

Baptism @ River of Grace

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words, and baptism is essentially that—a picture. It is a picture of God’s salvation of his people. It is a re-enactment of the gospel as the one being baptized is “buried” in the water and then “rises again” to a new life. Colossians 3:1–4 says this: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

When a person becomes a follower of Jesus, that person’s old life has died at the cross where Jesus died, and a new self—a new nature—is given. No longer is the believer a slave to sin and death, but now he or she is free to love and serve God and to live in proper relationship with the Creator. Baptism is a picture of this transformation— this death and new life. When a person comes to know and trust Jesus, that person’s sins are washed away. Their slate is wiped clean, and they are made pure and holy by the perfection of their Savior who is their substitute. The waters of baptism, therefore, are not only a picture of being buried and rising again but also of the cleansing from sin that takes place the moment someone turns to Jesus for forgiveness and a clean start. The outward washing of the body in baptism symbolizes the inner washing that God has done in a believer’s life.

Baptism is also a public event. We see in Scripture that Jesus himself was baptized in a river—a public place. Therefore, we generally conduct our baptisms in a public setting because we believe that baptism is a public identification with Jesus and his Church. Baptism is the way that a believer in Jesus announces to the world that they are now a Christ-follower. It is a ceremony of public commitment to Jesus and his Church. Because of this, candidates for baptism will be asked a series of questions before they are baptized. They are asked questions like “Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner?” and “Do you confess that Jesus is God’s son come in the flesh to die for your sins?”

To many observers the questions asked and answered at a baptism remind them of the questions asked at a wedding (“Do you take this man...?”). This is because just as at a wedding, two people are joined together, and at a baptism a person is joined outwardly and publicly to Jesus and his Church.

Why should I be baptized?

There are several good reasons to be baptized. First, Jesus set an example for us when he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Jesus said that “Let it be so now [for John to baptize Jesus], for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15). Jesus believed that it was proper for him to be baptized—that his baptism pleased God. In fact, it was immediately following Jesus’ baptism that God spoke from heaven expressing his love for Jesus and saying that he was very pleased with him (Matthew 3:17). We can infer from this that baptism, as an act of obedience to God, is very pleasing to God. We should follow Jesus’ example because we want to be like him and because we want to please God.

Second, baptism is part of Jesus’ ‘Great Commission’ (Matthew 28:18–20). Jesus commands that his followers make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey him. The Great Commission is most frequently understood to be the marching orders for Jesus’ followers from the day he ascended to be

with his Father until he returns again. In other words, what the Church is supposed to be doing is primarily three things: making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey Jesus. I don't think I would have chosen to raise baptism to that same level of importance, but Jesus did. And as my Lord, I choose to follow and obey him. If he said to be baptized, then how dare we say that it is not important? Baptism is extremely important.

Third, the pattern given in Acts is that the message proclaimed by the apostles and the early Church was essentially, "Repent, believe, and be baptized." We see baptism elevated to a high level of importance in passages like Acts 2:38, Acts 8:12, Acts 9:18, and Acts 18:8. As well, the Apostle Paul, writing to Christian churches in the first century, assumes that those present in the congregation have been baptized. We see this in Galatians 3:26–27, Romans 6:3–4, and Colossians 2:11–12. So, baptism was assumed, expected, and required for all those who trusted Jesus in the early Church era. Baptism was not, and is not optional for followers of Jesus.

Who should be baptized?

The pattern of the New Testament is that a person believes in their heart and then baptism follows. So, only those who have surrendered their lives to the care and control of their Creator and who have trusted in Jesus alone as their Deliverer and Savior from sin, should be baptized. Baptism is not something to be entered into lightly. It is a serious business as it is a time of pledging our lifelong commitment to Jesus. Since the requirement for baptism is that a person is following Jesus, then it stands to reason that infants should not be baptized. While we allow those who by conscience believe their baptism as an infant satisfies the command of Jesus, we do not encourage this or teach it. As well, there is no command or expectation that infants be baptized in the New Testament, nor is there a clear example of an infant being baptized. So, we baptize only those who have professed faith in Jesus.

If you are believing in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and if you are following him and trusting him to lead your life, then you should most certainly be baptized. There is no reason to wait. It is quite hypocritical to claim that we are Jesus-Followers if we are unwilling to obey his very clear instruction to be baptized. If you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and have repented of your sins and received God's forgiveness, you are ready to be baptized, and you should be baptized at the earliest opportunity.

Why are people "dunked" under the water when they are baptized?

There are three main reasons for this. First, the word "baptize" comes from the Greek word "baptizo," and it literally means to dip, dunk, or immerse. Second, the teaching of the early church in the Didache (an early extra-biblical document most likely from the second century) says that immersion is preferable while pouring is acceptable if there is not enough water available for immersion. So, it seems that the early Church's preference was for baptism by immersion whenever possible. Third, immersion is a much richer picture of dying and being buried with Christ to rise forth to new life.