



BAPTISM EXPLAINED: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

By
St. George in-the-Pines Anglican Church, Banff

Baptism

(Colossians 2:9–12)

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the Head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature... having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

What Is Baptism?

Baptism is more than a ritual: it is Jesus' sign that marks you as His own. In baptism, we are joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection and welcomed into His church.

Why Do Signs Matter?

In everyday life, we use signs that point beyond themselves:

- A handshake means friendship and trust.
- A wedding ring signifies commitment.
- A poppy symbolizes remembrance.

In the same way, Jesus gave the church two special signs: **baptism** and **holy communion**. These are called **sacraments**, meaning “outward, visible signs of an inward, spiritual grace.”

What Does Baptism Mean?

Read these passages together to discover what baptism represents:

- Matthew 28:19
- Acts 2:38–39
- Romans 6:4
- 1 Corinthians 12:12–13
- Matthew 3:11

- Acts 2:38

According to **Ephesians 4:4–5**, baptism happens once. Even if you don't remember it (as with childhood baptisms), it still matters. Like seeing a wedding ring reminds you that you're married, seeing someone baptised reminds you that you belong to Jesus.

But What If I Was Baptised as a Child?

We affirm **infant baptism**. Think of baptism like receiving a cheque with “forgiveness” written on it. Whether given as a baby or an adult, the cheque is valid. But you “cash” that cheque when you come to personal faith in Jesus. It was always yours, the faith response makes it real in your life.

Avoiding Two Extremes

People often misunderstand baptism in two opposite ways:

- **Magical view:** Some believe baptism automatically saves, especially infants. This is not biblical.
- **Mere symbol view:** Others treat baptism as just a human ritual, with no real effect. This also falls short.

The biblical teaching avoids both extremes: baptism is both a **command of Jesus** and a **gift of grace that calls for faith**.

1. Baptism Is Jesus' Command

Jesus Himself was baptised (Matthew 3:13). After His resurrection, He commanded His followers:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19)

2. Baptism Begins Christian Life

Baptism has always been part of becoming a Christian:

- **Repent and believe:** Our personal response.
- **Be baptised:** What the church does for us.

- **Receive the Holy Spirit and forgiveness:** What God does for us.

These steps don't always happen in a fixed order in the New Testament, but all belong to Christian initiation.

3. Baptism Welcomes You Into the Church

1 Corinthians 12:13 says,
“We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body.”

Baptism marks your entry into the visible church. But entering the **kingdom of God** requires faith. It's possible to be baptised and belong outwardly to the church without yet trusting Jesus inwardly.

Jesus' words to the thief on the cross remind us: someone may enter God's kingdom by faith alone, even without baptism (Luke 23:43). But as Christians, we are called to both faith and baptism.

4. Baptism Points Beyond Itself

Baptism visibly proclaims:

- **Cleansing** – “You were washed” (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- **Union with Christ** – “Baptised into Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:3)
- **Receiving the Spirit** – “We were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Immersion powerfully symbolizes:

- Going under water: sharing in Jesus' death.
- Rising up: sharing in His resurrection.
- The water itself: symbolizing the Spirit's cleansing and life.

Babies are often baptised by pouring, which also faithfully conveys the sign.

5. Baptism Is God's Effective Gift

Baptism isn't just a human action. It's a spiritual moment with real effect. In the Bible, physical actions carry spiritual weight. Baptism marks a real beginning with God.

But baptism alone doesn't save. Baptism is **God's gracious gift**, like receiving a cheque. But it is **faith** that "cashes" the cheque, making the gift personally effective.

Both grace and faith matter. Baptism gives; faith receives.

Final Reflection

As St. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote:

"Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift... It is called grace because it is given even to the guilty; baptism because sin is buried in the water; enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship."

Remember:

- Baptism is **Jesus' welcome** to you.
- Whether you were baptised as a child or an adult, the gift was real.
- Jesus invites you now to respond to that gift with faith, trust, and love.