

Baptism - an introduction

Why do we baptise?

Throughout the generations the church has continued to do the stuff that Jesus did. Jesus was specific about baptism, he told his disciples to train people in the ways of his kingdom and the act of baptism in water was to be a mark of their part in his kingdom. So as followers of Jesus we continue to baptise one another because Jesus told us to. You can read more about this in Matthew 28. Jesus himself was baptised in a river and you can read about that in Luke 3.



Baptism is a significant symbolic event which we do out of obedience to Jesus' instruction (Matthew 28:19): *"...go and make disciples...baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."*

It provides a great opportunity for you to think carefully through your decision to follow Jesus and then to share that choice with your family and friends and the community of faith.

A symbol is an external, physical and visible act which illustrates something that is internal, spiritual and unseen (like communion or giving money). Paul explains the symbolism in baptism in Romans 6:3-8 *...all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*

Baptism symbolises

| Action | Symbol | What is happening |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Entering the water | Death | Leaving the past behind. Choosing to follow Jesus rather than our old self |
| Immersed in water | Burial | Burying our old life, putting it away, forever, irretrievably |
| Coming up out of the water | Resurrection | Born again into a new life, a life of faith, by the power of the Spirit |
| Joining with everyone else | United with Him | Part of the Body of Christ, His Church, welcoming into the family of the saved |

Baptism is the sign that we have chosen to live under the rule and reign of God in his kingdom. It also represents:

- the washing we have received from our sin (forgiveness)
- our adoption into the family of God

Other scriptures

Acts 8:37:...the eunuch said, "Look here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" ... then both Philip and the Eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him.

Acts 16:31-34: Paul & Silas said to the jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved – you and your household." ...then immediately he and all his family were baptised ... he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God, he and all his family.

Colossians 2:12:...having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God...

Matthew 3:6, 13ff: Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan river....Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter Him saying, "I need to be baptised by You, and do You come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."

How do we baptise?

When someone asks to be baptised we will normally baptise by full immersion: in other words by plunging them into the water in a swimming pool, river or lake for a few moments. There are other methods of baptising people (sprinkling and pouring water) which can be used where immersion is not appropriate.

Christening, dedication and baptism

The questions surrounding the sacrament of baptism are many. They usually involve discussion about the amount of water involved and the age at which to get someone wet!

At Leeds Vineyard we acknowledge that different people have different convictions. The biblical direction on this issue is not clear cut and therefore we are happy to do any of the following:

1. **Christening of infants** - this involves a small amount of water sprinkled on a baby's head and is accompanied by the promises of parents, god-parents and the community of faith to raise the child in the family of the church.
2. **Dedicating infants and children** - this involves praying for the child and the commitment of parents, god-parents and the community of faith to raise the child in the faith of Christ with the expectation that they will one day make an adult decision to demonstrate their faith by baptism.
3. **Baptising children and adults** - where individuals have made an independent decision to follow Jesus and have not previously been baptised we can baptise them with full immersion (all the way under the water) or by christening (sprinkling water).

Usually, but not necessarily, these occasions take place at main events when a large number of the church family are around to support you and witness the occasion. However, you may wish to do something more privately and at a different time. If so, you may feel free to call on the pastoral staff of the church for assistance and advice.

There follows an explanation of some of the background for these different practices.

The Baptism of children (the *Paedobaptist* viewpoint)

Some people understand the bible to include the children of "Christian" parents in the New Covenant, and therefore (as with circumcision under the Old Covenant) they believe that their children should rightly receive baptism - as the sign of that New Covenant.

They believe baptism means the same thing whether it is received as a child or as an adult, although there are obvious differences, principally:

- an adult understands the process as they go through it, an infant does not
- an adult is baptised having already committed their life to Christ, an infant hasn't yet - although assuming a baptised infant does not grow up to reject Christ, they will grow up to fully realise the significance of their baptism.

The Dedication of children (the *Baptist* viewpoint)

Some people understand the bible to teach that baptism must come *after* repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and that children who are too young to have such a faith shouldn't be baptised. People who hold this view often prefer to "dedicate" their children. Dedication is the parents':

- expressing gratitude for God's gift of a child
- publicly affirming that they will bring their child up in the ways of the Lord
- giving their child back to the Lord (dedicating to Him) for His purposes
- asking His blessing upon their child.

Parents who dedicate their children anticipate they will grow up to know and love Jesus, and when they're old enough will make their own commitment, and then get baptised.

Paedobaptists and Baptists - which viewpoint is right?

At the Vineyard we believe both the Paedobaptist and Baptist viewpoints can be well argued from the Bible and, if we're objective and impartial, we would have to say that the Bible is not clear enough on this issue for us to be absolutely categorical about which view is 'right'.

- There is no chapter and verse proof text which *shows* Jesus or the disciples either baptising infants, nor excluding them when whole families were baptized
- There is nowhere in the Bible which *clearly* teaches that babies should or should not be baptised
- And even early church history does not provide any clear-cut answers - it is too scant on the subject to be conclusive either way.

Had the Lord wanted to make sure we got it 'right', and the timing of baptism meant as much to Him as it does to some of us, he would surely have made it clearer.

[It should be noted at this point, however, that this church does believe that when the Bible is clear on an issue we need to hold on tight to it. Many of the major tenets of the faith are summarised, for example, in the traditional Christian creeds, and are expanded in the Vineyard Statement of Faith.]

Unity in Diversity

Unfortunately, people down the ages have tended to hold *strongly* to their understanding of the 'right' viewpoint regarding baptism, very often believing that their viewpoint is clearly scriptural and that, by definition, the opposing view cannot be defended by the Bible. Invariably that is because they have not studied the alternative view well enough or objectively enough to understand it.

Often people of differing views have treated each other with an alarming lack of love and respect. In the 16th century, for instance, people felt so strongly about it that they killed each other, very often by drowning, just to make their point. Out of the argument arose new denominations convinced that they had the truth.

The hostility among Christians is probably not what Paul had in mind when he wrote: *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all and through all and in all."* (Ephesians 4.3-6)

As Christian we should live in unity, peace and love - even if that does not mean in complete agreement about everything. When we get to heaven we will probably find out which view was 'right' but in the meantime we must take Augustine's advice:

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; in all things, charity."

If you would like to discuss any of the issues in this article or would like to celebrate the birth of a child, please [contact the church office](#).