

## **Infant Baptism at Covenant**

### **What is the meaning of baptism?**

Baptism is a sacrament (a "holy ceremony") instituted by Jesus. Our being sprinkled with or immersed in water gives us a visual picture of what happens when a person enters into a relationship with God through faith in Christ: we are washed clean of our sin (I Peter 3.21), and we go down into death with Christ and rise up into new life in Christ (Romans 6.2-11).

When an adult or young adult believer is baptized, those images of cleansing and new life are symbols that point *backward* to what has already happened to that believer at the moment of trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. When the baptism is of an infant, however, this symbolic depiction of being cleansed from sin and rising up into new life points *forward* to the faith that we pray will one day mark that child.

We understand that in infant baptism, which parallels the Old Testament practice of circumcision, God's covenant promises are extended from the believing parents to their child. That is why we call a baptized infant a "child of the covenant." The promise of God's faithfulness to those who believe and the offer of forgiveness and new life in Christ now extend to the next generation.

### **What are the requirements that must be met in order for me to present my child for infant baptism?**

There is only one unbudging requirement for those who present their children for baptism: the parents' faith in Jesus Christ. Parents who present their children for baptism do so as an expression of their own faith as followers of Christ. So important is this that, as part of the ceremony of baptism, parents will be asked to make a public profession of their own faith by responding to the question: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" Baptism is a meaningless ceremony unless it happens in the context of saving faith.

Beyond this requirement, we urge that the parents who present their children for baptism are actively involved in this particular church family. For more about why this is the case, see below.

### **What does this baptism mean for my child?**

The heart of the Christian faith is our belief that God desires to enter into a love relationship with each one of us. The Bible describes such a relationship in terms of God

forgiving us, loving us, and living His life through us, as we open our lives to him. When we enter into that relationship, we become his followers.

How does that relationship begin? Not through baptism, nor through church attendance. The Bible says that it is by grace that we are saved *through faith* " (Ephesians 2.8). A saving relationship with God begins the moment a man or woman or young person makes an intentional choice to put the weight of his or her life on Jesus Christ by faith. That means believing that Jesus was who he said he was (God with us), trusting in what Jesus did for us (dying on the cross in our place to make us right with God), and living our lives for him (becoming a follower of the risen Christ).

If that relationship doesn't begin until a person makes a conscious choice to become a follower of Christ as an older child or as an adult, what is the meaning of baptism for the child? Infant baptism is essentially a prayer on behalf of a child, a prayer that God would draw that child into just the sort of relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ that I've just described. Infant baptism is an act of committing a child into the hands of God and inviting Him to work in that child.

We are careful not to use the word "christening" (which literally means "making someone a Christian") when we refer to infant baptism. We do not believe that baptism makes a child right with God. Infant baptism is not an act of evangelism. Nor do we believe that if a child dies without being baptized, he or she will go to hell. It has been the belief of the Church throughout the ages that if a child dies before the age of accountability, God in his mercy will welcome that child into heaven.

So baptism is simply an act of consecration. The child is entrusted into God's love with the prayer that God will be at work in that child, drawing that child to Himself, for we believe that God is the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12.2).

### **What does this baptism mean for me as a parent?**

In baptism we not only commit our children to God; we also commit *ourselves* to God as Christian parents. When we have our children baptized, we as parents are making a commitment to do everything within our power to grow our children spiritually, to raise our children to be growing followers of Christ.

During the baptism, you will be asked, "Relying on God's grace, do you promise to set before your children an example of new life in Christ, to pray for them and with them, and to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord?"

Obviously, it makes no sense for someone who is not actively involved in the life of the church to make that sort of commitment. By necessity, presenting your child for baptism means you are doing everything within your power to *grow yourself*

spiritually: worshipping at church faithfully, getting together regularly with other followers of Christ to study the Bible and to talk about your faith, that sort of thing. Before you present your child for baptism, please take a hard look at whether or not you are able to make that commitment. It is one we take seriously.

What if you have not been involved in that way or to that level up to this point? Does that disqualify you? No, but it will be important from this point forward to throw yourself in and take intentional steps to get connected, get involved, and get serious about your spiritual growth.

### **What does this baptism mean for the congregation?**

Baptism takes place in the context of worship on Sunday morning because we believe that the responsibility to raise children in the faith belongs to all of us, not just to the parents. That is why, during the ceremony, the congregation promises to share with the parents in the child's upbringing, promising "to pray for, to teach, and to set an example for that child as together we look forward to the day when, by God's grace, that child will make a commitment to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior." We do not observe the practice of selecting godparents for our children because the whole congregation is charged with this responsibility.

As you can see, this is one more reason why your active involvement in the life of this church is so important. The congregation cannot support you in your efforts to raise up your children in the faith if you and your children are not involved and known.

### **Other questions that may come up:**

***How old is too old?*** Our Book of Order says a child should be baptized "without undue haste and without undue delay." While there is not a specific age that is spelled out in the Bible, we recommend that children be presented for baptism during the first year of life, and before the age of three if at all possible. After that point, as a child begins to be able to understand the rudiments of the Christian faith, there may be confusion on the part of the child or the congregation: is this infant baptism or believer's baptism? If the child is much beyond the age of three, we recommend that the parents consider waiting and presenting their child for baptism upon the completion of the youth inquirer's class during middle school, assuming that child has become a believer.

### ***What about the situation where one parent is a believer and the other is not?***

While it is technically possible for one parent to present a child for baptism, we urge that parents be united in their decision to raise their children to be followers of Christ. Ideally, both parents will be strong and growing followers of

Christ. At the very least, one must be so, and the other able to give unqualified support to a decision to raise the children in the Christian faith and have them actively involved in the life of the church. If one parent has become a new follower and the other has not yet, it may be best to wait awhile to see how God might be at work in the whole family before pressing ahead with baptism .

***What if I have never been baptized?*** If you have committed your life to Christ and have never before been baptized, now's the time for you, too! We have had the pleasure of baptizing parents together with their children several times in the past, and I would love for you to have that experience. It is certainly a Biblical model (see Acts 16.16-33), and can be a very powerful moment for the family!

***What if I'm not sure about where I stand spiritually?*** If the idea of being a follower of Christ is new to you, if you have never come to a point where you have trusted Jesus with your life and received his gift of forgiveness and new life, I would urge that you reach out to a pastor for conversation about that before proceeding with infant baptism.