

The background of the entire page is a close-up, high-angle shot of teal-colored water with fine, concentric ripples. The lighting creates a shimmering effect, with lighter and darker patches of blue-green. Centered in the middle of the page is the word "Baptism" written in a white, elegant cursive script. The letter "B" is large and loops around to the left. The letters "p", "t", and "i" are smaller and more compact. The word "ism" is written in a slightly more upright cursive. Behind the letters "p", "t", and "i", there is a rectangular grid of small, light blue dots, which serves as a subtle graphic element.

Baptism

DAVID COOPER



Christian Baptism

Christian baptism is an act of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We identify with his death, burial and resurrection for our eternal salvation in the physical act of baptism. Just as he was buried in the grave for three days and then rose to live, we go into the water and come out to live a new life!

WHAT DOES BAPTISM MEAN?

Baptism is connected to our repentance of sin and receiving God's forgiveness and cleansing from sin. In the New Testament, baptism is associated with repentance. Peter said, "Repent, and...be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

It also shows our relationship with Jesus: "We were, therefore, buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom 6:4). Now, "in the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). Just as water cleanses the body, the Holy Spirit cleanses our souls so that we can take off the old self of sin and put on the new self of righteousness (Eph 4:22-24).

Baptism is a basic part of being a disciple (follower, learner, imitator) of Jesus as we obey his instruction and follow his example. He told us to, "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).

Finally, baptism demonstrates God's forgiveness of sins. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ

for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of salvation and eternal life that we receive when we believe in Jesus and confess him as Lord. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Baptism shows that we have repented of sin and we have experienced the forgiveness of our sins. Now, the Holy Spirit lives in us and he is with us to empower us. “Do you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?” (1 Cor 6:19). Jesus promised: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

Remember, baptism does not save us from our sins. Only faith in Jesus Christ can save us. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Baptism is an act of faith, a sacrament like celebrating the Lord’s Supper, as an act of personal worship and a public witness to others that Jesus is Lord of our lives.

WHEN DID BAPTISM START?

In the ancient world, forms of baptism have appeared in many cultures. Basically, it was used to show commitment to some great person or to some group. There are various forms of baptism that have existed in different cultures throughout history.

The Jewish faith has practiced baptism for centuries when a person converts to Judaism. Baptism is a ritual that washes away the old life of sin and pagan worship to embracing Jehovah as the one true God. John the Baptist is the first Jew, as a prophet and priest of Israel, who used baptism as an act of faith, repentance and confession for Jewish people. His baptism of everyone, Jew and Gentile, made him both unique and controversial.

John the Baptist was both a prophet and a Levitical priest. He preached openly in the outskirts of Jerusalem in the desert areas and great crowds came to hear him preach by the Jordan River, where he baptized people who responded to his preaching. He preached repentance of sin for everyone, regardless of the religion, and used baptism as a sign of repentance and cleansing.

When he invited Jews to be baptized and told them to repent of their sins, many responded but many were also offended. The

Jews in his day were born into the covenant of Abraham. They thought of themselves as God's chosen people who didn't need to repent, the same way many people today are born into their religion and don't think they need to repent of sins and receive Christ as their Savior. They see themselves as good people by nature who don't need to repent.

When Jewish baby boys are born, they are circumcised, which is a sign of the covenant. They are born into the covenant of Judaism, because they are sons and daughters of Abraham. If a non-Jewish boy or man converted to Judaism, they were circumcised so that they bore the sign of the covenant. When John the Baptist told his own people that they also needed to repent and be baptized, he was, in effect, telling them that just because they were born into Judaism didn't guarantee them a relationship with God. They were sinners by birth too, and they needed God's saving grace that came into the world through his son Jesus. That's why he told the people by the Jordan River to believe in Jesus. He said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

Jerome was an early Church leader who lived around A.D. 400. He lived in Bethlehem and translated the Bible (written in Hebrew and Greek) into Latin (called the Latin Vulgate.) He said that when John the Baptist told

the Jewish people and the religious leaders to repent and be baptized he basically excommunicated the entire nation. John was calling every person to examine their own hearts, admit their own need of saving grace, to repent of their sins and to put their faith in God for eternal salvation. We too cannot depend on our national citizenship, faith of our fathers, the church we grew up in or our religious works to save us. Only God can cleanse the soul of sin and give us eternal life when we turn to him in faith and repentance.

Christian baptism comes out of this history and is a continuation of John's message to repent of sin and to trust Jesus Christ as Savior - "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Jesus takes away our sins when we trust him! Christian baptism means we confess our sins, receive God's forgiveness and we experience spiritual cleansing all because Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again from the dead that we now have eternal life. We come out of baptism waters the same way that he came out of the grave, to live a new life! The old self has been crucified with Christ and sin no longer dominates or controls us. We have been raised up from the destructive power of sin to live a new life by the power of the risen Christ.

HOW DO WE PRACTICE BAPTISM?

We baptize by immersion into water, the way John the Baptist did in the Jordan River. Baptism by immersion was also the common practice of the Jews. The word baptize means to immerse or to submerge. Some churches practice baptism by sprinkling water on the person being baptized. The custom of sprinkling children in baptism (as I was as a little baby in the Presbyterian Church) comes from the Old Testament act of the priest sprinkling the altar of God in the Temple with the blood to consecrate it to God.

The act of full immersion best demonstrates Jesus being buried in the grave and then coming out of the grave, leaving behind an empty tomb, as the Living Lord! When we are immersed in the water and come out, we are identifying with Jesus and declaring we have died to sin and are raised to live a new life.

SHOULD CHILDREN BE BAPTIZED?

We do not practice infant baptism because baptism comes after, not before, a person's confession of faith in Jesus. Baptism follows the preaching of the gospel of Christ and our response to the gospel when we put our faith

in Jesus. “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). The order is important. When a person confesses that Jesus is Lord, the next step is to make a public witness of their faith by baptism.

Baptizing small children is a decision that parents need to make personally with their children. Children should not be coerced into baptism. They should not be baptized because they want to be like their older brother or sister. They should not be baptized as part of a youth group or children’s group because of peer pressure, as often happens at a summer camp or spring retreat. Baptism is a very personal and private act of a person in his or her worship of God and faith in Jesus that takes place in a public form as others rejoice with them of their faith in Christ. Only when a child understands the good news of Jesus, who came to save us from our sins, and their personal faith in Jesus and their commitment to him, should they be baptized only when they know and understand what it means to confess Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Our children need to be taught about baptism before they experience it.

WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE OF BAPTISM?

Jesus told us to “baptize them in the name

of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, he saw the Holy Spirit rest on Jesus in the form of a dove. So, when Jesus was baptized he was anointed and confirmed for his public ministry as the Messiah of God. John also heard God’s voice say, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt 3:16-17)

So, it is with us. When we put our faith in Jesus as Lord and trust him as our Savior, the Holy Spirit of God rests on us and lives with us and God says that we are his dearly loved children, with whom he is also well pleased. “Yet to all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13).

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ but have not yet followed the Lord’s example in baptism, I encourage you to obey his voice by being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You will experience an amazing work of the Holy Spirit in your life as you enter the waters of baptism. You, too, will rise from the cleaning waters to walk in newness of life!

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Discover Life Ministries,
2451 Cumberland Pkwy, Suite 3549
Atlanta, GA 30339

leadpastor@mountparan.com
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