

## What is Baptism?

The practice of baptizing new believers has two primary purposes. First, Christian baptism represents the union with Christ in His work that has taken place through the believer's salvation. It is a testimony to others of the believer's newfound faith. Paul tells the Colossian believers that they have been "buried with him in baptism" and "raised with him through faith" (Col. 2:12). That is, believers symbolically take part in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is the first act of obedience, or work (James 2:22), on the part of the one who has placed his faith in Christ. Jesus himself submitted to baptism to model submission and obedience to God for His followers (Mark 1:9-11, Matt. 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22). It symbolically represents the inward change that has taken place in the life of the believer—the physical picture of the washing of the "new birth" (Eze. 36:25-27). This does not mean that baptism is necessary for salvation, rather one who is truly saved will submit to baptism.

Second, baptism represents initiation into the community of believers—the church. Baptism is a church ordinance, particularly of the local church. When a person is baptized, he is not baptized generically and for his own pleasing. Through baptism, the believer agrees to identify with the beliefs associated with that community of believers and its unity of mind. Because we are a Bible-believing church that believes the Scriptures prescribe how baptism is to be done, all candidates for membership in our church must be or have been baptized according to what the Bible prescribes. In addition to demonstrating unity with what the church believes, the person being baptized further submits to the fellowship, rebuke, correction, and accountability of the church body.

Christian baptism is only for believers who have professed faith in Christ. Thus, it excludes both non-believers and young children who have not yet come to realize the gravity of their sin, the need for faith and repentance, and the offer of salvation made possible through Christ's saving work. The New Testament records no instance of an infant baptism, but instead repeatedly reveals that baptism followed this order: proclamation of the Word, hearing, faith and repentance, baptism, and works (Matt. 28:18ff, Mark 16:15f, Acts 2:36ff, 8:4ff, 10:44ff, 16:13ff, 18:8ff, 19:1ff, 1 Cor. 1:13ff, 1 Pet. 3:20ff, Heb 10:22f). Thus, it follows that baptismal candidates will be examined prior to their baptism to insure the authenticity of their confession.

We believe that baptism must take place by immersion, as opposed to effusion (sprinkling). The New Testament word *baptizo*, from which we get the word "baptize," literally means "plunging," "dipping," or "immersing." The prepositions "in" and "out of" when used to describe New Testament baptism, (Mark 1:5, 10) indicate the practice of immersion. The picture of the significance of baptism given in Paul's letter to the Colossians mentioned above further validates immersion.

Hopefully this sketch has answered most questions you might have about baptism. Feel free to contact any of the pastors to discuss this further by calling the church office: 770-475-6111.