

BAPTISM

Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge

Why should we be baptised?

- **The example of Jesus**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17).

- **The command of Jesus**

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. (Matthew 28:19).

- **The command of the apostles**

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, 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..." (Acts 2:38).

- **The example of the early church**

Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41)

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. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:36-39)

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised. (Acts 9:18)

Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (Acts 10:47)

What does baptism mean?

The word 'baptise' means to immerse, to dip, to plunge. When something is baptised it is pushed under the water before emerging again (or not in the case of a sinking ship!). Baptism was a Jewish ritual washing. In the New Testament it is a symbol of cleansing from sin:

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16).

Passing through the water symbolises the removal of our sin by Jesus' death on our behalf.

In the New Testament this action is also seen as a symbol of our dying with Christ and being raised again to new life.

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. (Romans 6:3-5);

"...and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." (Colossians 2:10-12).

Christians have known a death and a re-birth. The Old Life has died and been buried. There is a new life now. Paul teaches that our dying, burial and new life all take place in union with Jesus own death, burial and rising again. This is symbolised by baptism. It portrays what has taken place in our experience. It shows that we are united with Jesus and we have left our old life behind.

Baptism is also the initiation rite for joining the church. It is a symbol of identification with Christ and his church –

There is one body and one Spirit -just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6).

How should we be baptised?

Christian churches disagree about this. Some say that merely pouring water or touching the forehead with a small drop of water is sufficient. But there are several reasons for insisting that in normal circumstances baptism should be by full immersion. There is the meaning of the word baptise: ie to dip or immerse.

It looks very much as if John the Baptist took Jesus down into the river and that he emerged from out of the river –

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River. (Mark 1:5).

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. (Mark 1:10).

John chose to baptise at Aenon because there was plenty of water there:

Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptised. (John 3:23).

And Acts 8:36-39 also seems to indicate full immersion:

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. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Also, the symbolism of union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, which is integral to Paul's argument in Romans 6, is simply not present in any other kind of baptism. Therefore we should be baptised by immersion except in extraordinary circumstances.

Who should be baptised?

Again, Christian churches disagree. Many baptise babies of believers on the basis of the Old Testament practice of circumcising the male children of Jews who were seen as part of the covenant. They say that the promise of God's grace extends to children of believers in the New Testament church and so it is legitimate to baptise them. The problem with this is that the New Testament doesn't make this connection with the children of believers. And when the New Testament connects circumcision with baptism, it assumes that those who are baptised have experienced inner spiritual regeneration:

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, (Colossians 2:11);

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).

Few evangelical Christians would want to claim this for infants.

In the New Testament there is no clear example of babies being baptised. The so-called Household Baptisms in Acts seem to stress some kind of active response on behalf of everyone in the household, for example in Acts 16:33-34

At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptised. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God - he and his whole family.

Moreover there is in the New Testament a clear order: "Believe and be baptised" and to baptise infants violates this; for example:

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... (Matthew 28:19).

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. (Acts 2:38)

For this reason we conclude that only those who can profess faith in Jesus for themselves should be baptised. For children and teenagers, we normally recommend that you wait until you are around 16 at the earliest – I can explain more about this if you would like.

If you have further questions, we recommend Peter Comont's helpful little booklet *Should I be baptised? A booklet for those considering the subject of baptism*. The church office can supply copies.

What does baptism do?

It is important to realise that there is nothing magical about baptism. It is a rich symbol not an act that is powerful in itself. All the same, it is a rich and moving symbol because what it symbolises is so personal and so important.

When we are baptised we are declaring to God, to the church, to our family and friends, to the world and to the devil and all the spirits, good and evil, that we belong to Jesus; that we have decided to follow him; that we have died to our old life and, started a new life which we live with him and in his power. This is an exciting and important declaration and one that helps us in our relationship with the Lord.

Eden and Baptism

At Eden Baptist Church we are delighted to baptise new converts and other Christians who for a variety of reasons have not been baptised as believers. Candidates discuss baptism and their own personal testimony with the pastor. We will want to hear about your faith in Christ, what difference it has made, and to be sure that you understand some basic Christian teaching.

We baptise people in good faith that their lives are lived under Christ's lordship, and that there are not visible sins, which we do not know about, which would discredit the witness of the testimony.

We will then arrange a date for your baptism during a convenient service, to which we encourage you to invite your family and friends. We encourage candidates to give their testimonies in the service though this is not compulsory.

Your baptism vows

In the pool you will be asked two questions:

1. Do you confess that you have turned from sin and placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? [Answer 'I do'].
2. And do you promise, depending on God's grace, to serve Christ faithfully in the fellowship of the church, for the rest of your life? [Answer 'I do'].

The pastor will say:

'Then on your profession of faith in Jesus Christ, I baptise you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.'

If you would like to talk about being baptised, please contact me through the church office or at home.

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