



Primer on Baptism?

Based and Edited from the EPC Book of Order 2013/2014 Edition.

The Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ. By the act of baptism, a person becomes a part of the visible Church, for it is a sign and a seal of the Covenant of Grace for believers and their children. As a sign it proclaims God's forgiveness and our redemption in Jesus Christ. As a seal, God marks us as adopted children of our heavenly Father. It indicates our engrafting into Christ, our rebirth, the remission of sins, and our ability by the power of the Spirit to walk in newness of life. This sacrament is to be continued by God's people until the end of the world.

Candidates for baptism:

Those eligible to receive this sacrament are those who have professed their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and have promised to be obedient to Him, along with the infants of one or both believing parents. Also, those who have legal responsibility for an infant have the right to present the child for baptism.

Method of baptism:

In the sacrament of baptism water is to be used. Immersion or dipping the person into the water is not essential and baptism is ordinarily administered by pouring or sprinkling.

Effectiveness of baptism:

God's grace and salvation are not inseparably connected to this sacrament. Some who are baptized will be lost and some not baptized will be saved. Nevertheless, it is a great sin to make light of or to neglect this sacrament. A great benefit is lost when baptism is neglected, for God promises to bless His people through this sacrament. The effectiveness of baptism is not tied to the moment it is administered, yet God who keeps His promises confers His grace according to His own will and in His appointed time.

Administration of baptism:

The grace received through baptism does not come from the tradition or form of administration, and since it is not dependent upon the devoutness or the intention of the person administering it, baptism should be administered only once.

Time and place of administration:

Since baptism is the act by which a person is solemnly admitted into the visible Church, the regular administration of the sacrament should ordinarily be in the presence of the family of believers. At that time, the benefits and promises should be set forth. The people should be reminded of baptism as a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, of our engrafting into Christ, and of the need to yield to God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life. However, if circumstances justify administering the sacrament at a time and place other than public worship, the Minister may judge. In any event, at least one Ruling Elder should be present to represent the congregation and to assume on behalf of the congregation the commitment required by that congregation in the baptismal vows. No such private administration should convey the impression of baptismal regeneration or its necessity for salvation, and those present are to be reminded that baptism is not inseparably connected with God's grace and salvation.

Baptism for Adults:

When a person who was not baptized as an infant desires to profess faith in Christ and be engrafted into His Body, being admitted into the visible Church, the sacrament of baptism shall be received.

1. **Proper instruction:** Those persons desiring to be baptized shall receive necessary instruction concerning the meaning of the sacrament, the obligations of Church membership, the need to live by faith, to walk in holiness and righteousness, and to act in brotherly love toward those who have been baptized by the same Spirit into



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the same Body. The Church Session shall authorize the baptism of the petitioner only when it is fully satisfied as to that person's full intention to be obedient to Christ and a profession of faith has been made.

2. **Minister's duty:** The Minister shall remind those present of the meaning of the sacrament as a sign and seal of engrafting, remission of sin, regeneration by the Spirit, adoption, and resurrection to everlasting life. All should be reminded to be thankful for their own baptism with its benefits and privileges, to be humble because of sin and walking contrary to the grace given us, and to draw strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we were baptized.

3. **Recipient's duty:** Prior to baptism, the recipient shall make affirmative response in professing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, affirming intention to walk in newness of life as one of those who have given their names to Christ. The recipient shall further affirm faithfulness and support of the Church and of the particular church.

4. **Congregation's role:** In receiving a person into its fellowship and in acknowledging that person to be a part of the covenant community, the congregation assumes responsibilities toward that person. As Christ commanded His Church to baptize and teach, the congregation shall affirm its duty and commitment to the recipient by public vow.

5. **The administration of the sacrament:** After asking God's blessings to attend the sacrament, the Minister shall administer baptism. This shall be done with water, either by pouring, sprinkling or immersion and without other

Infant baptism:

Believing parents are encouraged to present their children for the sacrament of baptism, which should not be unnecessarily delayed. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace and in part confirm our position with and in Christ and demonstrate to the world the visible difference between it and those who belong to the Church. The baptism of an infant requires a two-fold affirmation, one by the parents and one by the covenant community. The parents are to take vows indicating their commitment to bring the child up in the faith and in the loving discipline of the Lord. The congregation also takes a vow indicating its commitment and duty to provide nurture, support, and a godly example in assuming with the parents the spiritual oversight of the child. Parents and congregation together are to encourage growth in grace until the child, having become of age, claims Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

1. **Who may present children:** The infants of one or both believing parents, or of a believer who exercises the authority of a parent, are eligible to receive the sacrament of baptism. Ordinarily this privilege is limited to those active members of the particular congregation. At its discretion, the Church Session may authorize those on the inactive roll to present infants for baptism. It may also require evidence of the intent of the petitioner(s) to follow the vows to be taken by meeting the requirements for restoration to the active roll. Further, the Church Session may grant permission to believers who are not members to present infants for baptism, provided such persons are members in good standing in some true branch of the visible Church. In such cases, the Church Session shall be careful to notify the governing body of the particular church in which those believers hold membership, of the baptism of the infant. Ordinarily the Church Session shall authorize and approve the baptism of infants, except in such cases as the Minister may deem inexpedient. In that case the Minister shall report the baptism to the Church Session. All baptisms shall be recorded in the permanent record of the Church Session.

2. **Instruction of parents:** It is the duty of the Church Session and Minister to offer instruction to the parents concerning the nature and meaning of the sacrament, the



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obligations assumed, and the role the congregation plays with the parents in the spiritual nurture and growth of the child.

3. Use of Godparents: The Evangelical Presbyterian Church does not recognize godparents since the members of the particular congregation assume with the parents responsibility for the spiritual life of the child. However, it is permitted to have persons who might become the responsible parental authority for the child to assume the vows of obligation with the parents. In such a case, the persons participating with the parents should have the same qualifications for membership in the visible Church.

4. The obligation of the Minister: The Minister shall be careful to remind the congregation of the meaning and nature of baptism. They should be reminded to remember the significance of their own baptism, the benefits and privileges of it, being humbled for failures contrary to the grace of baptism, and to remind all believers of the need for recommitment to their endeavor to live by faith. It is appropriate to restate that faith by confessing some appropriate symbol of the faith such as the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed.

5. The obligation of the parents: The parents or other responsible person shall assume vows of duty and obligation.

6. The obligation of the congregation: The congregation is to assume, with the parents, responsibility for the spiritual nurture and development of the child. The congregation acts for the whole family of God and assumes responsibility for it on behalf of the child.

7. Administration of the sacrament: The Minister shall set apart the water from all common uses to this holy use and mystery and pray for a blessing upon the ordinance. Then the Minister shall use the following or like formula without adding any other ceremony and shall baptize the child with water, saying: "_____, child of the covenant, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The ordinance is to be concluded by a prayer in which God's blessings are asked upon the child, upon all the children of the congregation, and for faithfulness to the vows the people have taken.

8. The continuing obligation of the Church Session: It is the duty of the Church Session to record each baptism in its permanent records and to inscribe the name of the child on the baptized roll. It is the continuing obligation of the Church Session to watch over the children of the congregation, to provide for that spiritual nurture necessary to grow in grace, and to provide opportunities, such as a communicants' class, where the children of the congregation may come to profess their faith and be prepared to assume the obligations and privileges of full participation in the life of the congregation