

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM



What does the sacrament of baptism mean?

The word 'baptism' originally just meant 'dipping.' The immersion in water is the visible sign that points us to the invisible reality that a person has been united through faith to Jesus Christ and has become a member of God's family, the church. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, baptism initiates us into the church, assures us that God forgives our sin, bestows on us the promise of God's grace, and calls us to life of faithful discipleship to Jesus. Sometimes baptism is called the 'sacrament of initiation,' because it marks the beginning of our life with God in Christ.

What is the history of baptism?

Even in the Old Testament water was an important sign for God's people. It was used in cleansing rituals in the pursuit of purity, and Gentile converts were immersed in water as a part of their initiation into the Jewish faith. When John the Baptist arrived on the scene to announce the coming of the Messiah, he began baptizing people as a sign of repentance in preparation for that coming (See Matthew 3:1-12). John eventually baptized Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17) as a sign of his unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, along with his unity with all people who would one day come to trust him as Lord and Savior. Some of Jesus' final words spoken before he ascended to heaven included a command for his disciples to baptize others who would place their faith in him (see Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is a sign and seal of our oneness with Christ.

Water is the special sign of our oneness with Christ. It is the everyday element by which God's promise at baptism comes to us. Water cleanses and renews us, just as Christ cleanses our sins from us. It is the simple life-giving sign of God's grace. Water is life! The Holy Spirit is the seal that confirms our union with Christ at

baptism. Though the action of the Holy Spirit, baptism brings us God's promise of love. The Spirit nourishes our faith and unites us with Christ, along with all others who are in Christ.

Who can be baptized?

All those who have come to place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and are willing to publicly confess that faith, should be baptized after a period of instruction and a public confession of faith in Christ. Baptism celebrates the start of a new life in Christ. Any person desiring baptism should contact one of our pastoral staff.

Can children be baptized at Faith Church?

At Faith Church we also baptize young children of baptized believers who are a part of our community. Obviously, when a very young child is baptized he/she has no idea of what is happening, and no choice in the matter. It is therefore the parents who bring their children for baptism on the basis of their own faith, committing before God and the congregation to raise their children in the instruction and nurture of the Lord's grace and love. Our congregation commits to join parents in this endeavor, coming alongside them all along the way. Our prayer is that one day such baptized children will, as adults or young adults, confirm the promises made at their own baptism and confess faith in Christ themselves. Our Confirmation program for teenagers is designed to help students explore their faith and consider such a commitment to Christ.

How is baptism celebrated here at Faith?

Baptisms are always celebrated in the context of corporate worship, typically on Sunday mornings (in other words, we don't celebrate 'private' baptisms). During baptism, not only does the baptized individual (or parents in the case of children) make a profession of faith in Christ, but the entire congregation joins in that profession by declaring the Apostle's Creed together. Individuals are always baptized "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit," and prayed over at the time of their baptism. We often baptize by sprinkling water on the head of the one being baptized, but can also baptize by immersion.

Can I be baptized at Faith if I have already been baptized?

We believe that baptism is not something to be repeated. If an individual was baptized in a Christian church, and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we recognize the sufficiency of that baptism. However, there are times when, after a season of repentance and coming back to Jesus and the church, that a person wants to mark that renewal in some significant way. We encourage such individuals to speak with one of our pastors about scheduling a time to renew their baptismal vows in worship. We have all likely seen married couples, at significant milestones, renew their marriage vows to reaffirm a commitment made years before. The reaffirmation of baptismal vows can serve a similar beautiful purpose.