

Baptism

This publication is intended to be of help to persons who are interested in how we do baptism at Fellowship of the Parks.

We realize that there are a variety of practices across the many different church groups in Christianity today. We recognize the right and responsibility of each group to be at peace before God with regard to their own practice of baptism.

Our basic approach to the subject of baptism is to look at the teachings about baptism in the Bible. We practice baptism in the form of and for the purpose of what we find in the Bible.

Who should I call if I want to be baptized?

Call the FOTP office at (817) 741-3687 and someone will be able to help you.

What is "Baptism"?

"Baptism" is an English transliteration of an ancient Greek word. The New Testament (NT) was written in the first century AD in everyday language--which at that time was Greek.

At different points in the NT, the Greek text uses the word "baptizo" (pronounced "bap-teedzo") meaning "to dip."

The term is used in the New Testament to name a ceremony in which a person was dipped into water by another. Those who become followers of Jesus were "dipped."

Later in Christian history the "dipping" was altered and water was sprinkled or poured upon converts to Christianity. Even later, babies were also sprinkled or poured upon before they became converts. In English the term baptism began to be used to mean any form of "water ceremony" marking one as a Christian. However, the actual ceremony in the New Testament involved, not pouring or sprinkling, but as the Greek term indicates, "dipping in water."

Why be concerned about Baptism?

We personally are concerned about it because it was something commanded by the Lord Jesus in some of his last words to the Church: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit..."(Matthew 28:19)*

We have come to know the Lord and are grateful for what he has done for us. So, we want to obey him.

Indeed, Jesus says that the indicator of that person who loves him is their obedience to his commands. *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."* (John 14:21)

Baptism also has a rich heritage and meaning among the people of God. It is a very significant point in your walk with God.

How is Baptism practiced at FOTP?

We do "baptism", as the NT indicates, by dipping people in water. We have a pool that we fill up with clean water. Those who are going to be baptized will meet with a minister about the meaning and practice of baptism. Baptism is also discussed in our LifeQuest 101 (Discovering Church) class.

Baptisms occur during our First Saturday evening service, the morning worship service, "Fellowship Community Services", and other special events. The person being baptized will walk into the pool. The brief ceremony occurs there: After being introduced, the question is asked, "What is your confession of faith?" The person being baptized responds, "Jesus Christ is Lord." The person is lowered backward into the water and immediately brought back up. Often the person is reminded of Jesus' command that we are to be the "salt of the earth and the light of the world." A touch of salt is dashed to the lips, and the person is handed a lit candle. The person then leaves the water and walks to a changing room, where they can dry off and change clothes.

The congregation often claps when people come up out of the water, glad that another person has decided to become a follower of Christ.

Who is Baptized at FOTP?

We baptize people who have become followers of Jesus Christ. Those baptized may be adults or children.

Some children come to an intelligent decision about following Christ at a very early age. Usually, there has been a great deal of teaching over several years by the parents. Our concern is that there be an intelligent understanding of what they are doing, not just a rote recitation of Christian ideas.

We baptize adults who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord (Managing Director, Boss) and Savior (the only one who can make them right with God).

When do Baptisms occur?

When we have several people to be baptized, we will schedule a baptism on Sunday morning and announce it in advance. Baptisms are also held during our First Saturday evening service (first Saturday of each month). Prior to the baptism, those who want to be baptized will meet with a minister or attend the LifeQuest 101 (Discovering Church) class to learn about the meaning of baptism and how the ceremony will occur.

If you would like to be baptized, please let us know.

Who does the Baptizing at FOTP?

Usually it will be our pastoral staff. However, we have allowed people who are members and representative of the church to baptize the person that they have led to Christ. We allow fathers who are members to baptize their children.

What does a person wear? (BRING A TOWEL)

We ask that people wear darker clothes. Lighter clothing tends to become transparent once it is wet--and may prove embarrassing. Dark blouses or tee shirts are recommended and dark shorts. The clothing needs to be flexible enough for you to move down into and out of the pool easily. Since some shirts tend to float up in the water, we recommend that you tuck them in.

You may want to wear a pair of slip-on sandals between the changing rooms and the pool. Returning back to the changing rooms, your feet will be too wet to slip comfortably into normal shoes.

Bring with you a change of clothes and a towel. You may want to also bring toiletries and a hair dryer.

Can I bring friends?

We would love for you to bring as many friends as possible to the baptism. This ceremony is a celebration and testimony of your new life in Christ.

What if I have special needs (physical, medical or other) related to baptism?

Please let us know and we will be glad to work with you.

Will I be expected to say something at the ceremony or be put in an embarrassing situation?

Baptism is a very special time in a person's life and a special time to the Lord. For us, it is a time of celebration. We try to think through the ceremony so that embarrassing things do not occur. We will not intentionally embarrass you in the ceremony.

However, you will be asked, "What is your confession of faith?" You respond, "Jesus Christ is Lord."

Beyond that you will not need to say anything at the ceremony. Occasionally, people will give a brief synopsis of their coming to Christ at the baptism or the pastor will interview someone about how they came to Christ. However, these are arranged beforehand and done with the permission of the person involved.

Can my friends or relatives take pictures?

Pictures are permitted during baptism. Those who take them need to go about it in such a way that they do not create distractions.

Frequently Asked Questions....

About Baptism

This section is intended to be of help to persons who want to understand the role of baptism in their walk with God and FOTP's perspective on some issues.

In the New Testament of the Bible one finds people, who had decided to become followers of Jesus, being dipped in water as a mark of having become His follower. An example of this is found in John 4:1-2 which states, *"The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples."*

In the centuries that have followed since the time of Christ, different practices regarding baptism have emerged in the Christian movement. The divergence in practice sometimes leads to questions.

The following questions give answers to some frequently asked questions. If you would like more information, we would be glad to help.

How does my baptism affect my walk with God?

...A Spiritual Forecast

In a way, baptism represents a "testing" point in a believer's life. Though the ceremony is simple and over within just a few seconds, it tends to set the pace for the rest of a person's walk with God. The way a person deals with baptism tends to be an indicator of how they are going to deal with the issue of obeying Christ all their life. Baptism tends to reveal what is in the heart. How?

...A Simple, Practical Command

Jesus gave the command for a person to be baptized after becoming his follower. How a person responds to that command tends to be an indicator of how he or she is going to respond to the Lord's other commands.

In the New Testament, baptism occurred quickly after commitment to Jesus. While Jesus was alive, people who wanted to follow him were immediately baptized at the public meetings by his disciples (John 4:1-2). As the early church

spread, believers were baptized almost immediately. In the case of the Jailer in the ancient city of Philippi, he and his family became believers in the middle of the night and were baptized before dawn (Acts 16:31-33). The command is simple; the situation is not difficult. The question is, after gaining an understanding of baptism, will the "follower" follow the Lord or not?

A Challenge to False Pride

There is a right kind of pride: respecting ourselves as belonging to God. However, most of us also struggle with false pride, the desire to "look good" before others. Baptism is a challenge to our pretense that we:

- can do everything for ourselves
- do not need anything from anyone— including God.

Perhaps the Lord created it to be a bit humiliating in the way it is carried out. How?

- It is **done to you**: You don't do it to yourself. Many cultures of the world, including America, tend to want to be seen as self-sufficient, so the baptism ceremony challenges their pride.
- It is **done publicly**: We tend to want special times to be personal and private, but Jesus designed baptism to be public and open; a public identification as belonging to Him. Those who are embarrassed by being openly identified with Jesus hesitate at the point of baptism. Indeed, they may not yet be ready to be baptized, for they are still a fan and have not actually become a follower of Jesus.
- It means that **all your previous religiosity was inadequate** to make peace with God. Only from the moment you yielded your life to Jesus Christ have you had peace with God and approval by Him as "righteous." Previous religiosity *may have helped* a person move toward God, but *one is "okay" with God only through Jesus Christ.*

People with a strong religious background sometimes resist being baptized lest their friends think less of them. Again, a person more concerned about friends than about obedience to Christ is still a fan and not yet a follower of Jesus.

In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees, the "holy" religious leaders of the Jewish people in the time of Christ, refused to be baptized by John for this reason. *"All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John."* (Luke 7:29-30)

One of the decisions that a person must make in becoming a follower of Jesus is that his relationship to Jesus Christ is primary over all his other relationships. At the point of baptism, a person is challenged by Jesus to put that commitment into practice.

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in Heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:33)

"Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God." (John 12:42-43)

I was baptized as a child; do I still need to be baptized as an adult?

In the Bible, those who are to be baptized are those who have yielded their lives to Jesus as Savior and Lord; they have become followers of Jesus. So, the sequence, given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, is become a follower (disciple), be baptized, then begin to learn to obey.

In some church traditions, children are christened and sprinkled soon after birth. And, such dedications of children to Christ can be meaningful and helpful. However, the practice in the Scriptures was that of baptizing those who had come to personal faith and trust in Christ. After someone personally makes that commitment, they are to be publicly baptized. We encourage those who have made a commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior since their "baptism" (regardless of their church background) to be baptized in line with the commands of Christ.

What if I was sprinkled on or poured on instead of immersed after my commitment to Christ? Do I need to be Baptized again?

Our understanding of the Scriptures is that baptism represents the death and resurrection of Christ and was actually practiced by dipping the person in water. Centuries after the New Testament some churches began the practice of sprinkling new believers, but the practice in the New Testament was clearly that of "dipping." In a desire to be obedient to Christ and without condemnation for

other traditions, we practice "immersion" baptism (dipping). Immersion is important because it communicates and portrays the death, burial and resurrection of

If you feel that you need to study the matter further, we would be glad to help. Let us know.

I was immersed in a church after I committed my life to Christ. They said I had to be baptized in order to be saved. Do I need to be baptized again?

According to the Scriptures, we are saved by faith in Christ Jesus, period (see Ephesians 2:8-9). It is a faith that is not just an intellectual belief, but also a personal conviction that He is God and has died to make the way to God for us.

The opposite of that kind of faith is a mistaken belief that I can do something to earn my way to heaven or into a relationship with God. The Scriptures call such a belief "works" and makes a clear statement that we are saved by faith, not by works (See Ephesians 2:8-9).

Some groups teach that salvation is achieved by "faith" plus "baptism." And, some passages of the New Testament can be "pushed" to draw that conclusion from them. However, the broad teaching of the New Testament is clear: salvation is by faith alone.

If in your baptism you were being baptized in order to complete your salvation, we would recommend that you be baptized again for the correct purpose this time.

The Meanings Of Baptism...

This section is intended to give insight into the many facets contained in the simple ceremony of Baptism.

...The Basic Word

"Baptism" is an English transliteration of an ancient Greek word. The New Testament (NT) was written in the language of the day, Greek. The ancient Greek word that we translate as "baptize" literally meant "to dip in water." A translation of the New Testament by a contemporary Jewish author actually translates "baptism" as "dipping."

Baptism has an extended history among the people of God. It is an act that symbolizes many things.

...In the life of Jesus

In the New Testament, Jesus, Himself, set the example for being baptized. At the beginning of his ministry, he went to be baptized by John the Baptist. In one translation of the New Testament, John's name is translated "John the Dipper." John had been sent by God to tell people to repent (that is, to turn around from directing their own lives and let God run their lives). Those who did so were "baptized" by John in the Jordan River as a *symbol that they had been cleaned up by God*: because of their repentance God forgave them for their rebellion against Him.

When Jesus wanted to be baptized, John hesitated knowing that Jesus had never sinned and so did not need to repent or be baptized. Jesus, however, insisted that he be baptized. Jesus was aware that he was setting an example for his followers. When Jesus came up out of the water, the Father spoke his approval of Jesus (see Matthew 3:13-17 and Luke 3:21-22).

From that point, Jesus' disciples baptized those who became followers of Jesus: *"...Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. (John 4:1-2)*

In one of his last meetings with his disciples Jesus told them, *"...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)

...In the Early Church

It was the intent of Jesus that those who became his followers would:

- next be baptized (dipped in water) and then,
- "plug into" the disciples group and learn, not merely what Jesus had commanded, but how to obey what Jesus had commanded.

In the first mass conversion of people after Jesus had gone on to the Father, the disciples did what Jesus had commanded.

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:41-42)

As new churches were planted around the Roman Empire during the first century, those who became followers of Jesus were baptized and then "plugged in" to the church to learn and help out with the work of the church (for example, Acts 8:12; 16:14-15; 32-33).

Instruction about baptism was a part of "getting your feet on the ground" in the early church. The book of Hebrews talks about the elementary things taught to believers: one of them is the teaching about "baptisms." (Hebrews 6:1-2)

...Old Testament "Washings"

Ceremonial "washings" had been part of the life of the people of God from ancient times. In the Old Testament, a ceremonial bath occurred to mark:

Cleansing of the defiled- People who were ceremonially "unclean" before God went through a "bath" as part of their ceremonial cleansing (See Leviti-

the community and warn others not to approach them by crying, "Unclean!" The disease separated them from full inclusion with the people of God. When a person was healed, he/she took a cleansing bath as part of the ceremony allowing them to return to be part of the community of the people of God (See Leviticus 14:9). Jesus Christ loved us and made us clean with his own blood. Our baptism is our cleansing ceremonial bath, acknowledging that Christ has cleansed us from anything that would hinder our being part of the people of God (1 John 1:7).

- **Consecrations of Priests** -Priests were the ones who could draw close to God on behalf of the people. They went through a special washing ceremony as part of their consecration (Leviticus 8:6). In Christ, we have become a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9); our baptism marks us as entering into our priesthood through Christ Jesus.

...New Testament Meanings

The New Testament clarifies the major meanings of baptism: in baptism we...

1. **are marked "branded" as belonging to God.** In the Old Testament, males of the people of God were circumcised on the eighth day after birth to mark them as belonging to God. For the rest of their life they carried the mark on their body, symbolizing membership of the people of God. Circumcision was supposed to indicate an inward "heart" set apart for God. In the New Testament, baptism corresponds to the circumcision of the Old Testament, marking those whose hearts have been given to God. *"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 2:11-12)*
2. **create a living picture of:**
 - **the cleansing of our lives** by the blood of Jesus Christ--just like the cleansing baths of the Old Testament.
 - **the death and resurrection of Jesus.**
 - **our spiritual death and resurrection:** As one is immersed under the water, the death of our old way of living is portrayed. When one is raised out of the water; the beginning of new life is portrayed in Jesus Christ.

3. **are mystically united with Christ** in his death and resurrection. We are baptized into the death of Christ and raised to walk a brand new life. It is our faith in Christ that saves us, but in baptism we somehow enter into his death and resurrection. *"...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 2:12) "...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." (Romans 6:3-4 NIV)*
4. **clothe ourselves with Christ**; he now lives within us, and we take on his way of living. *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27)*

It is your faith in Christ that causes all these things to come to pass. Baptism pictures these eternal realities in its brief ceremony.

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