

Baptism: A Gift for all God's Children

An Introduction to the Sacrament of Baptism at Second Presbyterian Church

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

1 John 3:1 NRSV

second
presbyterian church

Congratulations!

If you are reading this pamphlet then you are considering baptism for yourself or someone you love, probably a child. Either way, this is an exciting time for you. Baptism is a special and unique gift of love and grace from God. It reminds us that even before we take our first physical steps we are already on a journey of faith that includes our whole family—and indeed the whole church family.

We have prepared this pamphlet to give you as much background on Baptism as possible. We hope the *Frequently Asked Questions* section answers most of the questions you have. The additional materials in the resources section will give an even better understanding of what baptism is about and what actually occurs at a baptism. Along with this pamphlet you should have receive two other resources: a booklet entitled, “What Every Presbyterian Should Know about Baptism,” and a worksheet. Please fill out the worksheet and return it to the church office as soon as possible.

Who may be baptized and who may present children for baptism? In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) baptism may be offered to people of any age. In the case of an adult, they must be ready to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and be willing to accept the responsibilities of membership in a particular congregation. In the case of a child, at least one of the people presenting the child for baptism (usually a parent or grandparent) must be a confirmed and active member of a Christian church (either Second Presbyterian or another congregation). If the person presenting the child is not yet a member of this or another congregation, but agrees to participate in the next Inquirers Group for new members of this or another congregation, their baptism request will also be considered. All decisions about baptism are ultimately the responsibility of the Session, our congregation’s highest governing body.

Children or adults baptized in another Christian denomination do not need to be “re-baptized” when becoming part of our congregation.

When is baptism most appropriate? The best time is when the child and/or parents are “ready.” That time is different, of course, for each person. Infants are generally baptized at any time from six weeks old (or when it is safe for them to be in large crowds) to three years old, but it’s never too late for baptism. We have baptized people in their 80s.

How do I schedule a baptism? Fill out the enclosed worksheet and return it to the church office to get the process started. You will also want to speak with Pastor Jeff to tentatively reserve a date. Baptisms can be scheduled well in advance – even during pregnancy. Since all baptisms must be approved by the Session in advance, at least six weeks’ notice is required.

When are baptisms scheduled on the church calendar? Baptisms are usually not scheduled on the first Sunday of the month (when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated), days when another baptism is already scheduled at the same service, or days when there are other major events are occurring (such as ordination). Almost any other Sunday is a great day for baptism. Baptisms can be scheduled at either the 8 or 10:30 a.m. service.

What is baptism in the Presbyterian Church? It is one of two “sacraments,” or means by which God’s grace is imparted to us in a physical way. The other sacrament is the Lord’s Supper. It marks the beginning of the journey of discipleship in a very public way.

What isn’t baptism? It isn’t a vaccination against pain or suffering in life. And it’s not an insurance policy guaranteeing admission to Heaven. These analogies miss the point that baptism is about starting an intimate relationship with God. Getting baptized and then not pursuing God’s heart in any way misses the point of the sacrament. Parents of children being baptized need to take seriously the Christian Education and Worship responsibilities that come with offering their child for baptism.

Do you offer private baptisms? The Presbyterian Church is somewhat unique in insisting that baptism is an act of the whole congregation. Except in emergency circumstances, baptisms occur only during a public worship service. At that time the congregation makes extravagant vows to the person being baptized; if the baptism were private, this congregational dimension of the sacrament might be lost.

Do you schedule multiple baptisms at the same service? Only for relatives. We have found that in order to make the sacrament special for each family it is best to perform the baptisms at different services.

Who may I ask to perform the baptism and assist with the baptism? Of course it's the Holy Spirit who ultimately empowers each baptism, but if for any reason you would like a particular pastor to perform the actual baptism, you may request that pastor. If present, both pastors will be involved in leading the baptismal liturgy and prayers.

Do I need to ask an Elder to assist? An elder from our church represents the congregation at every baptism. The elder need not currently be serving on the Session. If you know an Elder whom you would like to ask, please contact the church office, and we will ask that person for you and get them the information they need. If you have no particular request for an Elder, we will gladly invite one to assist that day.

Do I have to choose Godparents? No. In the Presbyterian Church the whole congregation promises to serve in the place of Godparents, helping the child to grow in faith in every way.

When in the service will the baptism occur? Usually within the first 15 minutes, right after the Assurance of Forgiveness. If your child needs to leave the sanctuary for any reason after the baptism, please don't be concerned; do what works best.

What if my child starts crying, throws a fit, spits up, etc.? We completely understand your concern, but please don't sweat it. Our congregation knows that children are unpredictable. The baptism will go on and we will all have a good laugh.

Where should I sit? Anywhere close to an aisle so that you can easily come forward to the font and return to your pew.

May we take photographs during the baptism? Sure, as long as no flash is used and they can be taken from the pew in such a way that the photography doesn't detract from the baptism itself. We can also pose for photos after the service is concluded.

May my other children or family members participate in the baptism somehow? Yes. It's very appropriate to include them. Just tell the pastors ahead of time so they can plan on it.

What will we receive at the baptism? A baptismal certificate, a copy of the liturgy, and a cradle cross for the child's bedroom.

What does baptism cost? Absolutely nothing. It's a free gift from God to your child.

Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours

Understanding The Gift of Baptism

A Message Offered by
Jeffrey W. Gibelius, Pastor
Second Presbyterian Church
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Acts 2:36-42

Baptism is one of the greatest gifts God gives us. So it should not surprise us that over the past 2000 years thousands of scholars have weighed in on the meaning and importance of baptism, including theologians like Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. But the best and briefest explanation of the gift of baptism I have ever heard came from the eminent theologian, Stevie Wonder, when he sang in 1970: “Here I am, baby,

“Signed, sealed, delivered, I’m yours”

Baptism is a sign and seal of deliverance. And when we’re baptized we say to God, “I’m yours.”

How do you know that you are part of God’s family? What proof or sign do you have? Baptism is a **sign** to the world that you are child of God. Can you be a child of God without being baptized? Of course, but who would know? What good would that do you in the world? It’s a little like citizenship. Without a passport to prove it you can’t get very far. Many of us here this morning are citizens of the United States. But can you prove it? Is a driver’s license proof? Nope. Birth certificate? Not on its own. In the United States, proof positive of citizenship is a U.S. passport issued by the U.S. government. Just like an

American passport proves to the world that you deserve all the rights and privileges of a U.S. citizen, baptism is proof issued by God that says you deserve all the respect and responsibilities of a citizen of Heaven and child of God.

Baptism might not seem like such a big deal to an infant on the day that they receive that gift, but when that kid is 3 and he or she has just drawn a mural on the living room walls with permanent marker, it will be good for his or her parents to remember that child is first and foremost a child of God (and that God is watching over him or her). And when he or she is 14 and breaking out and being made fun of (probably because of their dorky parents), those parents will want to reassure that child once again that he or she is a child of God. And when that kid is 35 and being tempted to do almost anything to move up the career ladder, remembering that he or she is a child of God will them to stay on the straight and narrow. When we're baptized we know that our worth isn't bound up in our *reputation*, but in our *relationship* with God. Baptism is the only status symbol we need.

Sometimes parents worry about something terrible happening to their child before baptism. "What if my child should die before she's baptized?" It's important to remember that baptism is for our benefit. It doesn't change God's mind about us. Every child has a place in God's heart from before the time they are born. Baptism is a *sign* of salvation, it is not salvation itself. Otherwise salvation would depend on us, that is, on us getting to the church in time.

John Calvin talked about the sacraments as God's "accommodations" or "condescensions" to our small human minds. Just like Christ was the physical incarnation of God, baptism and the Lord's supper are the physical manifestations of God's grace. Most of the time it's enough for us to know in our heads that we are loved, but sometimes we need to be able to see and touch and grab onto that love. So God gave us this visible sign, or, as some pastors explain it—"an outward sign of inward grace." (God gave the Jews circumcision for the same reason; I think we got the better deal ☺)

Baptism is more than a sign of God's grace, however, it's also a **seal** on God's promise. In baptism God seals the covenant offered to us in Jesus Christ.

It's rare, but sometimes we seal documents today. In some states birth certificates and marriage licenses need to be sealed in order to be official. Even corporations need to use their seal from time to time. I guess it's to limit forgery and to set these documents apart as truly special. Lots of people make promises these days, but it is unusual to get someone to sign and seal that they will carry out their promise.

In ancient days official royal documents were sealed with hot wax and an imprint from a signet ring. This seal, this unique mark, indicated to the world that the signer's full authority was behind the document. When the King's seal was on something, you knew that that proclamation or order was going to happen—with no "ifs," "ands," or "buts."

Baptism is God's seal on some very important documents in our lives: our adoption papers. Those papers make us brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and heirs of God's riches. Think about it. How do we become part of God's family? Not through biological birth; that was the way in Judaism. Christians become part of God's family only through adoption, and that adoption becomes official when it is sealed by the waters of baptism.

The seal of baptism is more valuable than we can imagine. I think we would all agree that Jesus did some great things long ago, didn't he? But how does any of that apply to you and me now? What's the link between the merit Jesus earned on the cross and the grace we need right now? How can a specific person know that they, individually, are loved and redeemed, that they are part of God's covenant, parties to that contract? The seal of baptism is the connection we need.

Imagine that you're at your class reunion and someone tells you that an old classmate of yours died right before the big event. You barely remember the

person from high school and you didn't keep in touch afterward. But the class president tells you that after high school they went on to make a fortune in the stock market and retired to an estate in Scotland before dying suddenly. She never married and had no children. How do you feel? This is interesting and sad news, but not life-changing; it has no relevance to your life.

But now imagine that the class president, who also happened to be this woman's lawyer says, "By the way, I'm not supposed to tell you this yet, but in my safe at the office I have a duly signed, witnessed, and sealed will that says you were her closest friend and she's leaving her entire estate to you." Now how do you feel? That news would make your day. On the day we're baptized we have living proof that we are not only in the family of God, we're in God's will. We've got a major inheritance coming.

What are those riches? What comes with baptism? Baptism is a sign and seal that we have been **delivered**. Delivered from what? Delivered from sin? No. Baptized people continue to sin, despite our best efforts. Are we delivered from illness? No. Unfortunately, baptism is no protection against illness or accident. Does baptism deliver us from suffering? No. As part of a very large family--the family of God--we will have more than the usual opportunity to hurt with others. When we're baptized we become more sensitive to the needs of others and more angry at the plight of the poor. Baptism does not free us from suffering.

Baptism saves us from one thing: in baptism we know that we are delivered, or saved, from the consequence of sin, which is eternity apart from God—i.e., spiritual death. (Romans 3:23).

Sometimes people wonder, "is my precious new-born so bad already that she needs to be saved, even symbolically?" What I want to say is, "just wait until he's two. Then we'll talk."

But I don't say that. What I say is something like this. Christians believe that since the beginning of time we have a tendency to wander off the path toward

sin and away from God. Leave an infant in a white room with an open can of red paint and eventually, given enough time, you're not going to have a perfectly white room. Leave a toddler in a room with a bottle of pills, a sharp knife, and an electric outlet, and something terrible is going to happen sooner or later. In fact, that's why we don't leave babies with open cans of paint or dangerous objects. The temptation is too great. This is our human nature: left to ourselves we do not always do what is best for ourselves or others. And the consequences can be deadly.

In baptism God gives us a sign and seal that says, "I will deliver you from the ultimate consequence of your sin." How many of you have children with terrible physical scars, or children who've ended up in jail, or maybe even children who have died in an accident? I bet many of you would have traded places with your child in an instant if you could, if you knew it would save them from the harm they were about to do to themselves. You'd take on their pain. You'd take on their punishment. Parents want to spare their children from the most serious consequences of their actions, if we can.

God is a parent, too. And God was in the unique position of being able to take on the eternal consequences of our sin.

The betrayal. That was for us.

The denial. That was for us.

The mocking and the scorn. That was for us.

The beating. That was for us.

The thorns on the head. That was for us.

The nails in his hands and feet. That was for us.

The spear in his side. That was for us.

The death on the cross. That was for us.

In Jesus Christ God was dying in our place. God was saying, "I'm taking this on for you. Because I want you to live forever."

Andrew's body will stop working someday. But because of what God did long ago on the cross and because of what God did today in his baptism, I know Andrew already has eternal life.

Baptism is a **sign** that we are children of God and sisters and brothers of Christ. It's a **seal** that says that the promises of God apply to us, personally and specifically. It's a mark that we have been **delivered** into eternal life.

And when we are baptized we say to God, "**I'm yours.**" At baptism parents acknowledge something that is scary and wonderful at the same time: their child is not truly their child. That kid was God's long before those parents knew and loved him or her. The child has always belonged to God and always will. And someday that child will return to God. Our earthly parents are no substitute for our Heavenly one.

In baptism we admit that we are not our own. We have been bought with a price and ransomed from the devil. We belong to God. When a child is baptized it is as if the parents, the congregation, and God unite with one solemn voice to say, "No matter what happens in this child's life, no matter how high he or she ascends or how low he or she goes, no matter how far off the path he or she may wander, that child still belongs to God. You're not getting this child, Satan. Hands off."

The church teaches that baptism is a sign and seal of deliverance. And that it marks us as God's own. But what does *your* baptism mean to *you*? How does it feel to know that you are a child of God? How does it feel to know that everything Jesus did in his life, in some way was for you? How does it feel to know that you've already got eternity locked up? How does it feel to know that God chose you and calls you son or daughter, just like Jesus?

Some of you haven't felt those feelings in a long time. Remember your baptism. And if you've never been baptized—why wait? Baptism isn't just for kids. Why not accept the gift? It's not too late. Amen.

The Liturgy for the Sacrament of Baptism

The Words of Welcome

Elder: Being presented for the sacrament of baptism is
_____ *child of* _____

Pastor: Friends in Christ, we are here to celebrate life! We are here to celebrate the wonder that is birth, the mystery that is love, the fulfillment that is marriage, and the glory that is God.

The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Elder: Obeying the word of our Lord Jesus, and sure of his presence with us, we baptize those whom he has called to be his own. The Apostle Peter declared God’s Word when he said, “For God’s Promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls.” In Jesus Christ, God has promised to be our God, to forgive our sins, and has joined us together in the family of faith which is the church. By baptism, God puts a sign on you to show that you belong to God, and gives you the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that, sharing Christ’s reconciling work, you will also share his victory; that, dying with Christ to sin, you will be raised with him to new life.

Parents' Part in God's Covenant

Pastor: Friends, in presenting _____ for baptism, you announce your faith in Jesus Christ, and show that you want _____ to study him/her, know him/her, love him/her, and serve him/her as his Lord and Savior.

Pastor: Show your purpose by answering these questions:

a. Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

b. Do you trust in him?

I do.

c. Do you intend _____ to be his disciple, to obey his word and show his love?

I do.

d. Inasmuch as you have been blessed with the miracle of parenthood, will you dedicate yourselves as Christian parents to protect, nurture, and spiritually care for your child?

I will.

e. Will you provide opportunities for your child to grow up in Christ by regular participation in Christian Education and Worship?

I will.

Pastor: With the whole church, let us confirm our faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed, printed in the bulletin.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by

the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius

Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the

third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and

sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence

he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy

Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the

forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

(The elder addresses the congregation):

Elder: Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture _____ by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging him to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church? If so, say, “We do.”

People: We do.

Pastor: Let us pray.

God our Father: we thank you for your faithfulness, promised in this sacrament, and for the hope we have in your Son, Jesus. As we baptize with water, baptize us with the Holy Spirit, so that what we say may be your word and what we do may be your work. Amen.

The Act of Baptizing

Pastor: What is your child’s full name?

_____ I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Blessing

Pastor: O Lord, uphold _____ by your Holy Spirit. Give him the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

Pastor: “See what love the Father has for us that we should be called children of God, and we are!” (I John 3: 1)

The Welcome

Pastor: Let us pray.

Almighty God, giver of life: you have called us by name, and pledged to each of us your faithful love. We pray for your child, _____ Watch over him/her. Guide him/her as he grows in faith. Give him/her understanding, and a quick concern for neighbors. Help him/her to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Pastor: God of grace, Parent of us all: we pray for these parents, _____ Help them to love with your love, to teach your truth, and to tell the story of faith to their child, so that your word may be heard, and bring about plans for us you have promised.

God our Creator: we praise you for calling us to be a servant people, and for gathering us into the body of Christ. We thank you for adding to our number brothers and sisters in faith. Together, may we live in your Spirit and so love one another, that we may have the mind of Jesus Christ, who was baptized your Son and servant, and is our risen Lord. Amen.

Elder: _____ is now received into the church universal and this family of faith.

People: With joy and thanksgiving, we welcome you, _____ into the Family of Christ, for we are all one in him/her. We promise to love, encourage, and support you, and to help you know and follow Jesus.

Elder gives certificate if available.

second
presbyterian church

528 Garland Drive
Carlisle, Pa 17013

Phone: 717-243-4571
www.GrowWithSecond.org