

INTRODUCTION TO BAPTISM

A BAPTISM STUDY RESOURCE

Studied in the Spring of 2024



A NOTE FROM NATHAN

Baptism - a hot topic in the faith, but also an important one. People everyday choose to get baptized, and sometimes for many different reasons... "I love Jesus." "My friends are getting baptized, I want to do it too." "I got baptized a long time ago for the wrong reason and I want to do it again, but this time for the right reason." I've heard it all. But that does prompt these important questions... What is baptism? Why should you get baptized? That's exactly why the series "Introduction to Baptism" was taught, and why this resource was created after the fact. Watching many students give their lives to Christ over a period of time prompted me to teach this series, in hopes of showing them the full picture of what they've gotten themselves into, and teach those who weren't baptized yet about why they should choose to be baptized. This resource aims to cover all the bases of baptism. My prayer is that this resource will help you understand what baptism is and why you should join us in this journey of following Jesus, the greatest man who ever lived, the Lord and Savior of the world. With all that being said, let's jump right in!

The structure and much of the material of "Introduction to Baptism" was created by the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada church, specifically written for the youth, but useful for all people. The material was added to and modified to fit our context and align with scripture as much as possible.

BAPTISM

This acronym may make more sense once you've finished reading this resource, so I encourage you to come back and read this once you've finished reading through the whole thing. You can consider it a summary of what you're about to read. You may have a better understanding of it later!

B - Belief in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior

A - Act of obedience (to the command of Christ)

P - Power of the Holy Spirit is with you

T - Telling others you've turned from sin and that God is in control of your life

I - Included in God's people

S - Sign of God's grace and forgiveness

M - Mark of your promise to follow Jesus forever

Some scriptures to help you in your study of B.A.P.T.I.S.M.

B - Ephesians 4:3-6. Acts 2:36-38. Acts 10:42-48. Acts 19:1-6.

A - Matthew 28:18-20.

P - 1 Corinthians 12:13. Ephesians 4:3-6. Acts 2:36-38. Acts 10:42-48. Acts 19:1-6.

T - Romans 6:1-4. Colossians 2:9-12.

I - 1 Corinthians 12:13. Ephesians 4:3-6. Acts 10:42-28.

S - Acts 2:36-38. Acts 16:29-33. Acts 22:14-16. Acts 10:42-48.

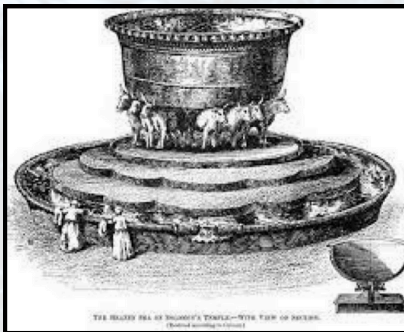
M - Romans 6:1-4.

Continue onto the next page to begin your in-depth study of baptism!

BACKGROUND TO THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Before we get into what baptism is or what it means, we're first going to look at the history of baptism!

Ritual cleansing and purification rites as initiation into pagan cults or religions have been around forever. In Judaism, there is a practice called Mikveh, which means "a gathering, pooling or flowing." It was most often used in reference to water. The practices of it were widely used for a variety of purposes for ritual cleansing... such as: women after their menstrual cycle, before marriage, after giving birth, after having contact with a dead body, for priests before entering the temple, for men who wanted to enter prayer and study the Torah, etc. Ideally this ritual was performed in a flowing stream of water. There were stone structures and pools built for the ceremony of mikveh, but water had to be flowing somewhere. There's mention of this type of ritual cleansing as early as the book of Leviticus. The Bible also has a description of a structure that was used for ritual cleansing in King Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:23) called the "Sea of Solomon." The priests could wash themselves using this "Molten Sea."



Examples of a typical structure of a pool for ritual cleansing are pictured below. Sometimes there would be steps leading in and out of the pool so that you wouldn't have to step on the same steps walking out as you did walking in, which would "re-dirty" yourself.



BACKGROUND TO THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Cleansing Requirements:

- Nothing can be between you and the water (you had to be naked!)
- You have to be in the pool alone
- You have to submerge your whole body in a forward motion 3+ times
- You have to have a minimum of 3 witnesses

Another use of Mikveh was as an initiation rite into the Jewish faith. This was one of three requirements to become Jewish if you weren't born into the Jewish faith. The other two were circumcision and offering a sacrifice at the temple.



This is a bath for ritual cleansing. It was discovered to the south of the temple (in Jerusalem) close to the Huldah Gate.

Purification rites were only associated with physical cleansing though. What about an inside, spiritual cleansing? Well some Jews at the time understood that the heart had to be right and the person “cleansed” internally through repentance (which means to turn/turn away from). **Repentance** is turning away from sin and fixing our eyes back on God.

Read Matthew 3:1-12

You can see that John the Baptist's baptism was different than a Jewish baptism - calling for repentance of sins. He then says someone is coming with an even different baptism, one of the Holy Spirit and fire. John would baptize that man. That's what we will focus on in the next section.

JESUS' BAPTISM BY JOHN

If you're reading this you probably know who Jesus is and know that He is perfect and without sin. But He was baptized. Whether it's Mikveh or John's baptism for the repentance of sins, it doesn't make sense to say that Jesus needed to be baptized. So why was He?

Before we get into why we think Jesus was baptized, let's talk about His baptizer - John the Baptist (Jesus' cousin).

The book of Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. In this book, it describes one who is to come prepare the way for the Lord (Malachi 3:1).

Read Malachi 4:5-6

John the Baptist is the prophet who came in the power of Elijah. The Jewish people did not expect God to come in the form of Jesus, the same way they did not expect "the one like Elijah" to come in the form of John, they expected Elijah. Elijah never died - he was taken up to heaven, so they expected him to return. When Jewish people celebrate Passover today, they leave an empty seat and open the door so that Elijah may come in and join. The book of Luke confirms that John is the one who was to come prepare the way for the Lord.

Read Luke 1:5-17

How do we know that John was the one to come prepare the way for the Lord?

- The archangel, Gabriel, quotes Malachi 4:5-6 while describing John in Luke 1:17
- John wore the same type of clothing as Elijah (2 Kings 1:7-8)
- John went to the wilderness to fulfill the Isaiah 40:3 prophecy
- John ate locusts - talked about by the prophet Joel
 - Represented the coming of the "Day of the Lord," and the Lord's judgment could only be averted through repentance (what John preached)

JESUS' BAPTISM BY JOHN

Read Matthew 3:13-17

Now that you've read the story of Jesus' baptism, without further ado...

Why do we believe Jesus might've been baptized by John?

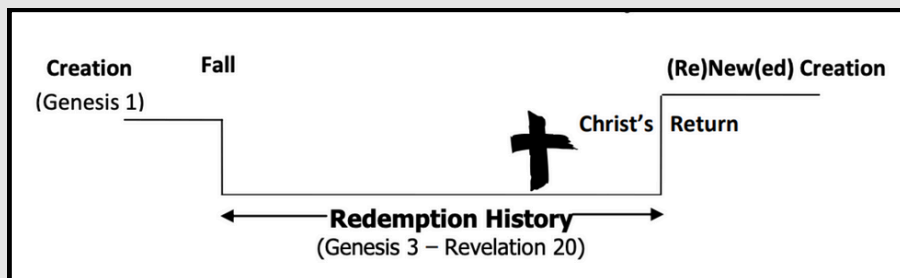
- To transform baptism and infuse it with new meaning
- His baptism signifies His willingness to carry out the Trinity's mission to reveal the Kingdom of Heaven
- It inaugurated His message and ministry of salvation
- He was baptized into priesthood (this was a Jewish practice of baptizing men at 30 years old before priesthood - Luke 3:23)
- The Father and the Spirit bear witness to the Son's calling and pour out their blessings, affirming that this is the will of God
- To set an example for believers to follow

John was hesitant to baptize Jesus because He had no need to repent. Depending on the translation you read Matthew 3:15 in, He might've said that it must be done to fulfill all righteousness. Without Jesus we cannot be righteous. He might've said that we must carry out all that God requires. This would signify that baptism is a requirement. It is an act of obedience (Matthew 28:18-20). It lets us identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, giving us new life.

You might've heard that baptism is a sign of having your sins washed away, and that is absolutely right. We are buried and raised to new life with Jesus (Romans 6:3-10). But choosing baptism is so much more than just having sins washed away. It's also living this new life described in Romans 6. Coming up... we're gonna talk about what you're choosing when you choose baptism. Get ready to dive deeper!

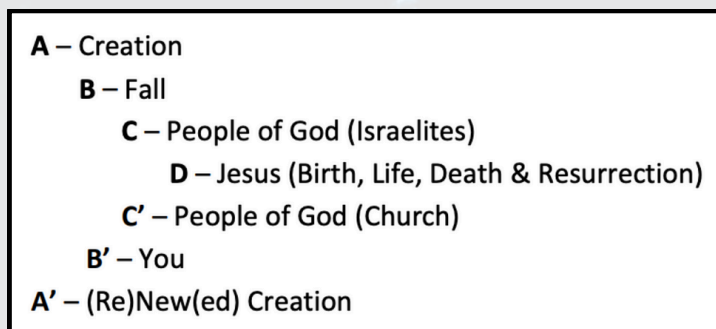
BAPTISM AND CONVERSION: BECOMING A PART OF GOD'S STORY

Jesus' baptism identified Him as God's chosen one, the Messiah. By willfully undergoing John's baptism, Jesus showed that He was in agreement with God's plan and purposes. Jesus accepted and owned the divine mission set before Him. As disciples of Jesus, we're invited to follow Jesus into the water. When we're obedient and are baptized, we are saying "Yes!" to the mission, the plan, and the will of God. We surrender our lives and our own plans to participate in the divine agenda. What is this divine agenda though?



The divine agenda is redemption. To renew us. This is God's story. He's redeeming humanity, and wants us to jump in on the mission with Him. This is a story, and typically in stories, books, movies, etc., there's a thing called a climax, where the big event of the story occurs. The climax tends to happen near the end of the story, but the Hebrew people were not linear thinkers in this way. For them, the climax, or the focal point of the story, happens in the middle. A literary tool that Hebrew authors use to emphasize their main point is a chiasmic structure.

A **chiasm** is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The term chiasm comes from the Greek letter Chi (X), because the structure looks like the left of the "X."



BAPTISM AND CONVERSION: BECOMING A PART OF GOD'S STORY

The only part of the story without a mirror event is the center, where the author's main message lies. Many biblical books and poems are arranged with this structure. Looking back to the Redemption History, you can see that God's actions in history reflect the chiastic structure.

First comes creation (A). You can look back to Genesis 1 to cover the creation story. Next comes the Fall (B) in Genesis 3. In the Fall, there were 4 relationships that were shattered. Our relationship:

- with God (Genesis 3:7-8)
 - Their eyes were opened and they felt shame.
- with others (Genesis 3:12)
 - The man blames the woman for giving him the fruit.
- with self (Genesis 3:10)
 - They heard God walking in the garden and hid because they were naked and afraid.
- with creation (Genesis 3:17)
 - The ground was cursed because of them.

God's story is working toward the renewal of all things, the restoration of heaven and earth. In this case, we should also be all about restoring what was broken. If your baptism is just about restoring the relationship between you and God, you've missed the point. What about others? Creation? Yourself?

(C) God's people, the Israelites, who God uses for His plan, and who the savior comes through. (D) The focal point, Jesus, the savior. (C') God's people are now anyone who puts their faith in Christ. (B') You become a part of God's story, working to redeem and restore what's been broken. (A') What we're looking to. Baptism is the declaration that life as we know it is not how it's supposed to be, so we join God in His work of restoration. Our goal isn't to get to heaven, but to bring heaven here on earth. How do we fulfill this divine mission? Continue onto the next section to find out.

BAPTISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

Now that we know what we're getting into when we get baptized, God's story / the divine mission to redeem and restore brokenness, we can discuss how we live that out.

Baptism says "I'm following Jesus," and there is so much more to following Jesus than just accepting a list of beliefs. We need to be ready to change our behavior and the way we live. It's all about transformation. It's about beliefs and actions together. There are terms for these ideas:

Orthodoxy - Right Thinking

Orthopraxy - Right Living

There is a book that covers these that would be a great resource to read along with this resource. It's called "Now That I'm a Christian" by C. Michael Patton. The first 5 chapters of the book cover orthodoxy (Bible, Man, God, Christ, Faith), while the second 5 chapters cover orthopraxy (Prayer, Study, Church, Suffering, Mission). I highly recommend reading that book! The way we think and live leads into this discussion about discipleship.

To help you understand what discipleship means, we'll answer this question... What's the difference between a student and a disciple? A student learns from their teacher, but a disciple learns from and tries to live like their teacher. So when we say we're disciples of Jesus, we're trying to think and live like Jesus, not just learn about Him. To be a disciple of Jesus is saying we're gonna preach the Kingdom of heaven like Jesus, we're gonna love and sit with sinners like Jesus (not condemn them), we're gonna deny sin when tempted like Jesus. Our faith is not just about learning about Jesus and then living how we want, it's about trying to be a reflection of Christ.

Remember the chiastic structure from the last section? Notice how in that story, creation is in the beginning and the end. This reminds us to steward God's creation in His story. This is a part of discipleship. God's story tells us that His creation was and will be the ultimate environment for His people.

BAPTISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

Read Romans 8:19-22

You may think, “How am I able to do this discipleship thing and play a part in creation? It sounds more complicated than I thought.” Here’s how:

Read 1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 3:10, 2 Corinthians 5:19-20

We are His representatives, His royal priesthood, His ambassadors. He has entrusted us to be a part of His mission. There’s even something that Jesus left behind to help guide us in the mission... The Holy Spirit. Jesus said that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8). The word power in that verse in the original Greek is the word “Dunamis,” which carries the double meaning miracle. This power/miracle came upon Mary to let Jesus be born of a virgin. This power/miracle rose Jesus from the dead. This power/miracle lives inside us, driving us to be true disciples of Jesus. This can only be done when we’re connected to God.

Jesus says “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). He tells us that we’re also the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). We carry that light when we’re connected to God. Think of the church (us) as light bulbs. A light bulb must be plugged in to light up. Witnessing is being plugged in and allowing the miracle of God to shine through you. When you decide to get baptized, you’re choosing to plug into this power/miracle. You’re choosing to be the light and go show people the love of God, while actively participating in the divine mission. You’re choosing to deny your own desires, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). We follow Jesus into the mission of making Him known to the world, shining our light in the darkness of the world.

Don’t feel like you have to be perfect to be a disciple. Discipleship is not a destination, but a journey. After your baptism, you’ll continue to grow spiritually and in knowledge anyway. You don’t have to be perfect to be baptized, nor are you expected to be perfect after. Buckle up for the journey and let Jesus be the perfect role model and teacher for your life!

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACT OF BAPTISM

We've talked about the history of baptism, Jesus' baptism, what baptism means for us... but what about the actual act of it? What's the significance of the act of baptism?

Maybe one of the closest examples you can use to describe what's happening in baptism is a wedding ceremony. Both are used to publicly mark the beginning of a covenant... a lifelong commitment to each other. Baptism is like the exchanging of rings after declaring wedding vows. The rings are a symbol of commitment between husband and wife. Baptism represents our commitment to Christ. If you've already decided to commit your life to Christ, baptism would be the next step!

When deciding to be baptized, some people will put their baptism off to wait for the "perfect" time. This is especially common in teenagers. Waiting for a friend so that you can do it together, waiting to do it at a special place like church camp, waiting for a special time of year like Easter or Christmas, etc. Some people may wait until they sort out their lives first, thinking they need to be perfect before coming to Christ.

There's a preacher who was telling a story once of a guy who asked another preacher if they need to stop smoking marijuana to become a Christian. The preacher said no, they don't have to. He said to the man, "Let me ask you something. Do you need to clean yourself up before you take a shower? No, you get in the shower to get clean. Jesus is the same way. You come to Jesus and then if there's anything you need to work out with Him, you'll work it out." It reminded me of when my mom used to hire maids to clean our house in Oklahoma. She'd tell my brother and I to clean up before the maids arrive so they don't think we're dirty. But... aren't they there to clean? Some of us may not want Jesus to think we're dirty, but He's here to clean us up and redeem us. Just as I said at the end of the previous section, it's not about being perfect, it's about continuous transformation.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACT OF BAPTISM

We get baptized because we're acknowledging that we can't sort out our own sin - only Jesus can deal with it. Once we make this acknowledgment and recognize how much we need Jesus, and you want to make Him the Lord of your life, you get baptized. And if you think your baptism seems too sudden, go ahead and read about this Ethiopian Eunuch who spontaneously gave his life to Christ in baptism.

Read Acts 8:30-39

I'm not saying it's bad to plan out your baptism detail by detail, but it's not about the time or the place, it's about the change of heart - the transformation.

We've learned that baptism is more than just repentance of sins. That's a part of it for sure, but that was the main purpose of John's baptism. One way that Jesus changed baptism was the addition of the Holy Spirit to the mix. The Spirit didn't come until the book of Acts, after Jesus was gone. People argue whether the Spirit is received before or at baptism, but it makes sense to say it is received before - making that initial decision to follow Jesus. Baptism is important because it acts as a marker pointing to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

If possible, baptism should take place in the community of faith, as it signifies you are committing to God's family. Those who surround you at your baptism can help hold you accountable to the decision you've made, plus, we cannot be ashamed of our faith and keep it hidden.

One of the most important symbols of baptism is the water - representing the cleansing of our consciences by Christ. We look at going under water as dying (to our old life) and coming up as resurrection (to our new life). But different churches believe they have the "right" method of baptism or use of water. Wait, there are different practices of baptism even though we follow the same Jesus? That's the topic of the final section.

WHY ARE THERE DIFFERENT PRACTICES OF BAPTISM IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

I believe up to this point we've covered almost everything you need to know about baptism. I can't promise it's absolutely everything you need, but it's a lot! In this final section, we'll talk about the different practices of baptism in the church.

First, a very controversial type of baptism... Infant Baptism. This is practiced by the Roman Catholic church, and even some Protestant churches (Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc). The Catholic and Protestant churches split a long time ago, each believing that they were re-establishing the original church, and the other was doing church wrong.

Infant Baptism:

- (Traditional Catholic teaching) The only way to remove original sin is to be baptized into the Roman Catholic church
 - Being baptized in another denomination would be invalid
- A child of believing parents is baptized to mark that its life has already been touched by God
- When of age, the child must choose for themselves to accept the promises made on their behalf by their parents (they take something called Confirmation classes, and then are asked if they accept or reject the beliefs and teachings)
 - Accepting the beliefs would "complete" their baptism

Some traditions' scriptural basis for baptizing infants:

- Scripture says that "whole households were baptized" (Acts 16:15, 33)
- Jesus blessed the children who came to Him (Mark 10:13-16)
- The Jewish practice of circumcision on 8 day old babies (Genesis 17:9-14)

The other type of baptism is called Believer's Baptism, where you get baptized after making the decision for yourself to follow Jesus.

WHY ARE THERE DIFFERENT PRACTICES OF BAPTISM IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

Believer's Baptism:

- Practiced by many Evangelical Denominations (Baptist, Reformed, Church of Christ, Methodist, etc)
- Strong biblical evidence, as demonstrated in Acts 8 with the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch
- Baptism is not the provision of salvation but a sign of conversion
 - Baptism alone does not save us, but it is a command of the one who saves

I grew up in the Church of Christ, and we don't believe in Infant Baptism. Regardless of how I grew up, I believe scripture points toward Believer's Baptism - letting people choose when they're baptized... which brings us to the 2 questions that bring the controversy of baptism in the church:

- "When should the water be administered?" (Birth or profession of faith)
- "How much water should be used?"

For example, in the Catholic church you're baptized as a baby (water) and profess faith later (no water). In Protestant churches there is usually something called a "Parent Commitment" or "Baby Blessing" (depending on the church) where the parents commit their baby to the Lord (no water), but later in life the child will choose to be baptized themselves (water). Regardless of the path, there is an event with water and one with no water. The students in my class all seemed to agree that Believer's Baptism was the way to go, allowing the person to choose baptism for themselves.

Finally, there are the common modes of administering water: **Sprinkling, Immersion, and Pouring**. All 3 were used in Bible history, but Immersion has the most biblical support. It also best represents our old self being laid to rest and our new self rising from the grave with Jesus.

I pray that this resource has helped you in your knowledge of baptism, your decision to be baptized, and your faith journey!

***Background to the Practice of
Christian Baptism***

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Jesus' Baptism by John

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***Baptism and Conversion: Becoming
a Part of God's Story***

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Baptism and Discipleship

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***The Significance of the Act of
Baptism***

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***Why Are There Different Practices
of Baptism in the Christian Church?***

McKnight Crossings Youth Ministry

