

Baptism

Why should we be baptised?

- The example of Jesus (*Matthew 3:13-17*).
- The command of Jesus (*Matthew 28: 19*).
- The command of the apostles (*Acts 2:38*).
- The example of the early church (*Acts 2:41; 8: 36-39; 9:18; 10:47, etc.*).

What does baptism mean?

The word 'baptise' means to immerse, to dip, to plunge. When something is baptised, it is pushed under the water before emerging again (or not, in the case of a sinking ship!).

Baptism was a Jewish ritual washing. In the New Testament it is a symbol of cleansing from sin: *Acts 22:16*. Passing through the water symbolises the removal of our sin by Jesus's death on our behalf.

In the New Testament, this action is also seen as a symbol of our dying with Christ and being raised again to new life: *Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 2:12*. Christians have known a death and a rebirth. The Old Life has died and been buried and there is a new life now. Paul teaches that our dying, burial and new life all take place in union with Jesus's own death, burial and rising again. This is symbolised by baptism. It portrays what has taken place in our experience. It shows that we are united with Jesus and we have left our old life behind.

Baptism is also the initiation rite for joining the church. It is a symbol of identification with Christ and his church – *Ephesians 4:4-6*.

How should we be baptised?

Christian churches disagree about this. Some say that merely pouring water or touching the forehead with a small drop of water is sufficient. But there are several reasons for insisting that, in normal circumstances, baptism should be by full immersion:

- There is the meaning of the word baptise: i.e. - to dip or immerse. It looks very much as if John the Baptist took Jesus down into the river and that he emerged from out of the river (*Mark 1:5, 10*). John chose to baptise at Aenon because there was plenty of water there (*John 3:23*); *Acts 8: 36-9* also seems to indicate full immersion.

- Also, the symbolism of union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (which is integral to Paul's argument in [Romans 6](#)) is simply not present in any other kind of baptism. Therefore we should be baptised by immersion except in extraordinary circumstances.

Who should be baptised?

Again, Christian churches disagree. Many baptise babies of believers on the basis of the Old Testament practice of circumcising the male children of Jews who were seen as part of the covenant. They say that the promise of God's grace extends to children of believers in the New Testament church and so it is legitimate to baptise them. The problem with this is that the New Testament doesn't make this connection with the children of believers. And when the New Testament connects circumcision with baptism, it assumes that those who are baptised have experienced inner spiritual regeneration: [Colossians 2:11](#); [Philippians 3:3](#). Few evangelicals would want to claim this for infants.

In the New Testament, there is no clear example of babies being baptised. The so-called Household Baptisms in [Acts](#) (e.g. [16:33-34](#)) seem to stress some kind of active response on behalf of everyone in the household. Moreover there is, in the New Testament, a clear order: believe and be baptised (e.g. [Matthew 28:19](#); [Acts 2:32](#)) and to baptise infants violates this. For this reason we conclude that only those who can profess faith in Jesus for themselves should be baptised.

What does baptism do?

It is important to realise that there is nothing magical about baptism. It is a rich symbol, not an act that is powerful in itself. All the same, it is a rich and moving symbol because what it symbolises is so personal and so important. When we are baptised, we are declaring to God, to the church, to our family and friends, to the world and to the devil and all the spirits, good and evil, that we belong to Jesus; that we have decided to follow him; and that we have died to our old life and started a new life which we live with him and in his power. This is an exciting and important declaration and one that helps us in our relationship with the Lord.

Greenstead Evangelical Free Church (GEFC) and Baptism

At GEFC, we are delighted to baptise new converts and other Christians who, for a variety of reasons, have not been baptised as believers. Candidates first discuss baptism and their own personal testimony with the pastor. We will want to hear about your faith in Christ, what difference it has made, and to be sure that you understand some basic Christian teaching. We baptise

people in good faith that their lives are lived under Christ's lordship, and that there are not visible sins, which we do not know about, which would discredit the witness of the church.

Then we arrange a date for your baptism in a convenient service. We encourage you to invite family and friends including non-Christians, who will probably be intrigued! We encourage candidates to give their testimonies in the service, though this is not compulsory. If there are songs or hymns you would like sung, please suggest them. Wear clothes you don't mind getting wet and that are suitably modest! Please bring a towel and a change of clothes. Please find a friend who can hold your towel for you and give it to you as you come out of the pool.

In the pool

In the pool you will be asked a question:

(Name), do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and do you promise to obey him as your Master and Lord? (Answer: I do)

The pastor will say

*Then on your confession of faith in Christ as your Saviour and on your promise of allegiance to Christ as your Lord, I/we baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

Then, after the actual baptising, we have a moment of prayer before you go up the steps out of the pool and off to get changed.

If you would like to talk about being baptised, please contact me on 01206 510114 or by email at pastor@gefc.org.uk.

Martin Peirce
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