

BAPTISM: The Meaning

Mat 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Meaning of word Baptism: comes from Greek word meaning to wash or dip

- For the ancient Hebrews [Law of Moses] “washing” was part of a ceremony to cleanse oneself from sickness or defilement.
- At the time of Jesus the baptism was also used as an “initiation rite” for gentiles to wash away their “uncleanness” before converting to Judaism.
- Baptism was a turning away from the old life to a new one [*repentance*]

The Baptism of Jesus

Mat 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.

Mat 3:14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Mat 3:15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

Mat 3:16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;

Mat 3:17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus baptism was different

- Jesus did not need to repent of sin, but as an example to us and “to fulfill all righteousness” he underwent the baptism of repentance
- ***Jesus “fulfills all righteousness” in his baptism by inviting us to share in his “Atonement”- his Death and Resurrection***
- Another new aspect of Jesus baptism was the Holy Spirit descending.
- Christian baptism symbolises our submission to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives
- The final difference with Jesus baptism from previous baptisms is that he is declared a beloved, pleasing Son of God by God
- In Christian baptism we also recognise that we are the adopted children of God

Key words

- **Repentance:** sins washed away [dying to sin]
- **Initiation** into Kingdom of God
- **Atonement:** Christ’s work on our behalf
- **Holy Spirit** descends on us to help us live better lives
- **Adoption:** God is pleased to have us as his children

Short History lesson on Baptism: origins of differing opinions

The Old Testament:

- Circumcision the initiation rite for new members of the community of faith
- The children of Israel went through the waters of red sea and the Jordan River on the way into the holy land.
- Baptism used as a ritual washing to cleanse people from certain sins or “uncleanness”

New Testament Church: Up to 70AD: People were baptised as per Jesus command immediately after or even prior to joining the Church Community.

Early Church 70-325AD: A period of Massive persecution and execution of Christians

- During this time there was a growing sense that the ultimate test of faith was martyrdom
- There were many who renounced their faith publicly to avoid death but still wanted to be Christians afterward
- It was seen as a good idea to let adults count the cost before they were “initiated”
- Many Churches only offered baptism after a waiting period and *Catechism* was completed
- Babies were baptised- The community of faith has to nurture the newly born or reborn member: they reasoned that Hebrew babies were initiated in faith under the old covenant, why should we not baptise in faith under the new covenant? [raising children up]
- Adult Baptism became a much more elaborate celebration:

People were brought into the River and baptised by emersion [symbolising their sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection] in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [one emersion for each name], then they waded across the river and as they were helped out they were given a white robe to wear [symbolising justification and purity] and a drink of milk mixed with honey [symbolising the blessing of Israel entering the promised land after crossing the Jordan]

325-500AD Biblical Christianity begins:

Augustine argues for the waiting period to be reduced as it is not a sin to offer baptism to all people. Augustine also recognised the difference between the symbol and what it symbolised.

Outward baptism may be administered where inward conversion of the heart is wanting: and, on the other hand, inward conversion of the heart may exist where outward baptism has never been received.

Dark Ages 500-1500AD Understanding what baptism meant was of no importance compared with being baptised. At this time many of the biblical concepts and symbols were forgotten about. This was mainly because very few people could read and even fewer could understand what was being taught.

- Not surprisingly baptism became known as the way of becoming a Christian
- The church emphasised the need of it to the extent that anyone who was not baptised was considered evil or foolish [but most of all Damned]

The Reformation and after: 1500-1900

1. Reformers such as Luther and Calvin returned to Augustine’s position: *All should be baptised but only those who truly believe can be certain that their baptism is real*
2. Reformers such as the Anabaptists [and eventually Baptists] returned to a stricter version of the early church’s position: *Only those who can show that they truly believe and understand should be baptised*
3. Reformers such as Quakers [and eventually the Salvation Army] went further: *Baptism and other symbols of faith are unnecessary if you truly believe*

Post Reformation 1900-today: The rise of Pentecostal/ Charismatic movement

There is Baptism by Water: symbol of conversion

There is Baptism by Spirit [separate event]: in which passion and enabling for service to God takes place

Other quotes from sermon

Luke 3:16 John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Colossians 2:11 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,

2:12 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.

2:13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

2:14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Whether the person baptised is to be wholly immersed, and that whether once or thrice, or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence:

John Calvin, The Institutes of Christian Religion [book 4 chapter 15 section 19]

We only see the tapestry of existence through the eye of the needle that pulls the particular thread with which we are aligned. God sees the whole tapestry and in fact it is he who works the needle.

Made up by James but similar thoughts contained in song from the movie: The Prince of Egypt

II. There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: therefore the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.[\[6\]](#)

III. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that does administer it:[\[7\]](#) but upon the work of the Spirit,[\[8\]](#) and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.[\[9\]](#)

Westminster Confession of Faith: Chapter 27