



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT BAPTISM

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is one of two sacraments we celebrate at CrossPoint (the other is communion). A sacrament is a practice instituted by Christ in Scripture and given to us as a multi-sensory sign and spiritual seal meant to deepen our faith, build up the Body of Christ, and connect us to spiritual realities we otherwise might have trouble remembering or grasping.

In this sense, baptism is a way for us to better visualize and celebrate the way in which we are washed clean by Christ's sacrifice, connected to him in his death, burial, and resurrection, and marked as his own for eternity.

Whether we are baptizing an infant or an adult, we do not believe that the outward rite of placing water on a person (or immersing them in water) actually accomplishes salvation. Rather, it is the outward sign and seal of an inward mystery that only Christ can institute, and which happens at a time and in a manner determined by Him and made possible only by the inner work of the Holy Spirit.

In the case of a believing adult, the spiritual reality of personal conversion precedes the outward rite of baptism; in the case of an infant/young child of believing parents, the rite precedes personal conversion.

Either way, we are steadfast in several convictions about baptism:

- It is meant to be a blessed and central part of every believer's faith journey and should be gladly celebrated by all biblically faithful churches and individuals.
- It is NOT a magical way to save someone apart from their having a genuine, personal, faith relationship with Jesus Christ.
- It is NOT just meant for the individual, but as a sacrament, it is to bless, edify, and unite the entire congregation and the Church at large.
- It is NOT meant to be a cause for division and conflict within the Church of Jesus Christ, and those with differing biblical convictions about the details of its administration should find ways to honor one another in love and mutual respect.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT INFANT BAPTISM?

In the Old Testament community of Israel, the people of God used the sign of circumcision to indicate a child belonged to God alone and was accountable to His covenants. This sign was given apart from any faith and was based instead on the reliability of God and His promises, the commitment of believing parents, and the follow-through of a loving community.

In many New Testament churches like ours, the practice of baptizing infants is seen as the New Testament expression of this sign. It is still an outward rite that is administered apart from any faith in the infant, and is still based on God's promises, at least one believing parent, and the support of a loving, biblical community. The focus of the sacrament is the wonderful truth that the grace of God is extended to this child (for God desires that all people be saved) and we pray for the Spirit of God to one day draw this child to Christ.

Scriptural foundations for this practice point out the explicit connection between circumcision and baptism (e.g. *Colossians 2:9-11*), as well as the possible inclusion of children in household baptisms of the early church (like *Acts 2:38-39, 16:15, 16:33, 18:8*, and *1 Corinthians 1:16*).

The theological strength of infant baptism is the emphasis it places on God's grace, promises, and freely offered love rather than on the individual's works, since the baby obviously does nothing to deserve God's love, the parents' promises, or the church's support (*Romans 5:6-8*)

The theological risk we run is that the sacrament could seem magical for this same reason, as if the water makes the baby a believer automatically. It is because of this risk that we always expressly state at any baptismal service that the rite itself does not save the person.

In this sense, an infant's baptism still points to all the full benefits of faith in Christ (cleansing from sin, eternal life, etc.), but only as a hoped-for future, since the infant does not yet have a personal faith in Christ. The parents and the congregation, by God's power, commit to strive toward that outcome. All parties are then left to wait for the child to mature and lay hold of salvation by faith in Christ and then to make a bold, public profession of faith.

If at least one parent of the child is a believer and member of CrossPoint, then arrangements can be made after consultation with the elders for the baptism of the infant or child to be administered at a public worship service.

The following represent the type of questions the parents will be asked during the baptismal service:

Questions:

- Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, accept the promises of God, and affirm the truth of the Christian faith which is proclaimed in the Bible and confessed in this church of Christ?

- Do you believe that your child, though sinful by nature, is received by God in Christ as a member of his covenant, and therefore ought to be baptized?
- Do you promise, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community, to do all in your power to instruct this child in the Christian faith and to lead her by your example into the life of Christian discipleship?

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ADULT BAPTISM?

In some cases, an adult believer (or child who is making profession of faith) may not have been baptized as a child. This may be because the individual is a new convert and did not come from a Christian background. In other instances, the individual's parents may have chosen to refrain from having their children baptized, preferring instead to reserve that experience for after they have made a public profession of faith in Jesus. Scriptural foundations for adult baptism are found in *Acts 2:38-41, 8:12, 8:36, 9:18, 10:48, 16:15, 16:33, 18:8, 19:5, and 22:16.*

The theological strength of adult baptism is the emphasis it places on personal conversion and a faith relationship with Jesus being the only thing that can save us, since the individual obviously professes a faith relationship with Him prior to receiving the sacrament.

The theological risk we run is that the sacrament could seem like a work an individual does to please or manipulate God, as if by the effort of personal belief and the diligence of outward ritual, the person might make him- or herself pleasing in God's sight. Again, we always state that the rite itself does not save the person.

In this sense, a believer's baptism still points to all the full benefits of faith in Christ, but as an already freely given and received act of sheer grace. The forgiveness, cleansing, inclusion in Christ, and unity with other believers pointed to by the baptism preceded the rite, just as the Father's love precedes our faith and awareness.

Also, just as in the case of an infant's baptism, the congregation and God affirm their commitment to the spiritual development and nurture of the recipient.

If a person is able to publicly and sincerely profess faith in Christ Jesus, and is willing to become a member of CrossPoint, then arrangements can be made after consultation with the elders for the baptism of the individual to be administered at a public worship service.

The following represents the type of questions an adult being baptized will be asked during the baptismal service:

Questions:

- Do you believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?
- Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the only rule for faith and life?
- Do you, relying on the grace of God, promise to confess Christ publicly before others, to serve Christ daily, and to walk in Jesus' way?
- Do you promise to exhibit the joy of new life in Christ; to share fully in the life of the church; to be faithful in worship and service; and to offer your prayers and gifts?
- Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church; to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation; and to seek those things which make for unity, purity, and peace?

WHAT ABOUT INFANT DEDICATION?

Parents of a newborn child who prefer to abstain from infant baptism usually desire to make a declaration of their intention to raise the child according to biblical, Christian principles and to request the blessing, prayers and support of the church in this task.

We invite the parents to bring their child to meet with the elders for prayer of blessing and dedication. They can sign up and come to be with the Elders at any regular scheduled meeting.

WHAT ABOUT RE-BAPTISM?

Some persons who have already been baptized begin to feel a deep desire to receive the sacrament again. Perhaps they were baptized as infants and wish to experience the sacrament as adults. Or, perhaps they went through a time of wandering or willful disobedience and wish to start over fresh in their walk with God.

However, since there are significant spiritual risks involved with this practice, we do not engage in intentional rebaptism of individuals for the following reasons:

1. We wish to avoid the error of those groups that believe they alone properly administer the sacraments, and who by rebaptism declare biblical, godly congregations illegitimate.
2. We wish to avoid the error of those groups that believe baptism is a cleansing work of man that must be endlessly repeated whenever human disobedience, inconstancy or doubt disrupt a person's ongoing relationship with God.

We do recognize the legitimate desire to reaffirm and remember the blessings and assurances contained in the sacrament. Thus, we encourage all baptized persons to remember that their participation in baptism is not limited to being the recipient, but that they also participate in the sacrament and renew their experience of it by sharing in the baptism of others.

In fact, we are even asked in the course of our congregational vows if we “the members of this congregation now renew [our] own baptismal vows as [we] celebrate this sacrament of grace?” If we view the sacrament as a corporate reality that belongs to all of us as Christ’s Body, then it is new for us and re-experienced every time another person receives it in our midst! All of us should strive to maintain this view.

The only time we do offer a type of re-baptism is in the rare instance where the person received baptism from a non-Christian sect (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, etc.) or from a sect that did not use the Trinitarian formula which Jesus himself prescribed (“baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” – *Matthew 28:19*). In such cases, we would view the original baptism as non-Christian and illegitimate, and thus a proper, Christian baptism would be in order.

WHAT IF I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

If, after reading this booklet, you still have more questions or would like to make plans to receive the sacrament for yourself or a child, please contact our church office at (909) 606-9833 and inform us. We can help you make arrangements to meet with the elders or talk to the pastor.