

Preparing for Baptism

LifeChurch Auburn Hills

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

Baptism has been one of the most central practices to followers of Jesus from the very beginning of the church. Because Christians come from every every tribe, tongue, and nation, the way Christians express their faith can look radically different from one another. The same is true for baptism. You may have encountered a baptism where a priest wearing a robe sprinkled an infant was sprinkled with water. You may have encountered an adult's baptism in a backyard pool attended by friends and family. Christians don't totally agree on what baptism means or how to do it. But, all Christians agree that baptism *really* matters.

The book of Acts in the Bible tells the story of an amazing event – the first baptisms of a large group of people who put their faith in Jesus as the Lord and savior of the world. In response to hearing the good news that Jesus had been raised from the dead, a crowd asks the Apostle Peter: so what should we do about it?

"Peter replied, "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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call....Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." (Acts 2:38).

This short passage summarizes our convictions at LifeChurch Auburn Hills about baptism.

- Baptism celebrates the forgiveness we receive from God for our sins
- Baptism marks us as part of the "number" of God's family
- Baptism declares our "yes" to God's call to follow Jesus
- Baptism reminds us of the promise of receiving the Holy Spirit

What did Jesus say about baptism?

In the New Testament, a prophet named John the Baptist, urged people to undergo baptism in the Jordan river as a sign of repentance and trust in God for forgiveness of sins. They committed to turn away from their sin and turn toward God. John was getting the people ready for the coming of Jesus, the Son of God. John prophesied that those baptized in Jesus name' would not only be baptized in water but with the Holy Spirit.

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4)

John answered them all, "I baptize you with^[b] water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16).

Jesus was baptized by John, not because he needed God's forgiveness (He was sinless), but because he fully identified with human sin and was committed to his mission to redeem us. In this moment, Jesus is saying "yes" to obey God the Father. And God the Father responds with an emphatic "yes" over Jesus God's beloved Son!

Jesus answered, "Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness."

So John agreed to baptize Jesus. ¹⁶ When Jesus was baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. ¹⁷ A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him." (Matthew 3:15-17).

God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21).

He then commanded it to be done, in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, as part of the process of people becoming His disciples (followers). Baptism doesn't mean that we've fully arrived as a Jesus follower--rather, it's a beginning of a life-long journey of growing more and more into people who live the kind of life that Jesus himself lived.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19).

What actually happens when I'm baptized?

We believe that baptism is a sacrament. This word comes from the latin word *sacramentum*, which meant an oath of loyalty pledged by a Roman soldier to their leader. The early church adopted this language for specific rituals (baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc.) that enacted an expression of faith in and obedience to Jesus, our Lord. Sacraments have a special status in Christian practice. They are, by one definition, "an outward (or physical) sign of an inward and invisible grace."

The outward sign in baptism is the act of being plunged underneath and then raised up out of the water. The invisible grace is the process of dying to our sins by sharing in Christ's death on our behalf; and then rising up as a new person -- joining Jesus in His resurrection life, free to live in ways that please God, with the sure hope of eternal life with Christ. Going under the water and coming back up is a picture of what has happened and bears witness to others of our commitment to follow Christ.

Or 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. 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. (Romans 6)

But this is not just something that happens to us as individuals. Baptism is like a right of passage into the family of believers. It reminds us that through faith in Jesus, we take on a new identity as part of Christ's body on earth. This is a family not based on shared human DNA. But amazingly, it is a family that shares divine DNA because the very Spirit of God actually lives in us.

You are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1 Corinthians 12:13)