

Understanding Baptism

Believer's Baptism

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What Is Baptism?

"Those who accepted his message were baptized..."

—Acts 2:41a

Baptism is often described as an outward sign of an inward change. It is a public testimony that you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your baptism powerfully proclaims what God has done, and is doing, in your life. In addition, as a follower of Jesus, you are publicly saying that you join with Christians from around the world who are unified by faith in Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Great Commission

After Jesus' death and resurrection, he ascended into heaven. Before leaving, he gave his disciples a command about what to do after he left this world. This command is known as the Great Commission.

"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

—Matthew 28:19–20



- The word *baptize* comes
- from the Greek verb
- *baptizo*, meaning to cover
- or plunge in water, wash,
- dip, immerse.

Why Be Baptized?

Baptism is one of the most important practices in the church. It reminds us of Jesus' death and resurrection, and our relationship to God and one another through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus commands us to be baptized. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his followers to make disciples and baptize them (Matthew 28:19). Choosing to be baptized is an act of obedience to the Lord Jesus. It is one of the first steps you can take to demonstrate your willingness to follow Jesus' teachings.

Jesus set an example by his own baptism. Jesus' willingness to be baptized serves as an example for his followers. In baptism, we do as Jesus did (1 John 2:6). We follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).

Baptism is a testimony. In baptism, you publicly identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–5). You declare that you no longer live for yourself, but now seek to live for Christ, in dependence on God and obedience to him. Your baptism can be an opportunity to share the gospel with friends and family, to let them see what God has done in your life.

Baptism unifies Christians. Your baptism is a witness to other believers that you are a member of the body of Christ—the worldwide community of believers. In the Gospel of John, just before Jesus went to the cross, he prayed that his followers would be unified (John 17:20–23).

Baptism can bolster your faith. For many people, the experience of being baptized strengthens their faith. It can solidify your commitment to live the rest of your days as a follower of Jesus.



What Happens During Baptism?

Although baptism may look quite different from group to group, there are more similarities than differences. (Your church leaders will give you instructions before your baptism so that you will be prepared.)

1. **Water is always present**, whether it is in the form of a natural body of water (like a river or lake), a baptistery in a church, or a swimming pool.
2. **A church leader**—usually a pastor or church elder—will ask you a few questions to give you a chance to profess your faith outwardly. You may be asked to:
 - Profess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Profess your confidence that your sins have been forgiven.
 - Profess that by the power of the Holy Spirit you will do your best to follow Christ’s teachings.
 - Profess that by the power of the Holy Spirit you look forward to living forever with Christ.
3. **The leader will say**, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
The leader will then immerse you in the water.



What does it mean to be baptized *in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*?

Jesus instructed his followers to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). In Scripture, to do something in the name of a particular person means that the act is done with that person’s authority. For example, in the book of Acts, the apostle Paul commands an evil spirit to come out of a woman “in the name of Jesus Christ” (16:18). In other words, it was by Jesus’ authority—not Paul’s—that the evil spirit departed. Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit acknowledges that the baptism is done under authority of the Trinitarian God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 1:13–15.)

• To *profess* means to
• declare openly and
• freely to others. In
• baptism, this could
• mean that you state
• what you believe in
• your own words, or that
• you affirm (say “yes” to)
• a few specific questions
• about your faith.

What Is Believer's Baptism?

Believer's baptism refers to the practice of baptizing *only* those who have a personal faith in Jesus. Churches that practice believer's baptism baptize only believing adults and children who are old enough to profess a personal faith in Jesus (sometimes called the "age of accountability") and communicate a desire for baptism and understand its meaning.

In believer's baptism, the emphasis is on:

- Faith as a human response to God's grace.
- A believer who trusts in God.
- The obedience and faith of a believer.
- A believer's witness to the world.

An Example from the New Testament (Acts 2:5–41)

The apostle Peter preached to a large crowd from many regions who had gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. He explained to them how it was God's perfect plan for Jesus to die on the cross and rise again. It was impossible for death to keep hold of Jesus. When the audience heard this, they realized that they needed to turn from their unbelief. They asked, "What should we do?" 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." Three thousand new believers were baptized.

Christians agree that the act of baptism itself does not save a person. Salvation comes through Christ alone by faith.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."—Ephesians 2:8–9

