinator know during the week before your Baptism.

4. Film your Story

When you get baptised it's the perfect opportunity to share the story of what your faith means to you. We've found the best way to do this is to film a short 2-3 minute video with each Baptism candidate. For most people, filming beforehand is much less stressful than a live interview in front of a large crowd, and it helps keep your story clear and concise.

As well as showing it on the day, we usually post the videos to our website. That gives you the opportunity to share your story further afield, with friends and family that can't make the service, as well as with others thinking about faith in general. We'll also give you a commemorative copy on DVD.

Filming tends to happen a week or two before the Baptism service and we'll make sure you know when and where that is. Although most people find the thought of being filmed a bit nerve wracking, it really isn't anything to worry about. In fact it's a lot easier than you think and you can always bring a friend along, if you need some moral support.

Of course, if you can't make the filming - for whatever reason - we can do a live interview on the day.

You can see examples of Baptism videos online in the Baptism section of our website.

www.woodlandchurch.net/baptism



On the Day

1. You should aim to arrive 30 minutes before the service for briefing and prayer with the service leader and Baptism assistants in the side chapel.
2. Remember to bring a towel, complete change of clothing and beware of see-through clothing! You'll need to remove socks, shoes and glasses for the Baptism.
3. We'll ask you the two questions at the bottom of page 13 immediately before we baptise you.
4. When baptising, the slower the descent, the less of a tidal wave. When the head hits the water we give an extra push to plunge right under to totally immerse.
5. A few prayers are said while you're still in the pool (but not under the water!).
6. On leaving the pool, it helps if you can let your legs drip in the pool as you get out onto a chair or platform.
7. You can get changed in the toilets by the side of the stage.
8. Opportunity for further prayers can be said afterwards, normally once you've got changed.
9. The Baptisms can be filmed and recorded, so you can have a copy if you wish. Please ask for this in advance.

Making the Most of it

Baptisms are a real high point in the life of church, a celebration of God working in people's lives. They offer a very natural and easy opportunity to invite non-church family and friends as guests to the service.

We'd like to help you make the most of this unique opportunity.

1. Invitations

We've created a simple invitation that you can give out or email to invite people to witness your Baptism. Extending an invitation for an event like this is a very natural thing to do and even if people can't make it they're often touched that you thought of them. You'd be surprised by just how curious and interested people are about church and faith - especially when it involves public soaking.

2. Welcome

We aim to make Woodlands a welcoming place for any visitor every Sunday. Yet with large amounts of visitors at Baptism services, the Welcome Team isn't always able to personally greet everyone. We'd like to encourage you to enlist the help of your home group or Pastorate to meet and welcome your friends and family. Coming to a large church for the first time can be daunting and a friendly welcome from someone often makes all the difference.

3. Party!

Getting baptised is a celebration and what better way to celebrate than have a party? If you're getting baptised in the morning, then it's really easy to invite your friends and family to a lunch afterwards. You could use the Crypt or Upper Hall at Woodlands or go off to another venue.

Again, we'd like to encourage you to get your church friends and homegroup as involved as possible. Let them sort out the meal so you can be freed up to chat with people. This kind of thing happens all the time at Woodlands, so if you'd like some advice just ask us and we'll talk you through catering and how best to put on a simply, enjoyable meal.

The same can be done after an evening baptism, either going off for drinks somewhere or a late dinner. Make sure you take the opportunity to share a few words with everyone to underline your story and thank people for coming to support you.

4. What Next?

You can be sure that some of your guests will be interested in finding out more about faith or the church. We make it our business to have a supply of Welcome Packs and Discovery material constantly available, as well as flyers for social events, special services and the latest Alpha Course.

Make the most of this by getting hold of a selection of take home materials beforehand. Then you can give them to your guests or make them readily available at any after-service function. It's too good an opportunity to miss.



and finally...

We've said it before - baptism is a starting point, not a sign that you've arrived. When it comes to discipleship, baptism is a signal of intent, a line in the sand.

Now comes the challenging part - learning to obey the commands of Jesus as you follow him. If you've not yet become part of a Pastorate or Homegroup then make sure you find one that suits you. Working out your faith in community with others is the only effective way to really grow as a Christian. If you need help finding a Pastorate or mid-week community to belong to, then just ask us.

It's a wonderful thing that you've decided to get baptised. You're making a public commitment to live your life with Jesus as Lord. We want to do everything we can to help you succeed in this wonderful adventure.

Note. The teaching material and Bible studies in this booklet are taken from 'Up Close & Personal', our 10 session course for new Christians. If you'd like to get hold of a copy then contact us on office@woodlandschurch.net



www.woodlandchurch.net/baptism