

Believer's Baptism at Treasuring Christ Church

What Is Baptism?

Baptism and communion (the Lord's Supper) are the two ordinances prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ as visible symbols of invisible grace. They are discernible and tangible representations of both the invisible realities of the gospel and the Spirit's application of this gospel to our lives.

With both ordinances, believers have an opportunity to "remember" God's goodness and grace, especially as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Both baptism and communion picture Christ's death and resurrection and our participation in His death and resurrection through union to Him in faith. As we enter the waters or watch another do so, we are reminded that Christ was crucified and raised from the dead and that we, too, have died to the old self in order to live for Christ.

What a person believes about baptism affects how they will perform the ordinance. Who should be baptized? When should they be baptized? How should they be baptized? All of these questions are answered as we reflect upon what baptism means.

The TCC Statement of Faith describes baptism as 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 a prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and the Lord's Supper.

As a symbol, baptism illustrates a number of significant realities:

1. Christ's death and resurrection
2. The disciple's union with Christ in His death and resurrection
3. The new life in which a disciple walks
4. Cleansing and washing away of sin

Is Baptism Merely A Symbol?

Within the Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries, the nature of the sacraments was fiercely debated, even between the various Reformers. Without attempting to justify any particular position, it is important to assert that baptism is in some mysterious sense a "means of grace," in which God sanctifies and encourages His people. That said, it is important to bear in mind a few helpful truths regarding what baptism is not and does not do:

- **BAPTISM DOES NOT SAVE.** 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 Christ as we obey Him in the call to be baptized.¹
- **BAPTISM IS NOT “NECESSARY” FOR SALVATION.** Without in any way diminishing the duty and delight of baptism for a believer, we must also warn against thinking which suggests that salvation is dependent upon baptism. The gospel is one of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.²

Why Should One Be Baptized?

Matthew 28:18-20: And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 Christ
2. To evidence that a person is a disciple of Christ
3. To follow the example of Christ

Baptism is not merely a responsibility but also a privilege. We have the opportunity to evidence our trust in and love for our King through obedience in this ordinance. If we think of baptism as a mere burden, we have not properly understood the joy of following Christ in the call to be baptized. We should have a similar response as the Ethiopian eunuch who, when he believed the

¹ While 1 Peter 3 states, “baptism...saves you,” it is important to note the context and particularly Peter’s immediate clarification that it is not the water but the “appeal to God” which saves. This corresponds to passages such as Romans 10:13, which states that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” We appeal to God and call upon Him as an expression of faith. Baptism is a symbol of this faith which alone saves.

² John 3 states that unless a person is “born of water and the Spirit” he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Many point to this as evidence of the necessity of baptism. However, nothing in the context suggests that Jesus is speaking of baptism. Rather, He is alluding to the promise of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36, which speaks of both “water” and “Spirit.” Therefore, Jesus is saying that “new birth” or “regeneration” is necessary for salvation, not baptism.

gospel, proclaimed, “What prevents me from being baptized?” It should be our joy, and we should eagerly anticipate our participation in the ordinance.

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

The desire to be baptized should be motivated by a desire to glorify God in faithful obedience. Any other motivation (to join a particular local church, to please a friend or family member, etc.) should not be the ultimate reason for seeking to be baptized.

Who Should Be Baptized?

MATTHEW 28:18–20: And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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.”

The TCC Statement of Faith says that baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” in other words it is for the person who has placed trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We practice what is called believer’s baptism, which means we only baptize those who believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Reading through Acts, we find baptism explicitly related to repentance, receiving the Word, believing and receiving the Holy Spirit. There is no explicit evidence to suggest that nonbelievers were 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.

What About Infant Baptism?

For most of church history, at least some portion of the church has baptized infants. This has been done for various reasons within different denominations. Within the Roman Catholic Church, infant baptism is believed to impart saving grace to the recipient. Within other evangelical and often Reformed churches, infant baptism is practiced because of the relationship between God’s covenants and their covenant signs. Infant baptism, it is argued, shows how God extended his covenant promise with Abraham—along with the covenant sign of circumcision—

to his people and their infant children (males), so also he extends his new covenant promise—along with the covenant sign of baptism—to both believers and their children.

However, infant baptism applies the sign of union with Christ to those who are not yet united to Christ. Furthermore, infant baptism does not fully appreciate what is new about the new covenant. In the new covenant, God forms His people in a new way that is radically different from the old covenant. A person enters the new covenant not by natural birth, but by spiritual rebirth. All those in the new covenant have their sins forgiven and know the Lord. All those in the new covenant have God's law written on their hearts. All those in the new covenant have God's Spirit living in them, renewing them, enabling them to walk in God's ways. Being born to Christian parents is no guarantee that these new covenant realities will be true for someone. The new covenant does not operate by birth but by rebirth. So the sign of the new covenant should only be given to those who profess faith in Christ, and thus have been born again. At TCC, we practice child dedication, in which parents commit before the Lord and the church to raise their children in the fear and admonition of this Lord.

Key texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:38-39; 16:15, 31-34; Rom 6:1-4; 1 Cor 1:16; 2 Cor 2:11-12

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.

In all the accounts in the Scriptures, baptism is rather immediate. This pattern of somewhat immediate baptism should be emulated unless there are convincing reasons to delay baptism. At TCC, we ask believers who wish to be baptized meet with a staff member or pastor, write out their testimony, and share their testimony before the church. First, this practice allows us to discuss the gospel and the meaning of baptism and to teach our theological convictions regarding both. Second, it allows the church the opportunity to celebrate together as a congregation sharing in the joy of a person's obedience and agreeing to walk with him or her in fellowship. Finally, it allows the person being baptized to invite family and friends who will have an opportunity to celebrate and hear the proclamation of the gospel.

Improper Motivations for Delaying Baptism

Fear

One of the most common reasons for delaying is fear, but such anxiety should not hinder our obedience. It is important to know that when fear keeps you from obedience it is sin and thus should not to be passively accepted. Trusting Christ in the face of our fears in this area is an excellent way to begin the process of sanctification in the area of the fear of man.

Not Being Good Enough

There will never be a time where a person will be “good enough” for baptism. Our right to enter the baptismal waters is grounded upon Christ’s righteousness, not our own. If we have been united to Him, we should confidently draw near in obedience to His command and example.

How Should a Person Be Baptized?

TCC practices baptism by immersion. We do so in light of the following considerations:

1. **The Greek word βαπτίζω (*baptizo*) literally means to plunge, submerge or immerse.** Our English word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek *baptizo*. *Baptizo* was used in Greek literature to describe the act of immersing something in water or another liquid. It later became a technical term that referred specifically to the Christian ordinance of baptism.
2. **The representation of union in Christ’s death and resurrection is best expressed through immersion.** Whether buried below or above ground, the symbolism of burial is still that of being placed under something. Likewise, resurrection is accomplished by coming out of something (whether grave or tomb). Immersion best symbolizes this reality by actually placing the believer under the water and bringing them out.

In addition, it is interesting to note the use of water to symbolize judgment in the Scriptures (e.g. the flood of Gen. 6-7 and the destruction of Egypt in the Red Sea of Exod. 14). Thus, by passing through the waters of baptism, the believer expresses trust that God’s judgment has been satisfied by Christ.

Colossians 2:12: 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.

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.

3. **The surrounding context of baptisms in the Scriptures suggests baptism by immersion.**

Matthew 3:16: 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.

Mark 1:5, 10: 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.

John 3:23: John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized. ACTS 8:38–39 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?

Although there are no prescriptions in the Scriptures to location, we prefer to practice the ordinance within the context of the local church because it is a marker of inclusion in the body of Christ and it allows the congregation to celebrate together in a person's act of obedience and submission.

Who Can Perform A Baptism?

The Bible gives no prescription for the requirements to perform baptism. While TCC does not restrict the duty to pastors, we prefer to have one of the pastors of the church perform baptisms. If there is a desire for someone else to perform a baptism, the pastors at TCC would approach such situations on a case by case basis.

How We Baptize At Treasuring Christ Church

Before Your Baptism:

1. We ask those wishing to be baptized to have a conversation with a pastor or staff member, where we explain the gospel, core Christian beliefs, theological distinctives (articulated in our “Statement of Faith”) and our theology of baptism.
2. We also ask for participants to submit a testimony of conversion in which we look particularly for evidences of grace and a proper understanding of the gospel. For instance, we want to make sure a person does not articulate that he or she was born a Christian or thinks that Christianity consists merely in moral improvement.

Baptism Services:

1. We have regular baptism services in which the church celebrates baptisms together or will schedule them as needed. We encourage those wishing to be baptized to do so within the context of these gatherings.
2. Participants are asked to personally share their testimonies before the church before their baptism.
3. After the testimony, the person performing the baptism will ask, “Do you confess and believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?” to which the baptizee will respond, “Yes” or “I do.”
4. The baptizer will then immerse and subsequently raise the baptizee out of the water while saying, “I baptize you, my (brother or sister) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The person baptizing you will also saying something like, “Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life,” which is taken from Rom. 6:4 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.

Helpful Hints

- Wear dark shorts and a dark shirt to maintain modesty.
- Bring a change of clothes, towel and bag to hold your wet clothes after you change.
- Invite family and friends to celebrate your baptism with you.
- Arrive early to church to make sure you are set on instructions for the morning.

Baptism and Membership

Baptism is a requirement for membership at Treasuring Christ Church. We require anyone wishing to join the church to have displayed obedience to Christ’s command following conversion. While we practice a baptism by immersion at TCC, we do not require the mode of

immersion for membership. If a person was sprinkled or immersed (or a possible other mode) after conversion, he or she has met our requirement for membership.³

³ Material in this document has been taken and, in places, adapted from content provided by The Village Church in Dallas, TX.