

Introduction to



Bethel Church, Vashon Island

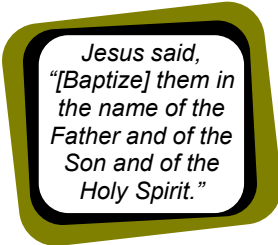
Introduction

You're interested in being baptized . . . that's great! Here are a few items for you to know as you take your first steps toward being baptized at Bethel Church.

The Roots of Baptism

Baptism and the Lord's Supper (communion) are ordinances of the Christian church. An *ordinance* refers to something that we do to express our faith. Jesus gave the early church the ordinance of baptism when He commanded the first church leaders to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

The concept of baptism goes back to the Old Testament law, which instructed ceremonial washing as a way to be cleansed from disease or sin. Washing was also part of the ceremony when people wanted to become Jews. They would strip off their clothing from their former life and bathe completely to symbolize leaving their old ways behind, purifying themselves, and accepting a new way of life under the Jewish law. After the washing, they were welcomed as new members of the Jewish community.



Jesus said,
"[Baptize] them in
the name of the
Father and of the
Son and of the
Holy Spirit."

John the Baptist performed another type of baptism in the Jordan River. He preached repentance and called the Jewish people to purify their hearts and be baptized in preparation to receive the coming Messiah.

Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John. His baptism was unique because it was the culmination of all of the ceremonial washings that had gone before. Jesus said that His baptism was "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). All of the previous baptisms of purification and preparation came to a fulfillment when He was baptized. Through His baptism,

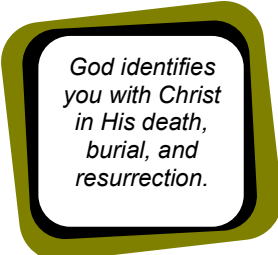
- Jesus linked Himself with those in the past who had purified themselves for His sake,
- He launched His messianic ministry, and
- He inaugurated a new kind of baptism that all future believers would follow—a baptism that was a symbol of your salvation.

Baptism as a Picture

Your baptism is an outward picture of an inward change. As you are lowered into the water and drawn up again, you are acting out what happened to you spiritually when you trusted in Jesus as your Savior. Let's take a closer look at your salvation to better understand the picture of baptism.

Salvation

The story of your salvation begins with your admission to God that you are a sinner. Your sin separates you from God and places you under His judgment. The penalty for sin is not like a fine that you can pay off with good behavior. Scripture states that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). But God loves you and doesn't want you to perish. So He sent Jesus to take the death penalty for you. He bore your sin on the cross and suffered the judgment that you would receive. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus didn't remain dead, though. He rose from the grave in victory over death and as a promise that one day we will follow Him and live eternally with Him after we die. God's only requirement is that you believe what Jesus did for you. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31)



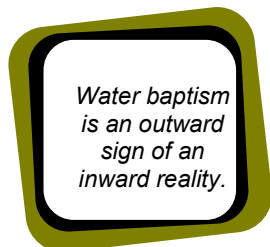
God identifies
you with Christ
in His death,
burial, and
resurrection.

When you trust Jesus as your Savior, God spiritually unites you with His Son. The best word to describe this spiritual act is *identification*. God identifies you with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. When Jesus died, God considers you to have died; when He was buried, God sees you buried; and when He was raised, you are raised as well!

Spiritual Baptism

According to Scripture, your identification with Christ is a *spiritual baptism*.

Or 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)



When God baptizes you into Christ spiritually, you may not feel anything. Even so, spiritual baptism is very real. Water baptism is a way to physically experience what happens spiritually. It is an outward sign of an inward reality.

Water Baptism

When you go under the water, you can imagine yourself going into the grave with Jesus Christ. In the split second when the water washes over you, it's as if you experience the death that your sin deserves. And then, in a flash, you are raised up—as if you are resurrected from the dead just as Christ was resurrected. Death has no hold on you just as it had no hold on Jesus!

Baptism is a picture of the new life that you have in Christ and the promise of life after death with Him in heaven.

Baptism as Participation in God's Family

Baptism not only symbolizes your union with Christ as your Savior, it also represents your union with other Christians as your spiritual family. Your spiritual baptism includes the Holy Spirit's work of joining you with Christ's body, the church.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Your union with all believers gives you a place to belong. And through the Spirit's power, you receive spiritual gifts which you can use as you fulfill your role in the body of Christ.

Baptism as Proclamation

Baptism is a public event. It gives you an opportunity to display your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and your commitment to Him as your Lord. Making a proclamation in public of your faith solidifies what you believe in private.

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9–10)

The person baptizing you often asks whether you have trusted Christ as your Savior and if you desire to follow Him as your Lord. Answer yes, boldly! Upon your proclamation of Christ as your Savior and Lord, you are then baptized.

Baptism FAQs

Is Water Baptism Necessary to Be Saved?

Baptism doesn't make you a Christian; rather, it demonstrates the faith you already have. A person is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9). To say that a person must be baptized in order to be saved adds a condition for salvation apart from faith.

If I Was Baptized as an Infant, Should I Be Baptized Again?

Your parents may have taken you before the church to be baptized when you were an infant. This rite is done by sprinkling and is thought to impart grace on the child's life. Some churches view infant baptism as a dedication ceremony, and it is done in anticipation of the child's future faith in Christ. Either way, infant baptism is not the same as believers' baptism, which takes place after a person has trusted Christ as his or her Savior. If you were baptized as a baby we encourage you to consider reaffirming your faith in Christ as a public confession of your personal commitment that you have made to Christ. *(We also encourage you to be baptized again as a sign of your faith commitment.)*

Why Does Bethel Practice Water Baptism?

Most likely, Jesus was immersed when He was baptized by John, which would have followed the Jewish practice of complete ceremonial washing. Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch is described as going "down into the water" and coming "up out of the water" (Acts 8:38–39). The best way to translate the root meaning of the Greek word for baptism is "dip, plunge, or immerse." And, most importantly, immersion best pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

When Should I Be Baptized?

Although baptism isn't a requirement for salvation, it is a requirement for being a disciple of Christ. Jesus commands his followers to be baptized, and as soon as you can grasp what baptism means, you should be baptized. The model of the New Testament believers was they were baptized almost immediately after they were saved (Acts 2:41; 8:12–13).

What Do I Bring to My Baptism?

Bring dark clothes that aren't see-through when wet (a t-shirt and shorts or swimsuit is fine), a towel and a change of clothes. The church office will supply you with a certificate of your baptism. Encourage your friends and family to attend!

Adapted with permission from the Soul Care Ministries at College Avenue Baptist Church, San Diego, California