

Three Rivers Presbyterian Church  
Foundations  
Baptism

- We believe there are two sacraments instituted directly by Christ and represent him and his benefits – namely, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

What are sacraments?

- Sacraments are holy *signs* and *seals* of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to *represent Christ*, and his *benefits*; and to *confirm* our interest in him: as also, to put a *visible difference* between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word (WCF 27.1).
- A sacrament is a *sign* – a picture of God’s promises. Sacraments point us to the grace of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
  - No power in the sacrament that causes God’s grace to come to an individual.
- A sacrament is a *seal*. A seal confirms the authenticity of the promise.
  - In the ancient world, kings would authenticate letters/documents with a seal. Even today, we have seals of authenticity (birth certificates, sports memorabilia, etc.)
  - A sacrament seals God’s promises and gives confidence they can be trusted.
  - “He [Abraham] received the *sign* of circumcision as a *seal* of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:11).
- A Sacrament is a *mark*.
  - Puts a visible difference between the church and the rest of the world.
  - Baptism is a jersey that marks us as part of the baptized team.
  - Likewise, the Lord’s Supper serves as a picture of those who will participate in the final “marriage supper of the lamb” (Rev. 19:6-11).

WLC Q. 165 What is baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a *sign and seal* of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit, of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly *admitted into the visible church*, and enter into an open and professed *engagement* to be wholly and only the Lord’s.

The New Testament neither explicitly commands infants to be baptized nor explicitly prohibits them from being baptized.

## Continuity Between Covenants

- The debate centers on questions surrounding the meaning of baptism and the degree of continuity between the Old Covenant and New Covenant.
- As Presbyterians, we believe that there is continuity between the covenants. Baptism is the New Testament sign of God’s covenant of grace just as circumcision was the Old Testament sign of the covenant.

## God’s Covenant with Abraham

- “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and **I will be their God**” (Gen. 17:7-8)
- Abraham had faith before he received the sign of faith (circumcision). Abraham’s son, Isaac, received the sign of faith before he had the faith that the sign signified. God ordered that a sign of faith be given before faith was present.

## Household Baptisms

- In Acts 16, Lydia and the Philippian Jailor, both of whom are heads of households, believe in Jesus and their entire households are baptized.
- “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after **she was baptized**, and her **household as well**” (Acts 16:14-15)
- “Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you **and your household**.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and **he was baptized at once, he and all his family**. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God” (Acts 16:30-34).

### Genesis 17:1-8

Parties: Abraham and his offspring

Promise: “I will be your God”

Sign: Circumcision (males only)

### Acts 16

Parties: Lydia & Household

Promise: “Salvation through Jesus”

Sign: Baptism (males and females)

In the New Testament, Peter reaffirms that the *content* of God's promises has not changed – though the sign has changed. Circumcision → Baptism

- “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the *promise* is for *you* and for *your children*....” (Acts 2:38-39).
- “In him also you were *circumcised* with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in *baptism*, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:11-12).

Every administration of God's covenant included children (why should the new be different?)

- The burden of proof is on our Baptist friends to show that God no longer includes the household (the offspring of believers) as part of his covenant promises.
- **Presbyterians do not believe in baptismal regeneration.** Children who receive baptism are not automatically born again or saved. They still have to believe in Christ for themselves.

#### Other New Testament Baptisms

- Adults who were previously unbelievers. They were first generation believers. Presbyterians agree that adult converts (who were not baptized as infants) must first make a profession of faith before receiving baptism, which is a sign of their faith.
- Children of New Testament believers are set apart “as holy” in God's sight because of the faith of one parent.
- “For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:14).

#### What about the mode of baptism?

- No explicit mode is taught in the New Testament. Presbyterians recognize the validity of immersion but believe that sprinkling is the correct mode.
- Baptize does not always mean “immersion” (1 Cor. 10:4; Mark 7:5).
- The power is not in the mode but in the God who is at work through his Spirit.