



Baptism



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INTRODUCTION

In what is known as 'The Great Commission' in Matthew 28 verses 16 to 20 Jesus told his disciples to *"..go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.."*. Ever since that time Christians have been doing just what Jesus told them to do, making disciples and baptising. Churches may differ in the way that they baptise, who they baptise and when they baptise, but baptism is something that Christian churches have in common.

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality, it is a public declaration that a person has accepted Jesus into their life and entered into the family of God. Baptism does not make a person a Christian, it is a sign that a person is one.

Baptism is a significant part in our church life and we practice what is known as 'believer's baptism'. Believer's baptism is not unique amongst Baptist churches, many churches follow the same practice.

As a church we welcome everyone and you may be reading this leaflet with the benefit of a different background. In particular you may have been baptised as an infant and possibly confirmed later. With this in mind, please be assured that our heart is to honour the commitments you have made to God within the church background that you have been part of.

BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

The word used in the Bible to denote baptism is "Baptizo" and means "to dip" or "to immerse" which is why, by tradition, we follow the symbol of baptising by full immersion. When a person is baptised they go down into a pool of water where they are then dipped fully in that water. This is a powerful picture of death to the old life and way of living and birth of the new life and way of living that Jesus gives, *"therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5 vs 17)

There is also importance in the sequence of belief followed by baptism, and this is the sequence shown in the Great Commission in Matthew 28. It is the command of Jesus that we are to make disciples and then baptise them in His name.

Since baptism comes after a person has expressed their belief in Jesus it is known as 'believer's baptism'. It follows that since an infant is not old enough to understand and make their own decision on such belief we do not baptise infants, or accept that an adult can stand in that infants place and make that statement for them. We do, however, recognise the gift of children to families from God and the relationship that exists between them and encourage parents to consider taking part in a public service of infant dedication.

THE OUTWARD SIGN

In the New Testament the act of baptism is linked to a person's new spiritual reality in the following ways:

Death and burial

It may seem strange to talk of death and burial in the same breath as talking about new life and being a new creation but this is just what Romans 6 verses 3 and 4 say: *"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 death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of God the Father, we too may live a new life"*. When we become a Christian we have the new life that Jesus gives - our old life is put to death and buried, we cannot live two lives in two different spiritual realities at the same time.

Washing

In the Old Testament the people of God used to wash in water to cleanse themselves of all that was wrong in their lives. Baptism in the New Testament is a sign that Jesus has cleansed us from the wrong in our lives. Acts 22 verse 16 says: *"And now what are you waiting for? Get*

up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”

Living

Just as we have put to death and buried our old life we celebrate that we have new and eternal life (Romans 6 as above).

BAPTISM AND BELONGING

Baptism is also linked in the New Testament with belonging to a church. Christians are not given new life to live in isolation from one another but to live a corporate life in community with fellow believers. *“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body..”* 1 Corinthians 12 verses 12 and 13. We have been saved as individuals but we are called to express growth in our faith as part of a community. It is because of this link between baptism and belonging that we ask that a person undergoes believer's baptism before they become a member of the Church (see the Leaflet on 'Membership').

WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTISED?

Being baptised is a personal decision, not something that should be forced onto someone, but we hope that having read this far it is something that you would like to do if you have not done so already. It is worth noting that:

- Baptism, as we have seen, is one of the two sacraments that Jesus ordained (Communion being the other). If we seek to follow Jesus and obey Him then that should include Baptism.
- Jesus was Himself baptised (Matthew 3 verses 3 to 17). John the Baptist was calling people to repentance as an act of turning to God and was baptising them in the river Jordan. Before Jesus began his ministry, He went to John and was baptised by him in the river. If baptism was something that Jesus did then should we not do the same?

THE BAPTISM

Baptisms usually take place at a Sunday service set aside so that a number of people can be baptised on the same day, but it is possible to be baptised as part of any service. Baptism is an important and public declaration of faith and so you are encouraged to invite friends and family along to share in this part of your life.

The act of baptism is, in itself, a testimony but you are also encouraged to say a few words about what God is doing in your life and why you are being baptised.

You will be baptised by two people, usually two members of the Leadership Team who will ask you to make a short statement of faith whilst you are in the pool and before you are (briefly) dipped under the water. After, but whilst still in the pool, those baptising you will pray for you before you leave the pool.

These services are exciting and encouraging times for both those being baptised and for the whole church as we join in thanks and praise to God for His grace and love for us.

WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

If you think that you would like to be baptised or if you have any further questions about Baptism and what it means, please let one of the Leadership Team know as they would be pleased to discuss it with you and pray it through with you. If you decide to be baptised, a member of the Leadership Team will take you through a short preparation using a booklet called 'Baptism and Belonging'. This will give you a further opportunity to pray and prepare for this important step.