



PREPARING FOR
BAPTISM





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WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is one of the most important moments in the life of a Christian. No doubt you've been thinking a lot about it and sense a desire to get baptized. Maybe you are a brand new believer and want to take the next step, or you've been a believer for a long time but never got around to being baptized. You might have been baptized as an infant and wonder if it 'counted.' However you've come to this decision, it is good to think about baptism. This booklet is designed to help you understand what baptism is, discover if you are ready to be baptized, and learn how to move forward if you are ready to take this step.



BAPTISM COMMANDED

When the Apostle Peter preached the good news of Jesus on the day of Pentecost, the crowds of people were cut to the heart (Acts 2:37). God’s Spirit stirred them to understand and believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior. What were they supposed to do with this new belief? They asked Peter and the other apostles there that day, *“Brothers, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). Peter responded with these words:

“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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” - Acts 2:38-39

Verse 41 goes on to tell us that this is just what many of them did: *“those who received his word were baptized.”* This is the way people publicly declare their Christian faith. They hear the gospel message of Jesus Christ, they believe it, they repent (turn away from sins), and are baptized. We see in the book of Acts that this is a command and the normal response when people come to faith (see Acts 8:12, 13; 10:48; 18:8). It should be noted that this is something that typically happens relatively soon after conversion. We do not see in the New Testament any warrant for delaying baptism for

an unnecessarily long time. Baptism is intended to be a first step of obedience for those who are genuine believers in Christ.

Baptism is not just a responsibility for individual believers, but for churches of believers. God calls believers to **be baptized** and God calls churches to **do the baptizing**. Read Jesus' words to apostles after he resurrected from the dead, but just before he ascended to heaven:

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘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 behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

This means that baptism is an important decision for you, but it is also a great responsibility of the church.

DISCUSSION WITH KIDS

Parents, ask your children:

‘Why do you want to be baptized?’

‘Why does God want you to be baptized?’



BAPTISM DEFINED

What is baptism?

Let's start with a robust definition.

(Note to Parents: You may want to skip to the shorter definition below when explaining this to your children.)

Baptism is a deeply symbolic act, whereby believers demonstrate faith in the Triune God and their union with Christ. By going under the water, believers identify with the death of Christ to wash away sins, and by coming up out of the water they identify with Christ's resurrection from the dead to walk in new life.

So let's take a closer look at this definition.

- 1. It is a deeply symbolic act.** Similar to the Lord's Supper, Jesus took an everyday act (in that case, eating a meal) and infused it with deep spiritual meaning (Matt. 26:21-25; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). In baptism, Jesus takes the act of physical washing and gives it deep spiritual meaning: we are washed clean of our sins!
- 2. Faith in the Triune God.** Christians believe that God is Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus commands believers to be baptized in the name of the triune God (Matt. 28:19). This reminds us that we are identifying with the God revealed in the Bible, not a vague concept of a god we've created.

- 3. Union with Christ.** By faith we are 'connected' to Christ. We are in Him and He is in us. Through this connection to Christ, we receive all the blessings of his saving work. We now belong to Christ and are part of his kingdom.
- 4. Wash away sins.** We are united with Christ in his death, meaning our old life of sin is crucified with him. The penalty for all our sins has been paid. We are washed clean of guilt before God and are pure in his sight. We baptize by immersion (completely under the water), in part to demonstrate that we are fully clean before God.

*"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
- Galatians 2:20*

- 5. Walk in newness of life.** We are united with Christ in his resurrection. Just as Christ rose from the dead, so do we, both now and in the future (for more on the future bodily resurrection, see 1 Corinthians 15). From now on we live new lives, patterned after Jesus and in obedience to him (see Romans 6:6-11). And when Christ returns, we will have a bodily resurrection.

With all of that in mind,

here is a simple definition to consider:

(parents, this may be the better option to go through with kids)

Baptism is the way believers show that they belong to God by faith in Jesus, and that they have forgiveness and new life in him.

Baptism is a way a believer says to everyone...

'I have faith in Christ.' He is my Savior, Teacher, and King! I trust him to make me right with God.

'I belong to God.' He is my Creator and Father. He loves me, and because of Christ I get to be with him forever and receive all his good promises.

'I am forgiven of my sins.' I am a sinner, which means I disobey God. But God has rescued me from the punishment I deserve and forgiven me for all my sins in Christ.

'I have new life.' God has given me eternal life. I live with God and for God, now and forever.



DISCUSSION WITH KIDS

- Talk through the shorter definition of baptism with your child.
- Read Galatians 2:20 together and ask them what they think it means.



3 WHO BAPTISM IS FOR

Baptism is for Believers.

Baptism is an ordinance (some churches call it a sacrament) that all Christian churches practice. They don't all do it the same way or for the same reason. Many churches baptize infants by sprinkling or pouring a small amount of water on their heads (called 'paedobaptism,' after the Latin word for 'infant'). Churches in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist tradition practice baptism this way (Note, questions about infant baptism are addressed briefly in the Additional Questions of this document). However, many other churches baptize only those who profess belief in Christ. This belief, called 'credobaptism' (after the Latin word for 'belief'), is what we practice at Living Hope Church. This means that baptism is for those who have heard and professed belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What is the gospel of Jesus Christ?

This is a good place to pause and ask the question, 'Do I understand and believe the gospel?'

The word 'gospel' means 'good news.' It is an announcement of utmost importance. In fact, it is the main message of the Bible. The Old Testament prepares the way for it, the four Gospel narratives of

Jesus' life and ministry (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) reveal it, and the rest of the New Testament letters explain and apply it. So what is the gospel?

The gospel message can be briefly summarized like this: *Jesus Christ is Savior and King.*

This definition comes from 2 Timothy 2:8, "*Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.*" The NIV translates that last phrase as "this is my gospel," meaning that these three points are a summary of the entire gospel.

Let's unpack it.

Jesus Christ. The good news is a message about a person. Jesus is not any ordinary man, he is the Son of God sent from heaven. We believe that Jesus is fully God and became fully human. He perfectly obeyed all the Father's will, something we never could do. In his short life, he trained followers and established his church, taught, and did many miracles. The Christian faith and message is focused on this man.

Jesus is Savior. The biggest event in Jesus' story is his death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. By his death on the cross, he paid the penalty for our sins. By his resurrection, he granted us new life with God forever. Just as he rose from the grave in glory, so will all who believe in him when he returns. This is the main part of the gospel message: Jesus' death and resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 - "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

Jesus is King. Sin is our big problem. It is a rejection of God's rule. This is the source of all evil and our separation from God. Our specific sins are just the working out of this principle in little acts of disobedience. We need forgiveness, but we also need to be brought back into right relationship with God under his rule. God sent Jesus to establish his kingdom on earth and welcome people into it, so that we can live joyfully under the good reign of God. Through faith in Jesus, we can enter his kingdom now and be part of it forever.

"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." - Colossians 1:13-14

Once again, the gospel message summarized is that **Jesus Christ is Savior and King.**

Becoming a Christian

This good news comes into effect for us when we believe in it. **Christians are those who believe the gospel message and trust in Jesus to make them right with God.** When we trust in Jesus, God includes us in all the promises of the gospel (forgiveness, new life, entrance into God's kingdom, the promise of the Holy Spirit, and much more!) Remember, baptism is for Christian believers.

Have you ever put your faith in Jesus?

If not, I encourage you to pause and pray. There are no magic words. Simply express that you understand you are a sinner who deserves God's judgment, but that you trust in Jesus' death for forgiveness, and his resurrection for a new life with God.

It's as simple as A, B, C.

Admit that you have disobeyed God, rebelled against his rule, and need to be reconciled to your Heavenly Father.

Believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior who lived, died, and rose again to give you forgiveness and eternal life.

Commit to follow Jesus, obey God's Word, and live a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” – Romans 10:9-11



DISCUSSION WITH KIDS

- Ask your child to express what they think the gospel means. Focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and what it means for us.
- Read John 3:16 and John 14:6.
- Ask your child if he has put his faith in Christ.
- Walk through the A, B, C's of putting faith in Christ.
- Pray with your child.



WHAT BAPTISM DOES

We have explained what baptism means, what it symbolizes, and who it is for. But what does baptism actually do? **Here are five things that occur at baptism:**

1. A believer publicly professes his faith in Christ.

Baptism is an outward response to your inner faith in Christ (Acts 2:41; 8:12). It shows you have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

2. The church affirms the believer's profession.

The church has a responsibility to make disciples of Jesus and then baptize them (Matthew 28:18). The role of the church is also to make sure that the person to be baptized is actually a believer in Christ. The elders of a local church baptize a new believer, affirming their profession of faith in Jesus is real. Baptism means you belong in the church!

3. God uses baptism to identify his children publicly.

At the baptism of Jesus, God the Father clearly identified that Jesus was his Son. In a similar way, baptism is the means by which God is confirming to us, the church, and the world that we belong to him. This is why baptism is done publicly, before Christian witnesses.

“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; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”

-Matthew 3:16-17

- ### 4. Baptism continues the believer's journey of obedience to Christ.
- To be baptized is a primary responsibility Christ expects of new believers. It is one of the initial steps of obedience in the long journey of faithful service to God. Based on the pattern of the New Testament, baptism is intended to happen shortly after someone comes to faith in Christ (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12, 36-38). This is not always the case in practice, and baptism may occur weeks or months after someone recognizes they have been converted to Christ. As a general rule, we do not think it is wise or healthy to delay baptism for a long period without good cause.

5. Baptism unites you with other baptized believers.

While baptism is expressing your personal faith in Christ, it also unites you with a family of other like-minded believers. The Christian life is not meant to be solo, but lived alongside other faithful believers. We recommend that believers get baptized in a local church that they intend to be involved with and committed to, whether at Living Hope Church or another congregation that faithfully teaches the Scriptures.



DISCUSSION WITH KIDS

- How do you explain what baptism does?
- Of the 5 things listed, which are you most excited about?



5 PREPARING FOR BAPTISM

When you feel ready to be baptized at Living Hope Church, here are the next steps.

1. Meet with an Elder.

Living Hope Church is led by elders - men who rule, teach, and care for the church (the elders who work for the church are also called pastors). The first step is to arrange a meeting with any elder you choose. They will ask about your understanding of the gospel, profession of faith, and understanding of baptism.

2. Review the Four Pledges.

At your baptism, you will be asked to publicly affirm the following statements. An elder will guide you through the statements, and you'll be asked to repeat the pledge in italics. You will not need to memorize them. Please review them prayerfully in preparation for baptism.

Pledges

If you desire to be a disciple of Jesus and a member of the Christian faith, say:

“I will follow Jesus and obey Him.”

If you believe that, through your faith, you have become united with Christ in His death, say:

“I reject the devil and all sinful desires.”

If you believe that, through your faith, you have become united with Christ in His resurrection, say:

“I embrace Jesus and His victory.”

If you desire to put on Christ and receive a new identity, say:

“I will put on Christ and my new identity in Him.”

What to expect at Baptism

The day the church gathers for your baptism is exciting! Here is what will happen:

- Since we baptize by immersion in a pool, tub, or other large body of water, you will go fully underwater.
- The elders welcome you to share a brief testimony (2-3 minutes) about your faith in Christ and how he has changed you. This is optional, so don't feel pressured. But it can be a great opportunity to share what God has done for you.

- Baptism is performed by an elder at Living Hope Church, but we encourage you to have someone else in the waters with you to support you as you declare your faith. This can be a parent, mentor, friend, or family member who is already a believer in Christ. If you have no preference, we will usually have another elder assist.
- At Living Hope, we get excited about baptism, so expect plenty of people to celebrate with you and cheer when you come up out of the water!



DISCUSSION WITH KIDS

- Do you have any other questions about how to get ready for your baptism or what will happen?



NEXT STEPS:

The A,B,C,D,E,F's of Discipleship

If you are a new believer you may be wondering what it looks like to live as a disciple of Jesus. There is much to say about this, but here is a snapshot to begin with:

Active Faith: A Christian trusts in Jesus not just once, but everyday. A true faith is alive, pursuing God in every area of life. Make it a habit to pray daily. Seek God's will and ask for his help in all your needs. Seek to walk in step with the Holy Spirit. Repent of sin as you sense the Spirit's conviction.

Biblical Training: Growing in knowledge and obedience according to Scripture is essential to our life as Christians. We need to have our minds renewed by God's Word (Romans 12:1-2). Begin by developing a habit of reading God's Word daily. A simple way to do this is to pick a book of the Bible and carefully read a chapter or so a day. You could begin with Genesis, the Psalms, one of the Gospels, or the book of Romans. Your daily Bible reading should also be done in conjunction with faithful attendance at church to sit under the preaching of the Word. Small group studies, devotionals, study Bibles, and Christian books from trusted authors are also good resources.

Church Commitment: Christian growth happens in community. God has appointed the gathered local church as the people and the place for us to find this community. The Sunday gathering is where we worship God in song, offer prayers, learn from the Scriptures, enjoy Christian fellowship, and minister to one another. However, Christian growth means more than simply attending a weekly service. We hope that you will commit to membership in the local church, as a way to receive from the elders, love the people, and use your gifts to serve.

Discipling Relationships: Participation in the gathering of the whole church for worship and teaching is essential (Heb. 10:25). However, you should not ignore the need for deep and personal relationships with other Christians. We all need mentors, fathers, and mothers in the faith (1 Cor. 4:15) and brothers and sisters to lock arms with as we pursue the Lord (2 Tim. 2:22). Begin by investing in small group ministries (Life Groups, for example) where you can meet new friends.

Evangelism: Jesus doesn't only save us, he sends us! The Great Commission is the Christian's marching orders (Matt. 28:18-20). We are to tell everyone we can about the good news that Jesus is Savior and King. Some people do this by becoming missionaries across the globe, but you can do it by telling others about Jesus and what he has done for you (1 Peter 3:15). Start with your friends, family members, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers.

Faithful to Calling: Being a Christian means that we are submitted to Christ in every area of life. We ought to do everything to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Paul writes in Colossians 1:10 that we are to *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”* So in your family life, your work, your school, your speech, conduct, your leisure - in every area of life - seek to honor Christ!



DISCUSSION WITH KIDS

- As you grow as a disciple of Jesus, what is one area you want to work on?



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

What about infant baptism?

While many churches in the Protestant and Reformed traditions practice infant baptism, we do not think this is the best expression of the Bible's teaching. Acts 2:41 says, *"So those who received his word were baptized."* We believe this is the consistent pattern and order in the New Testament. A person hears the gospel of Jesus Christ, receives it by faith, and then demonstrates this by baptism.

Is there a certain age a child must reach before being baptized?

There is no biblically defined age. When elders interview a child interested in baptism, we ask questions to see if a child understands the gospel, accepts Christ as Savior, can articulate simple biblical truths, and has a desire to be baptized. We have seen that around age 8 is when children who have faith are ready for baptism.

What if I've been baptized before and want to get rebaptized?

Baptism is intended to be a one-time act, symbolizing our death and resurrection in Christ, so it is not intended to be something repeated. There are some instances where a person may have to consider undergoing another baptism even if they were baptized earlier:

- A person was baptized as part of a church that does not hold to orthodox, biblical Christianity, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon), Jehovah's Witnesses, or Unitarian Universalists, and has since come to true faith in Christ.
- A person was baptized while still an unbeliever, indicated by an insincere confession and a lack of fruit, and has since come to true faith.
- A person was baptized as an infant in an orthodox, trinitarian church, but has come to the conviction that they ought to undergo believer's baptism.

These are situations that require careful discussion with elders, as each person's situation is unique. If you have further questions or concerns, please contact one of our elders.

Does Living Hope Church accept my previous baptism?

We do not require people to be baptized to participate in the worship gathering or attend various ministries. We do require baptism for those who seek to become Committed Members of Living Hope Church. If you have been baptized by immersion as a believer in Christ

somewhere else, we certainly accept your baptism as genuine. If you have received baptism as an infant within a protestant or evangelical denomination (such as Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, etc.), you may have the conviction that this was a true and biblical baptism. The elders would ask you to consider being baptized in keeping with the New Testament pattern of believer's baptism by immersion. However, if you believe you have fulfilled Christ's call to be baptized, we will accept your baptism and not force anyone to be baptized against their conscience.

Why does Living Hope refer to baptism as an "ordinance," rather than a "sacrament"?

Some churches refer to baptism as a sacrament, meaning that it is a sacred act that in itself conveys grace to the participant (the Roman Catholic Church has this view). Some Protestant denominations also refer to baptism as a sacrament, yet they mean something different when they say it this way. Most churches in the baptistic tradition refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper as 'ordinances,' because Christ ordained these practices for his church. We refer to baptism as an ordinance for sake of clarity.

Will I feel any different after I get baptized?

Maybe. We do not believe that baptism itself saves, or that the Holy Spirit enters a person upon baptism (that happens at conversion). So you may not “feel” any different; yet in our experience, those who are baptized experience an intense sense of joy and satisfaction in the Lord. We do pray and expect the Holy Spirit to bless you as you take this step of faith and obedience. How can you not feel good surrounded by your brothers and sisters in Christ celebrating your public declaration of faith in Christ!