

WHAT ABOUT BAPTISM?

A. So... You're Thinking About Being Baptized...

The fact that you're reading this... thinking about being baptized... probably indicates that you're at a significant point on your journey to know God. For centuries, people just like you have walked a similar path and eventually came to that place where they wanted to deeply align their lives with Jesus. Baptism was and continues to be one of the unique ways people like you express this new story they sense being written into their lives.

So let us assure you... baptism is not something you do once you've gotten your life all figured out. It's not what a person does once they have all the answers. Baptism isn't about committing to live life perfectly. Instead, it is about admitting that you no longer want to live a single moment dislocated from intimacy with God. It's about realizing in the way you identify with Jesus, you are becoming more of who God has longed for you to be in this world and in your life.

The beautiful mystery of the Christian faith is that, in Jesus, God actually entered into the human condition; yet death did not have the last word. In His resurrection, God's scandalous love, redemption and new life had the final word.

The cross is a picture of God's solidarity with a broken world and a refusal to give up on humanity; to believe that even the worst in us and around us can change, can become alive, vibrant, new... resurrected from a dead life. Trusting in Jesus then is trusting in the new thing God wants to do in your life, in this world and beyond.

An amazing journey still awaits you. The next few pages will give you more information about the baptism experience and tell you how to register. So look it over carefully. If you have any questions, feel free to call or email. Our staff stands ready to respond or help in any way they can.

B. What is Baptism?

Baptism is:

- An outward demonstration of the inward response of a life committed to God. It becomes an open and formal declaration that, “I want to walk with God for the rest of my life.”
- A sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord (Matthew 28:18-20), signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers, as declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.
- A symbol of the new covenant of grace. Just as circumcision was the symbol of the old covenant; baptism symbolizes of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and also of the Christian, the new convert. Romans 6:3, Colossian 2:12

B. Our Understanding of Baptism...

1. Water baptism is a **sacrament** of the church. A sacrament is “any of certain Christian rites (i.e., communion, baptism) held to have been instituted by Christ and to convey God’s grace to us.” This means that baptism is a gift from God that helps us to know Him and respond to Him.
2. In the original language “baptize” is to submerge, to fully immerse in water. There is little debate that the early church understood the word baptize to involve an individual being fully immersed (that’s why we baptize in a lake, pool, hot tub or baptism tank).
3. “Baptism” was used by Jewish sects both pre and post New Testament times:
 - i) as a purification ritual / washing.
 - ii) as a means of repentance (i.e., John the Baptist).
 - iii) as a means of entering a community of faith.

Certainly, some of these are involved in our present understanding of baptism, but Christ did attach even more significance to baptism as we will see below. Please note though, that as much as we understand about baptism, there is still some mystery connected to it!

D. Why Should I be Baptized?

1. Because Jesus commanded it.

Jesus said, "Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the Threefold Name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you."

Matthew 28:19-20 The Message version

2. Because Jesus was baptized. Why was Jesus baptized? It was to mark the beginning of His earthly ministry *and to **model** baptism for us.*

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John."

Matthew 3:13

"We know that we have come to know Him, if we obey His commands... whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did."

1John 2:3-6

3. Because it symbolizes my ownership of Jesus' death and resurrection.

- i) Are 'symbols' important today in your life? In our culture we wear wedding bands to symbolize our vows. Why do we wear wedding rings? Is it to help us remember our vows? Is it for others to know we are married? For many of the reasons we wear wedding rings, we are baptized.

- ii) What is meant by “ownership”? What is it to own Christ’s burial (“to be buried with Christ”) and to own His resurrection (“raised with Christ”)? Essentially to **own** Jesus’ death is to acknowledge that He did this for me, that I needed Him to die for me. To own His resurrection is likewise, to recognize that He did in fact rise from the dead and today He is alive and I know Him.
- iii) The people of Israel also had a tradition to help them communally remember God-moments: they would set up a ‘marker’ (i.e. a pile of rocks or an altar) at the site where God had performed a miracle. So when the people of God crossed the Jordan river, they celebrated that God-moment by erecting a monument of 12 stones (Joshua 4:19-24). Now, note the word “marking” in the Matthew passage on page 2. We can understand that baptism is a marker celebrating that I have “crossed over” to a new life in Jesus Christ.
- iv) Baptism signifies a personal acceptance of the benefits of the atonement (sacrificial substitute) of Jesus Christ.

“For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised in Christ.”

Colossians 2:12

“The waters of baptism do that for you, not by washing away dirt from your skin but by presenting you through Jesus’ resurrection before God with a clear conscience.”

1Peter 3:21 The Message

(Further reading: Romans 6:1, 1Peter 3:2)

- 4. Because it is part of God’s design (i.e., Conversion, Confession, Community). Baptism confirms our **obedience** to Christ and conveys our connection with Him and His family on earth (from conversion into community). Baptism is that moment we make a public stand to say ‘I am saved, and am a part of the family of God’.

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:26-28

“Your body has many parts – limbs, organs, cells, but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ. By means of His one Spirit, we all said goodbye to our partial and piecemeal lives... This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.”

1Corinthians 12:12-13 The Message

E. Who can be Baptized?

- Anyone has repented of their sins (Acts 17:30, Acts 2:28), who believes in Jesus Christ (John 3:36, Mark 16:16), who confesses their sin (1 John 1:9), and receives Christ as their Saviour (Revelation 3:20). (Salvation) Simply stated: Have you asked God to forgive you and now do you know that your sins are forgiven through faith?
- Do you believe the Apostle’s Creed?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried; He descended into Hades; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

- Can you answer “I do or I will” to the following questions? If so... then you may be baptized.
 - *Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, and do you desire to be baptized in His name?*
 - *Do you intend by this act to testify to all the world that you are a Christian and will be a loyal follower of Christ?*
 - *Do you believe in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?*
 - *Trusting God to help you, will you resist temptation always and keep from doing those things which you know to be sinful or displeasing to God?*
 - *Will you attend the church services and do those things you know a Christian should do?*
 - *Do you purpose now to live your life in pursuit of God?*

- What about infants? The Free Methodist Church’s roots are clearly in the infant baptism tradition. Over the years, as the church has incorporated people whose consciences have been shaped by adult or infant baptism traditions, it has granted parents the right to choose which service they prefer. The Free Methodist Church attempts to embrace both dimensions of Christian truth. We provide a service for either baptism or dedication. In both, we emphasize the grace of God and the necessity of faith. When Christian parents – as a matter of conscience – have a preference for one service or the other, our pastors honour that request.

By teaching and follow-up, we emphasize that neither practice has saving virtue and that both are appropriate only for parents who themselves are living the life of faith. Note: Adults who were baptized as infants will be required to affirm the vow for themselves before being accepted into church membership.

F. Often Asked Questions

1. “What if I was baptized as an infant?”

- i) **Are there theological / doctrinal concerns with being baptized twice?**
- ii) **Does this nullify what my parents did to me as infant?**

Answer: Remember the four reasons you should be baptized? Have these been satisfied in the method of confession you used [i.e., infant baptism & then a confession of some sort]?

2. “Do I have to speak in front of everyone?”

Answer: If you are nervous about speaking, you could write out what you want to say or we could simply ask you the few baptismal questions that will help you tell your story of faith.

3. “Do I need to be re-baptized if I have backslidden?”

Answer: Remember the story of the “prodigal son” in Luke 15? Did the son need to go through the rites of passage to re-enter the family? All he had to do was ask forgiveness of the Father.

4. “How old should I be in order to be baptized? Can my children be baptized?”

Answer: The Bible does not clearly state an age. In the book of Acts there are passages that state that not only was a parent baptized, but, “he and his whole household were baptized that day”. This obviously included children, but how old we do not know. So it is not a question of age, but of maturity, and understanding.

The first words of advice we offer parents when they ask if their child is old enough are:

1. Do you understand what baptism is and the four reasons given for baptism in section E?

2. If there is any doubt at all that your child may not be old enough then don't! We certainly don't want to 'steal' a very special moment by doing it too early in the child's life – before the child has really owned the faith.

Here are some questions that will help us make a wise decision about your child:

- Is your child old enough to understand “born again” (words Jesus used to describe Christianity, John 3:3)?
- Does your child understand the reasons to be baptized listed in section D (take your time moving through the verses together and making sure your child has some handle on each reason)?
- Do you see in your child's life, evidence of their friendship with God?
- Does your child understand the questions in section E? (the Apostle's Creed and Baptismal Questions)
- Do you and (if applicable) your spouse feel comfortable that your child understands section F?

G. Instructions for Baptism

1. Invite your family, friends and anyone else who comes to mind as you prayerfully think about the day. **Why** do you think you should invite others?
2. Ask your small group, close friends, or family to pray for you as you prepare for the day.
3. Read through the verses in this booklet.

4. Bring with you on that day:
 - Big towel (we will provide baptismal gowns when possible)
 - Dark coloured t-shirt and pants or shorts
 - Change of clothes and grooming stuff (brush, makeup, etc.)
 - Earplugs if you require them (you'll be able to plug your nose).
 - Plastic bag to bring wet things home.
 - Someone to video or take pictures.
5. Arrive 45 minutes prior to the start of the service to receive final directions/instructions.
6. You will hand your towel to attendant, and then enter the baptismal tank. Pastor will stand beside you. You will cross your arms, you may hold pastor's left arm and his/her right arm will be on your back (to assist you back up). Relax, bend your knees and simply allow yourself to fall back into the water.

H. Readings for Further Study

Acts 2:38, 41, 8:12-13, 8:36-37, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 16:33, 18:8.

These passages will give you further insight into how the early church understood and practiced baptism.

Contact Us!

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