

Baptism at Journey of Faith

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

-- The Baptist Faith and Message 2000

What is Baptism?

Baptism and communion (the Lord's Supper) are the two ordinances prescribed by the Lord Jesus Christ as visible symbols of invisible grace. Both are tangible and distinct representations of the invisible truths of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit's application of the Gospel in our lives.

In both ordinances, Christian believers have the opportunity to remember God's grace and mercy, specifically revealed in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. Baptism and communion reflect the death and resurrection of Christ and our participation in faith and through our union to Him. When we enter the water or watch another person do so, we are reminded that Jesus Christ was crucified and raised from the dead and that we also have died to the old self in order to live for Christ and His glory.

What an individual believes about baptism influences how he will observe the ordinance and how he answers the why, who, when, how, and where of baptism.

Is Baptism Just a Symbol?

Baptism does in some sense operate as a "means of grace" by which God sanctifies and encourages His people. However, we need to keep the following in mind about baptism:

1. Baptism does not save.
 - a. Though grace is mysteriously mediated through the ordinance, it is not saving grace but rather sanctifying grace. We are more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ when we obey Him in the call to be baptized. Baptism is a symbol of the faith in Christ that alone saves.
 - b. Romans 6:3-11 (ESV)
 - i. *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united*

with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

- c. Colossians 2:9-15 (ESV)
 - i. *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*
- 2. Baptism is not necessary for salvation.
 - a. While not diminishing the delight and duty of baptism, we must also guard against the thought that suggests salvation is dependent upon baptism. The Gospel message is about salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.
 - b. Romans 1:16-17
 - i. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*
 - c. Romans 3:21-26
 - i. *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*
 - d. Ephesians 2:8-9
 - i. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Why Should a Person Be Baptized?

Matthew 28:18-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Acts 2:37-41

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 22:16

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

1. To obey the commands of Jesus Christ
2. To evidence that an individual is a disciple of Christ
3. To follow the example of Christ

Baptism is a privilege and not just a responsibility. We are given the opportunity to demonstrate our love for and trust in the King through our obedience to follow this ordinance. We have not correctly understood the joy of following Christ in baptism if we think of baptism as just a burden to complete. Our response should be similar to the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 when he believed the Gospel and said, "What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:37). Baptism should be our joy, and we should enthusiastically anticipate our participation in the ordinance.

Even though there are certain costs associated with baptism, the reward of obedience is always more worth it.

The desire for baptism ought to be motivated by a desire to glorify God in faithful obedience. Other motivations (for friends or family, to join a church) must not be the main reason for seeking baptism.

Who Should Be Baptized?

Matthew 28:18-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Journey of Faith practices believer's baptism, meaning we only baptize people who confess and believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In the book of Acts, baptism is specifically tied to repentance, receiving the Word, and believing and receiving the Holy Spirit. No direct evidence exists that nonbelievers were also baptized.

Acts 2:41

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Galatians 3:27

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Romans 6:3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Should a Person Be Rebaptized?

For individuals immersed or sprinkled at an earlier age, it is important to understand that only once should we be baptized. However, if a person experienced immersion in water or sprinkling before being born again and believing in Christ, his experience was not a baptism, and thus he needs to be baptized. The question that must be asked is: "Did I truly trust in Christ when I was baptized?"

There are always seasons of growth and periods of greater maturation for everyone who believes in the Gospel. A believer must not be rebaptized every time he experiences greater joy and sanctification. If a person believes, however, that his original experience was prior to truly believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, then he should be obedient on this issue by being baptized soon.

When Should a Person Be Baptized?

Acts 22:16

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

An individual should be baptized soon after he believes in Jesus. The Bible does not mention delayed baptisms in which a regenerate believer does not obey the ordinance. The Bible states that baptism is soon after a person is saved into the Christian faith.

Improper Motivations for Delaying Baptism:

1. Fear
 - a. Anxiety ought not to hinder our obedience. We should all understand that fear is sin and should not be accepted in a passive manner. An essential aspect of discipleship is confronting sin, and obedience in this aspect is a great way to begin the sanctification process against the fear of man.
2. Not Being Good Enough
 - a. A person is never “good enough” for baptism. The righteousness of Christ, not our own merits, is the foundation for the right to enter the baptism waters. We should confidently obey His command and follow His example if we are united to Him.

At Journey of Faith Church, baptism candidates are asked to delay for a brief time while attending a baptism class and waiting for a baptism service. This process allows us to discuss the Gospel and the meaning of baptism and to teach our church’s belief on both subjects. It also provides the church the opportunity to celebrate together as a family, sharing in the joy of a person’s obedience while also agreeing to walk with him in Christian fellowship. Lastly, it enables the individual being baptized to invite friends and family, who then have the opportunity to celebrate and to hear the Gospel being proclaimed.

How Should a Person Be Baptized?

Even though other churches and denominations baptize by sprinkling or pouring, Journey of Faith Church practices baptism by immersion. The reasons include:

1. The Greek word for baptism (*baptizo*) literally means to immerse, to submerge, or to plunge.
 - a. The Greek *baptizo* is transliterated to the English word baptism. In Greek literature, *baptizo* was used to describe the action of immersing in water or in another liquid. Later, the word became a term associated specifically with Christian baptism.
2. Immersion best expresses and represents the believer’s union in Christ’s death and resurrection.
 - a. The reality and symbolism of burial + resurrection is best shown when a believer is placed under water and then brought out from the water.

- b. Additionally, the Bible uses water to symbolize judgment, such as the flood (Genesis 6-7) and the Red Sea (Exodus 14). When a believer passes through the baptism waters, he is expressing trust that Christ has satisfied the judgment of God.
 - c. Colossians 2:12
 - i. ... *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*
 - d. Romans 6:3-4
 - i. *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*
3. The biblical context of baptism suggests immersion baptism.
- a. Matthew 3:16
 - i. *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;*
 - b. Mark 1:5, 10
 - i. *And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*
 - c. John 3:23
 - i. *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized.*
 - d. Acts 8:38-39
 - i. *And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.*

Where Should a Person Be Baptized?

Even though the Bible does not prescribe a location, the best preference is to practice baptism within a local church, so that a congregation can celebrate with a believer's act of submission and obedience. Baptism also publicly identifies a believer with a local, visible church.

How Journey of Faith Church Does Baptism

Prior to Baptism:

1. We ask every person who wishes to receive baptism to participate in a baptism class. In this class, we explain the Gospel, fundamental Christian beliefs, and our theology of baptism.
2. After attending this class, we ask baptism candidates to give a salvation testimony so that the church can see evidences of saving grace and a proper understanding of the Gospel. For example, we want to make sure a person does not believe he was a Christian based on his physical birth or that Christianity is all about moral improvement.

Baptism Service:

1. Our church encourages everyone wishing to receive baptism to do so in these services.
2. Candidates are asked to share their testimony (if possible) or to videotape their testimony.
3. After the testimony, the person conducting the baptism will ask, “Do you believe and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?” to which the baptized person answers, “Yes” or “I do.”
4. The baptizer will then immerse and raise the baptized out of the water while saying, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

Baptism and Membership

At Journey of Faith, baptism is a requirement for church membership. Anyone who wishes to join the church must display obedience to this command of Christ subsequent to his/her conversion. Although we practice baptism by immersion, we do not require immersion for membership. If an individual was immersed or sprinkled after his/her conversion, he/she meets our membership requirement.

Further Reading

- *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright
- “Baptism” in *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* by Wayne Grudem

