

BAPTISM



HELPS FOR
UNDERSTANDING
BAPTISM



Baptism and Salvation

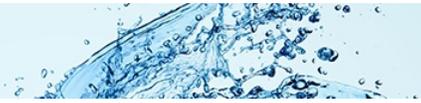
Many people ask if water baptism is required for salvation. Straight up, baptism isn't an act that gets us into heaven. It is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord that offers that assurance. Baptism is an act of obedience that ideally should be an immediate part of our acceptance of the gift of grace offered by Jesus Christ. But it does not mean that one who truly gives their heart to Jesus will be kept out of heaven if they fail to get baptized. The thief on the cross next to Jesus didn't have the opportunity to be baptized before he died, but he did believe in Jesus and put his trust in Him, and Jesus responded by saying, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

True faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross for our sins is sufficient for salvation. Christ has already done everything. By definition, His grace doesn't require any additional works by us. That being said, Jesus Christ commands us to be baptized (Matthew 28:19-20), and therefore, all believers should be baptized. Immediately following Christ's command, the Book of Acts describes the practice of administering baptism to almost every group or individual who believed in the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles (Acts 2:37-41; 8:5-13; 8:35-39; 9:10-18; 10:34-48; 16:13-15; 16:30-33; 18:8; and 19:1-6).

Is there right way to be baptized?

When it comes to baptism, churches are a lot like water parks with a lot of ways to get you wet. The Bible's command to be baptized in water is practiced using different forms in different churches and denominations. Some churches sprinkle a few drops of water on the forehead. Others pour water over the head. Still others will dunk you all the way under. But even those who dunk you do it differently – some dunk you forwards, others backwards, some one time, others multiple-times (some traditions triple dip one in the name of the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit). So which of these is right?

Maybe that's not the best question to ask or even the best way to pursue the answer to how should I be baptized. When the Scriptures use the word baptize it is from a Greek word "baptizo" which meant to be fully submerged. The word was used to refer to clothing materials that would be submerged in dye. Descriptions of people being



baptized in Scripture reflect this meaning as they are immersed into water. It says of Jesus when He was baptized: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water.” (Matthew 3:16) Likewise Philip baptized an Ethiopian believer and it says he: “baptized him and they came up out of the water.” (Acts 8:38-39)

Church leaders in history have also expressed the clarity at which the Scriptures speak about the way baptism happened in Bible times:

“I would have those who are to be baptized to be entirely immersed, as the work imports and the mystery signifies.” Martin Luther

“The word ‘baptize’ signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church.” John Calvin

“Buried with Him’, alludes to baptizing by immersion according to the custom of the first church.” John Wesley

At Mountain West our practice is to baptize by fully immersing a person in water.

Baptism by immersion

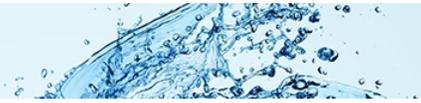
One of the reasons that we do baptize by immersion is because of how that method helps us to communicate some important things about our life and faith. In the next few posts we will explore some of those things that baptism symbolizes.

First, baptism helps to explain the content of the gospel itself. The Scripture teaches us that Jesus was the unique Son of God. He was divine, everlasting and coexistent with God: *“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* (John 1:1) When Mary became pregnant it was not from a physical relationship with a man, but the Holy Spirit impregnated her with a divine seed. And, Jesus was born a God-Man with a limited real physical existence and an eternal divine nature: *“So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.”* (John 1:14) What that meant in every day terms is that Jesus never shared man’s sin nature and therefore never committed any action of disobedience and sin. He perfectly represented God’s heart and the life God intended for man on earth.

This perfect life was also the basis of an acceptable sacrifice whereby God could exchange Jesus’ life for ours on the cross. *“And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”* (1 Peter 2:24) Simply Jesus died so that we could live. But the gospel doesn’t end with His death: *“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) Jesus resurrection is the centerpiece of our faith because it is our assurance that God accepted in full Christ’s sacrifice for our sins; and, it provides the basis of our hope of life beyond death.

So in baptism we have a witness of Christ story, that He lived perfectly and willingly gave His life for our sins and was buried (being brought completely under water). And He was raised to life (being brought up out of the water).

Having stated our method, sometimes there are limitations due to physical health. In those cases we can make allowances with creative solutions that allow all people to experience baptism no matter their limitations. The key to baptism is not so much having the right method as much as it is about having the right meaning behind it.



Baptism; Sharing our story with others

Another compelling feature of baptism is that it allows us to communicate our story with others. The Bible makes clear what we all know to be true from experience: *“everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”* (Romans 3:23) The resulting wages of our sin *“is death.”* (Romans 6:23a) Gratefully God has intervened in our hopeless condition by offering to us forgiveness and *“the free gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23b) As we accept God’s offer of salvation by inviting Christ into our hearts and committing ourselves to follow Him, we are given new, resurrection life.

Through baptism we are acting out the essentials of our story – we were dead in sin (taken under the water) but raised by God’s grace to live with new life (brought up out of the water). Part of the reason that we invite as many people as we know to attend our baptism experience is because it is one of the most powerful and clear presentations of what has happened to us. We once were lost, now we are found --- once dead, now alive. When you fill out your online baptism registration, be sure and hit the link to the e-vite card you can send out to all your friends and family! Let everyone you love know what has happened to you.

“For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.” Romans 6:4

Baptism is not an option

When Jesus instructed His initial disciples to *“go make disciples...baptizing them”* (Matthew 18:19) it was not a suggestion but a command. In short, Jesus commands His followers to be baptized. Baptism isn’t an option.

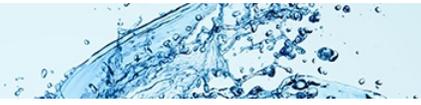
The wisdom to position such a sudden and obvious decision in the path of a new Christ follower is it immediately introduces us to a fundamental way of being as a Christ follower. Quick obedience is a vital lesson to learn. When God reveals something for us to do, to believe, to change our best response is always *“Yes Lord.”* A benefit of baptism is it etches in our heart an initial pattern to follow in living a “Yes Lord” life.

In Biblical times, baptism was almost always done immediately after someone chose to be a Christ follower. That was the case for the first Christians at Pentecost: *“And those who believed were baptized.”* (Acts 2:41) Lydia's baptism quickly came after believing *“As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart and she accepted what Paul was saying. She was baptized...”* (Acts 16:14-15) Finally the Philippian jailer followed this same pattern of believing with instant baptism: *“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household... Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.”* (Acts 16:31,33). The benefit to being immediately baptized is that it brought this lesson of quick obedience home in their heart from the beginning of their Christian journey.

Today we are not as suited to make baptism happen so suddenly. But regardless of the timing, the choice to obey the command to be baptized still challenges us about living a Yes Lord life. The sooner we learn and shape our Christian experience around that principle the better and more abundant this life will be!

Surrender Starts Here

A hymn that's been sung in countless churches includes these words: *“All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give. I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live. I surrender all.”* While the lyric and melody of



this song have a gentle and comforting tone, surrender is fight. By nature we want to remain in charge of our lives. For most of us, giving control over to God is one of the hardest habits to develop.

Baptism is a pledge of allegiance. Jesus' surrender of His life for ours, and our willingness to allow that sinless life to be sacrificed for our guilt means He has paid the price and earned the right to be in charge of our lives. The Scripture makes this clear, *"You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price."* (1 Corinthians 6:19) When we are baptized we are acknowledging that our life is being surrendered to God. We are saying that we belong to Jesus and are committed to surrendering daily control over to Him. Even the action of baptism, falling back into the water in the hands of another, demonstrates willing surrender.

The best life is a surrendered life. No one is in a better position to be at the controls of our life than God. And baptism is a great way to get that process of surrender started.

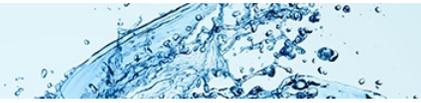
Getting Baptized Again - A Conscious Decision

Baptism marks a new beginning. It symbolizes our new start with God through faith in Jesus Christ. It symbolizes a new beginning of obeying God and surrendering to Him. For many this moment is so memorable and meaningful that it becomes one of the biggest events of their spiritual journey. Therefore many people ask about being baptized again. In the next few posts we are going to look at some situations where being re-baptized is something to consider.

Some people were baptized as a baby or many were baptized at a moment in life when they did not understand what was happening. In Scripture a group of people had been baptized earlier in their life to symbolize a sorrowful attitude about their sins, but they did not know that there was a baptism they could experience as Christ followers. *"Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' he asked them. 'No,' they replied, 'We haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' 'Then what baptism did you experience?' he asked. And they replied, 'The baptism of John.' Paul said, 'John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.' As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."* (Acts 19:1-5) This second baptism was quite meaningful for these believers because it marked for them a new beginning with the promise of new life with God's power to live it.

The act of baptism should be a conscious, thoughtful and personal decision. Many who are directed to baptism as a child can't remember and feel a bit cheated by that. Others simply did not know what was happening or its significance when they were baptized initially. Like these Ephesian believers that Paul found, many would prefer to experience baptism as a more informed Christ follower. So whether a prior baptism occurred before you were able to understand or if you did not connect its significance with what you were doing, being baptized again might be something you would want to consider.

"Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized..." (Acts 2:38) In the Scripture there is a progression to our spiritual experience that should be followed. First, an individual must have a personal conversion encounter. They must come to the decision that they are a sinner, that their life is in need of a Savior, and must turn to Christ alone for forgiveness. Then following that conversion experience they must obey the command to be baptized. This way baptism has the proper meaning behind it – it demonstrates your own



personal story of being dead in sin and brought to new life in Christ. If someone is baptized prior to a salvation experience then the symbolism of baptism is not fully portrayed.

If you were baptized before being a follower of Christ, you will want to consider a fresh baptism that invokes the full value and symbolism of that experience.

Getting Baptized Again - A New Start

The idea of repentance and a new beginning with God is closely identified with baptism. In Scripture John baptized people to express this commitment: *“John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God for forgiveness.”* (Luke 3:3) When we are baptized as a follower of Christ we are demonstrating our decision to receive the forgiveness of God and committing to living in a new, obedient way.

Baptism, in theory, is a one time act. But often people lose their way in life, wandering from consistent Christian discipleship. For those who had a genuine salvation experience but have taken some detours in their journey, they often feel compelled to mark their return to God with baptism.

We should not think that baptism is required in such cases, neither should we feel that it is necessary to renew our baptism after every season of disappointment and failure. Yet we understand how meaningful and helpful it can be to recognize our fresh commitment to the Lord by being baptized. A big part of our ministry is helping people find their way back to God. So we have been honored to baptize some individuals and families where that’s their story. And, we would be privileged to stand with you as you take a new stand with Christ in baptism.

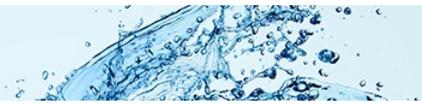
Why did Jesus need to be baptized?

“Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to talk him out of it. ‘I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,’ he said, ‘so why are you coming to me?’ But Jesus said, ‘It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.’” Matthew 3:13-15

The question of Jesus’ baptism is one that has generated a lot of discussion. John’s baptism was conducted to help people who were guilty of sin to confess their faults and commit themselves to a new relationship with God *“when they confessed their sins, John baptized them.”* (Mark 1:5) Since Jesus was never guilty of any sin, in thought or action, why was this baptism necessary?

Whatever we understand or don’t understand about this moment in Jesus’ life, one thing is certain about it – Jesus thought it was necessary and so He obeyed. This establishes a very important point about our baptism. While it has been our aim to create some understanding through this blog to help us process the importance of baptism, at the end of the day baptism is a command that comes to us directly from Christ and whether we understand everything about it or not, we must obey. *“Jesus told his followers... ‘Go and make disciples of all people baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’”* (Matthew 28:18-19)

By saying that He ‘must carry out all that God requires,’ Jesus was teaching us the important principle of complete and total obedience to God. That is true when we “get” everything that God is revealing for us to do, and when don’t. After all, God’s ways and His logic are sometimes beyond our ability to fully comprehend. *“For*



thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD." (Isaiah 55:8)

God will make His will clear to us (the what's) but He will not always answer all of our questions (the whys). When that is the case, follow Christ lead and obey, do all that He requires.

Jesus and Baptism - He identified with us

Besides providing for us an example of obedience to follow, Jesus' willing baptism accomplished another important spiritual purpose. There was something in this act of baptism that identified Jesus with people in a real and necessary way.

Fast forward to the cross, where He died for our sins. In a purely spiritual transaction God transferred the guilt of our sin over to Christ. As it says *"The LORD laid on Him the sins of us all."* (Isaiah 53:6) Instead of being punished for being responsible for wrong doing, Jesus willingly identified Himself with our sins and accepted the punishment for them: *"Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins."* (Isaiah 53:4-5)

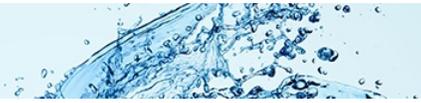
While completed at the cross, this whole process of identification was being started in the waters of baptism. Notice what John said to and about Jesus at His baptism: *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:26) John knew Jesus had no need of being baptized for Himself, but what He was doing He was doing for others. Identifying, bonding Himself to their need.

We feel the benefit of this identification not only through the forgiveness that comes to us by His willing sacrifice of our sin, but also in His compassion. His identification with us allowed Him to experience our hurts and burdens and to fully understand what we go through (Hebrews 4:15). The result is that we have a relationship with a God who is our advocate who cares, feels and sympathizes with our grief. Therefore we feel free to approach Him with all of our needs.

Jesus and Baptism - A Powerful Affirmation

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17

At Jesus baptism there was a powerful moment of affirmation. The Father's approval and pleasure was openly displayed so that those looking on could identify Jesus as the Christ. John admitted that even he didn't fully understand who Jesus was until that moment: *"Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."* (John 1:32-34) This experience gave credibility to the start of Jesus' earthly ministry. And, it would have given Him a deeply felt point of affirmation as He stepped out on a bold and demanding mission to seek and save the lost.



We need those "Yes" moments in our life. When someone gives us a sincere compliment or offers a positive word to affirm us it moves us deeply and stays with us for a long time. Even during times of struggle and insecurity we can reach back and grab that encouraging word and find that it gives us strength to press on. When we are baptized there is a recognition of our new identity. The Bible tells us that when we accept Christ in our lives and become His follower we are "a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) That new identity is affirmed as you go under the water, symbolizing the death of the old person; and then raised up out of the water, showing that you are starting a new life in Christ. Our church family celebrates that new identity with you. People shout, clap and cheer -- it is a celebration, an affirmation, a "Yes" to your commitment and new life. This moment has a felt impact on you. You sense the honor and joy of joining the other members of Christ's body at Mountain West in walking out this new life. That "Yes" stays with you and propels you forward in your journey of following Him! Don't miss out on a powerful opportunity to hear Heaven's "Yes!"

Who can baptize another?

Sometimes the question is not who can be baptized but who can baptize another?

In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul is addressing the people of Corinth. He had spent more than a year with them in a pastoral role, teaching them the new way of life as a follower of Christ, but now is writing them a letter to address some problems in the church. Some of the people are claiming to be followers of Paul, others Peter, others Christ alone. To them he writes " Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name." (vs 13-15)

As Paul instructs them to be unified in following Christ alone, we see in his letter that baptisms were not exclusively reserved for the pastoral figure. Paul makes the point that he was involved in very few of the baptisms during his tenure there. And baptisms continued under the care of the Corinthian church after Paul had moved on to other missionary endeavors.

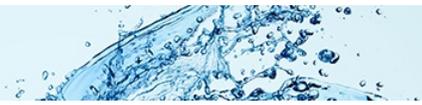
At Mountain West, our pastoral staff take the lead in baptisms, but there are times when someone who is instrumental in the spiritual life of the one getting baptized may lead the baptism.

Can my child be baptized?

We will baptize anyone who understands what baptism symbolizes and wants to make that personal public declaration. If your child is under 18 years old, we ask that parents partner with our MW Kids Ministry and Young Mountain Student Ministry to help your children through these decisions of faith. You can set up this meeting by contacting our staff pastors over these areas:

Randy Helms - Children's Pastor
www.randy@mwchurch.com

Mannie Marti - Student Pastor
mannie@mwchurch.com



Going Public

When a private company decides to “go public” it does so to gain investors, adding a broader base of support to shoulder the financial load of the enterprise. In addition, the company gets the benefit of promotion, knowing that public businesses are more widely known than private corporations.

In many ways these benefits parallel with the Christ follower who decides to “go public.” By sharing this experience with others who are there to cheer you on, you gain a group of people who can invest themselves in you through prayer and encouragement. You also get the benefit of being widely known as a follower of Christ. This is the heart of Jesus, to let the change we experience on the inside be made known to those around us.

Most of the examples of baptism recorded in scripture are very public. In fact, baptism is how Jesus went public. It’s the mark that initiated His life-changing public ministry. It’s how He went public and it’s how we go public. We become marked as His, and in doing so, we gain the spiritual investment of others and He gains more promotion and honor. So why be private when you can go public for His sake!

We are looking forward to you being a part of our next Baptism Celebration. We stand ready to celebrate with you as you go public!

What can you expect at a Baptism Celebration?

Sometimes anxiety and fear accompanies the unknown. What should we expect to happen to us when we are baptized?

At Mountain West the celebration of your baptism has a party like atmosphere. You are surrounded by friends and family and people who can't wait to celebrate with you. People will be clapping, high-fiving, cheering and smiles all around. The result will be a very affirming atmosphere. So you should expect to feel encouraged about taking this important step in your spiritual journey.

You should expect that your story will impact someone in a lasting way. Instead of making you say it yourself, we have you write down a sentence or two about what the day means to you. Then when you are in the pool to be baptized someone will read what you have written. Some moving moments have occurred just from hearing the stories of people.

Don't feel like you need to hold back your emotion or be “dignified”. In fact we want you to feel the freedom to rejoice and be excited in this moment. We don't hold back either! We don't just dip you in the water and gradually lift you up...we bring you out of the water with energy and enthusiasm because of what it represents...the old is gone and the new life has come! Overall you should expect the experience to be life-changing! We can't wait to celebrate what God has done in your life!

You should expect that your baptism will be a memorable day for you, one that you will look back on and value greatly...you should expect the experience to be life-changing! If you would like more information, you can email Heather Lovejoy at baptism@mwchurch.com