

Believer's Baptism

What It Means To Be Baptized

Baptism is commanded by Jesus Christ for every believer. Therefore, a clear understanding of what baptism is and why it matters is essential. Baptism does not save us from our sins. Salvation is a gift provided by and secured through Christ's work for us (Ephesians 2:8-10). But we are given evidence to the importance of baptism through our Savior's own baptism, the command of Scripture and the practice of the early church.

The Meaning of Baptism

If baptism has no saving power, then what is the significance of baptism? Baptism has importance for every believer because of its frequent appearance in the New Testament (115 clear references).

First, baptism is a public declaration of one's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture declares that we are to openly and publicly profess Christ. There are to be no "silent followers of Jesus." Therefore, baptism should immediately follow salvation, for in doing so, we proclaim Christ's work in us (Matthew 10:32).

Next, baptism is a perfect illustration of what Christ has done for all sinners through His death, burial and resurrection. Baptism illustrates the new believer's break with the past and the beginning of a new life, a resurrected life, through a new birth in Christ.

Then, baptism is a personal identification with Christ and with His Church (Galatians 3:27).

Baptism says, "I belong to Jesus Christ and I honor the witness and practice of His Church." Baptism is the seal of our commitment to Christ, and it recognizes the responsibility of His Church to teach and practice this ordinance described in Scripture. In many ways, baptism is like a wedding ring. You can be married without a ring, but the ring reflects the commitment and alignment of your life to another. Christ compares the husband/wife relationship to Himself and His bride, the Church. Baptism is important for identity as well as obedience.

The Motive for Baptism

Why are we baptized? Baptism not only signifies our identification with Jesus Christ but our desire to live a life of obedience to Him. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). When we obey Christ we demonstrate our trust in Him and our submission to His will. Loving Christ means expressing that love in ways that are pleasing to Him. Motivated by love and gratitude, we follow Christ in baptism.

Let's consider three reasons for our church's practice of baptism:

- **The example of our Savior, Jesus Christ.** Jesus began His public ministry with baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). He did not need to be saved, but through baptism, Christ was identifying Himself with us—those He came to save.

In baptism, Jesus was saying, *this is what I have come to do for you*. He died on the cross, He was buried, and He rose again. No wonder John the Baptist said of Jesus at His baptism, “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”?

- **The encouragement of New Testament believers.** Throughout the New Testament, baptism was the first response of these eager believers. Consider Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-38), Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:47-48), and Paul and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34).
- **The explanation of Scripture.** In Romans 6:4-5, we see baptism used to describe the new life we now live in Christ. In Acts 16:31-34, we see new believers being baptized, pointing to the fact that this act is an outward symbol of the inward reality of what Christ has done in their lives.

Therefore, our motive in baptism is obedience to Christ and for the glory of Christ and His Church.

The Method of Baptism

How should baptism be done? Although this has been a point of confusion for some, the Scripture is quite clear on the manner or method of baptism. Because baptism is an intended picture of our identification with Christ—that is in His death, burial and resurrection—any alteration of this picture would interfere with the intended message of baptism.

The word "baptize" is actually an adaptation of the Greek word *baptizo* given in the New Testament. It is clear that this word most accurately translated means to "immerse," "submerge," or "to place under." Scripture tells us that when Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water. Philip and the Ethiopian came to a place of much water. The Jordan River was often a place referenced in Scripture where baptisms occurred.

The Moment of Baptism

The question is often asked: “When should I be baptized?” The answer is simple—soon after you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. This is the New Testament pattern (Acts 2:41). Yet, there is one point of clarification we must observe.

Baptism should always *follow* salvation, never precede it. The experience of baptism, no matter how sincere, is inadequate if it has occurred prior to your understanding of personal repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, if you were baptized prior to your salvation experience, you should follow Christ in baptism as a believer.

Is baptism required for church membership?

People come to Northbridge from denominations or church backgrounds that do not share our doctrines, beliefs or practices. This is often true at the point of baptism. For this reason, we seek to offer clear instruction and assistance in following Christ in believer's baptism.

Baptism is not a matter of personal preference, but a scriptural command. Therefore, we believe the proper practice of baptism is important in the life of every member of our church.

At Northbridge, we require those who have not been baptized by immersion or come from a church background that does not share our view of the purpose and practice of baptism to be baptized.

Our goal is not to question a person's salvation experience or diminish his or her Christian heritage but to unite our membership in belief and practice. Obedience to Christ and His Word is the starting point for growth and fellowship together.

What do I do now?

You may schedule your baptism by contacting the Northbridge office at 269.385.4378, where simple instructions will be provided. On the day of your scheduled baptism, please arrive 30 minutes prior to the Worship Service. At that time, a Pastor will speak with you and provide brief instructions for the service to follow. This is one of our greatest delights and privileges as a church.