

Baptism

Mode: We practice baptism by full immersion in water. We do it through this mode for three primary reasons:

1. This appears to be the way Jesus was baptized in the gospel accounts. In Matthew 3 and Mark 1 it says that he “came up out of the water”. The Greek verb *anabaino* means to ascend or spring up, signifying that he was immersed in water and came up out of it.
2. This appears to be the way the Apostles baptized throughout the book of Acts (at least whenever it’s specifically stated).
 - a. Acts 8
 - i. The Ethiopian eunuch is baptized and it states that he and Philip “went down into the water”.
 - b. Acts 16
 - i. A woman named Lydia is baptized, but the story begins with the context that they were at the river side. This would certainly infer that the baptisms performed here were not by sprinkling but by immersion.
3. The Greek word *baptizo/baptisma* means to immerse or submerge. Whenever it’s used outside of the specific act of water baptism, it describes an experience that is fully immersive.
 - a. Luke 12:50
 - i. Jesus uses this word to describe what he’s going to experience through the Passion narrative. In other words, a fully immersed experience of suffering, pain, and sacrifice.
 - b. Mark 7:4
 - i. The word is used to describe cleaning or purifying their hands before eating. This would involve washing completely before partaking.
 - c. Luke 3:16
 - i. John the Baptist says, “He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” This is describing the Acts 2 experience which is clearly a fully immersive experience of the Spirit being poured out upon the people of Jesus.
 - d. Romans 6:3
 - i. Paul says, “Or do you not know that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” He’s using the word baptism to describe the fully immersive experience of going through death into life.
 - e. Galatians 3:27
 - i. Paul says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Yet again, he’s describing an experience that is fully immersive (like changing clothes).

For these reasons, we believe that baptism is meant to be a fully immersive experience and therefore practiced through full immersion in water.

Timing: We believe that baptism is a deliberate action taken after coming to faith in Jesus. Therefore, we do not baptize anyone who has not openly put their faith in Christ, including infants (as they do not have the wherewithal to make this decision for themselves). We take this approach for the following reason:

- This appears to be the practice as shown in the book of Acts.
 - o In Acts 2, Peter says, “Repent and be baptized”. Baptism appears to be in connection with genuine repentance here.
 - o After Peter preaches in Acts 2, the historical account says, “those that received his word were baptized”. Baptism was an act that followed receiving the word.
 - o In Acts 8, the people “believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news” and then were baptized. It also says, “Simon (the sorcerer) himself believed and was baptized”. Baptism here follows genuine belief.
 - o Later in Acts 8, Philip told the Ethiopian eunuch about the good news and then was baptized immediately after.

- In Acts 9, Saul had an amazing experience with Jesus and after being filled with the Holy Spirit, “he got up and was baptized”.
- In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Gentiles and then they are baptized immediately after.
- In Acts 16, the Lord opened Lydia’s heart to respond to Paul’s message and then was immediately baptized.
- Later in Acts 16, the jailer came to belief in God and baptism is what immediately followed.
- In Acts 18, it says that many of the Corinthians heard Paul and believed, and then were baptized.
- It seems that the normative experience is for people to hear the gospel, to respond by faith/trust/belief, and then to be baptized immediately following.

There are a few exceptions that are worth noting:

- Acts 8:14-17
 - ¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.
- This is clearly a section that diverts from what we typically read in the book of Acts. It appears that these people were baptized prior to receiving the Holy Spirit. However, it does say that they had “accepted the word of God”. Due to this, we would simply say that these individuals were seeking genuine faith and baptism immediately followed. However, for some reason, they had not received the Holy Spirit yet. There’s no way of knowing why they hadn’t received the Spirit yet; all we can say is that God will meet people in a variety of different ways. As it relates to baptism specifically, they still accepted the word of God first and then were baptized.
- Acts 9:1-7
 - ¹While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. ⁴Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.
- Yet again, this is another situation that deters from the typical experience described in Acts (and again, we must simply say that God meets people in different ways). However, baptism in this example is applied consistently. That is, these individuals come to belief (as assumed in verse 2), and then they are baptized in water (in verse 5). How and when they receive the Holy Spirit is a separate discussion.
- There are several occasions where household baptisms are mentioned (Acts 10, Acts 16, and Acts 18). Some point to this as evidence that infant baptism is warranted. However, there is no evidence that infants were included within these examples. We have no direct evidence in the New Testament to support this practice. Furthermore, it is not surprising to see that entire households would come to conversion together, considering the communal nature of this culture. If mom and dad made this decision, the child would’ve humbly followed suit. However, those decisions could’ve still been made by children of age that had the wherewithal to make a commitment of that magnitude. We view household baptisms as a beautiful example of unity within the family, but not as evidence that individuals were being baptized apart from their conscious consent.
- One other point that is sometimes used to support infant baptism is that the book of Acts would’ve been explaining a new practice that was happening for the first time. Therefore, it would be no surprise that the majority of baptisms were happening to adults that were responding to this new announcement of

the kingdom. Therefore, as the decades and centuries rolled forward, it would've made sense that this practice would've shifted to more of a "passing down" approach from parent to child, rather than hearing for the first time and responding. While this is a somewhat compelling argument, the fact of the matter is, the events of Acts happen over the course of roughly 30 years. If converts in Acts 2 were supposed to be baptizing their infants, it seems likely this would've been discussed and shown throughout the decades that followed. However, we do not see this in the historical archive of the book of Acts. Additionally, we don't see the Apostle Paul explicitly teaching this in his letters to the churches either. While they may have been hearing the good news for the first time, certainly Paul would've wanted them to know how to handle their children in that respect. But again, we do not see this explicitly shown or taught throughout our New Testament records.

With all these reasons and examples in mind, we teach and practice baptism as an immediate response to faith. We believe this should be done as an act of obedience following genuine faith/trust in God.

Purpose: We believe that baptism is a big idea within the whole of the biblical story, and therefore, brings with it a lot of meaning and significance. A few of the primary aspects of baptism that we see throughout the biblical story and throughout the history of God's people are:

Washing and Cleansing

Throughout the history of the people of Israel, washing and cleansing was deeply significant to them. We see this clearly with the people who worked the Temple (priests and Levites). Ceremonial washings and ritual purifications were essential to their service to God. We see this all over the story:

- Numbers 19
- Exodus 29:4
- Leviticus 8:6
- Leviticus 14:8-9
- Leviticus 15:13
- Exodus 30:17-21

As the history of Israel moved forward, washings and ritual baths became part of the rhythm for the community. Beyond the washings that were required within the Mosaic Law, ritual baths called *mikvehs* became important for living a faithful life to Yahweh.

There were two primary purposes for these washings and cleansing.

1. For communion with God
 - a. We see this clearly from the priests and Levites, washing before they would enter the Holy Place.
 - b. We also see this from the whole community, understanding that in order to live in deep communion with God, purification was important.
2. For reflection of God (or holiness)
 - a. In order to be the people of God... to reflect him, represent him, and "image" him... it was clear that cleansing was essential. To reflect God, who is perfect and blameless, washing was appropriate.

This idea was clearly in the imagination of Jesus and the Apostles as they carry out baptism in the new covenant.

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and **wash** your sins away, calling on his name."

1 Peter 3:21

...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a **clear conscience** toward God.

1 Corinthians 6:11

And that is what some of you were. But you were **washed**, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Therefore, new covenant baptism means to be washed, cleansed, and purified as the people who commune with God and reflect him.

A New Identity/Family

Throughout the history of the people of Israel, there were always opportunities for people to be grafted into the family (aka converted). While the Israelites were an ethnic family, they were also the people of Yahweh, and to be grafted into that people group, steps were given for entry.

By the time of the Second Temple Period (roughly 538 BC – 70 AD), to enter the family, they would baptize people. It was called proselyte baptisms.

This symbolized a complete break from their past idolatrous life and full acceptance into the Jewish covenant family.

Yet again, this beautiful idea is held in the imagination of our New Testament writers and audience. In fact, water baptism is first introduced to us through John the Baptizer, whose baptism was for repentance. This is exactly what repentance means... to turn from your old life and go in the direction of your new life.

As baptism became central to the way of Jesus, this became a sacred part of baptism. It's a celebration of a new family member. It's a proclamation that the baptized person or persons has a new future and a new family.

This is seen in several ways throughout the New Testament:

- In John 3, Jesus likens the experience to a physical birth. When you pass through the waters of the birth canal you come out the other side into life. But not only into life, but into the life of a new family. You now have a father, brothers, sisters, and a family name to live by.
- This is the reason that Jesus says to baptize, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Throughout the book of Acts the Apostles carry on this tradition by baptizing "in the name of Jesus". One of the primary reasons this is central to baptism is because it's an announcement that the baptized individual has a new family name. In the ancient world (of which Jesus inhabited), this meant everything. It represented who you were, what you stood for, and what your ultimate destiny was. Therefore, when someone is baptized in his name, the declaration is clear, this person now belongs to the family of God.

Death to Life (or Resurrection)

All throughout the biblical narrative we see a repeated theme of God saving his people through water. What we miss through our modern lens is that this was deeply significant through the eyes of the ancient people.

In the Ancient Near Eastern world, they viewed “the waters” as a place of chaos, destruction, disorder, and death.

- It's abounding with terrifying, deadly creatures.
- It's rife with storms that are massively destructive.
- It's not a place that can sustain human life.

Therefore, when scripture opens with the picture of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters to bring about order, peace, and life, it was evidence that this was the true God of the universe. And this concept began a long, scriptural theme with massive implications.

- Genesis 6-9: Noah's family is saved from the chaotic waters (the flood) and lead into new life together (Genesis 9:1).
- Exodus 2: Moses passes through the waters (the Nile) and miraculously comes out on the other side alive and well, with a new future ahead.
- Exodus 13-14: The people of Israel walk through the waters (the Red Sea or Sea of Reeds) and come out on the other side safe and set free.
- Joshua 3-4: The people of Israel go through the waters (the Jordan River) and into a new life and destiny within the Promised Land.
- Jonah 3-4: Jonah is rescued through the waters and brought onto the other side with a new purpose.

This even carries into the New Testament as Jesus overcomes the waters:

- Mark 4:35-41: Jesus overcomes the chaotic, stormy waters (Sea of Galilee) leading him and the disciples safely to life on the other side.
- John 6:16-21: Jesus walks on the chaotic waters (Sea of Galilee) showing power over them, then quiets the waters and leads the disciples into safety.

The act of baptism picks up on all these themes throughout the whole narrative and carries them out in the life of the believer. Therefore, baptism represents:

- Freedom
- New life
- A new future
- A new destiny

It ultimately represents what we see on page one of scripture; the Spirit of God hovering over us (just as in Jesus' baptism), nurturing us back to life. He quiets the chaotic waters and storms within us, bringing about life, peace, and purpose.