

BAPTISM

PREPARING FOR BAPTISM



The Apostles' Creed

*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 Spirit,
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 is seated at the right hand of God
the Father Almighty;*

*From there He shall come to judge the living and
the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.*



What is baptism?

In many ways, baptism is where the Christian life begins. It is where our relationship to Christ and His church is formally acknowledged. It the sign and seal of initiation into the visible family of God, whether as an adult convert or as a child of believing parents. It is the sign and seal of God's saving promises to us – to claim us as his own, to unite us to his Son, to wash away our sins, and to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit. As a sign, baptism visibly symbolises these promises (see below). As a seal, baptism reassures us that God will keep his promises. To put it simply, baptism publicly identifies us as belonging to God and to His people, and it symbolises all of the blessings God has promised to give us in Christ. These promised blessings include:

Baptism signifies the washing away of our sins: In Acts 22 we read the words of Ananias to Paul: *“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name”* (v.16). Just as water washes away dirt, baptism pictures our sin being washed away by the blood of Christ.

Baptism signifies our reception of the promised Holy Spirit: After Peter calls people to repentance and baptism at Pentecost, he adds this promise: *“And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38). As surely as the water pours over our head in baptism, so God promises to pour out His Spirit into our hearts.

Baptism signifies our adoption into God's family: Being baptized *“into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* declares that we have a new name because we have been adopted through the Son into the family of the Triune God (Matt. 28:19). Just as a wedding ring marks us as belonging to our spouse and to our family, baptism marks us as belonging to God and to His family.

Baptism signifies our union with Christ: In Romans 6:3–4 Paul identifies baptism as our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life”*. Christ joins us to Himself so that we share in His death and resurrection. Through this union we are liberated from our sins and regarded as righteous before God.

Who should be baptised?

Those who should be baptised are all those whom God, by His grace, has brought to Himself and into His family. This may be adults who come to Christ and into His church later in life (e.g., Acts 8–9), or it may be children of believers who are regarded by God as “holy” (1 Cor. 7:14); that is, already belonging to Him and to His people by virtue of their parent’s faith (Eph. 6:1–4; Col. 3:20–21). For more on Infant Baptism see pages 4 to 6 of this booklet.

Discuss and Reflect

- > *What questions do you have about baptism?*
- > *What makes you right with God?*
- > *Who do you say Jesus is?*
- > *Why do you call Jesus your Saviour?*
- > *Do you see yourself as a sinner or a saint?*
- > *How can you keep your love for Jesus growing?*



Infant Baptism

The Status of our Children

We hardly need reminding that children are a wonderful blessing from God. This is evident not only in the months of preparation that goes into welcoming a new child, but especially in the excitement at the child's arrival—an excitement usually shared by family and friends. In God's eyes children are special too. The psalmist put it this way, *"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him."* (Ps. 127:3).

In the Old Testament children were included in the covenant (binding relationship) that God had made with his people. Abraham was commanded to circumcise every male child born into his family (Gen. 17:10-14). This marked the child as belonging to God's covenant family. Therefore, the child could claim the promise of God's love and protection and were also indebted to live a life of faith and obedience as they grew up.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the fulfilment of the old covenant promises, which means baptism now takes the place of circumcision (Col. 2:11–12). That our children too are included is evident in that Jesus took them in His arms and blessed them (Matt. 19:14). Not surprisingly, whole households were baptised when they were converted (Acts 16:15).

Quite simply, just as circumcision was a sign of the promise for children in the covenant family of Israel, so now, baptism is the sign of the promise for the children of the covenant family in the church.

The Two Parts

One of the features of a covenant is that it has two parts—think of it as a contract initiated by God. First, there is God’s part. In the covenant God makes promises. For us as new covenant believers the promises that are given include forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life – together with all the glorious blessings associated with these promises.

Second, there is our part. As God’s covenant people, we are called to faith and obedience (Rom. 16:26). It’s our duty to trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross and to live a life of worship and gratitude for that wonderful salvation. Some Christians argue that infants should not be baptised until they come to that point of faith. The argument is that they are not yet able to fulfil their part of the covenant.

However, Scripture treats children as belonging – belonging to Jesus and His church. A comparison may be helpful. When a couple get married they usually take out family health insurance, which will also normally include cover for their children. But when those children grow up and commence work they then need to take out their own health insurance. Similarly, children of believers are called “holy” on the basis of the faith of their parents (1 Cor. 7:14), but the day will come when they must exercise their own faith in Jesus and take hold of His covenant promises.

Sign and Seal

Infant baptism is not the same as a Christening. The idea of a Christening is that in baptism a child actually becomes a Christian. We believe Scripture teaches that baptism is a sign and a seal.

As a **sign**, the sacrament of baptism is God’s picture language. It’s a picture to remind God’s people of the wonderful reality that He will be their God and they shall be His people. It is not that baptism itself saves the child; but it is a visible sign that the child is indeed a member of God’s covenant people and as they grow, will prove to be so by their own response of faith. In other words, in baptism, the Lord promises His presence and loving involvement, and in doing so compels those baptized to true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

As a **seal**, the sacrament of baptism is given to us to reassure us of God's faithfulness and His love for us — that He will keep the promises that He has made to us in the gospel. Just as an ancient wax seal on a scroll guaranteed that it was sent by the king so baptism guarantees the blessings God promises us through the work of Jesus.

Solemn Vows

This simple and yet wonderfully profound sacrament does need to be taken with due seriousness and solemnity. In this respect, we particularly draw your attention to the vows you will be asked to make as a part of your own baptism or your child's baptism (see p.12 of this booklet). As we pointed out, this is not a Christening where things happen automatically. Your part of the covenant is to nurture your child to love and follow Jesus. This needs to happen by both word and example.

With respect to "word" it will mean teaching your child the Bible and the truths it contains. It will mean explaining to them the glorious truth of the gospel and what Christ has done for them. Most Christian families begin to read a suitable children's Bible with their child from a very early age. We recommend "The Jesus Storybook Bible" by Sally Lloyd-Jones and the ESV Children's Bible. As their understanding grows they will also need to grasp the truths summed up in the wonderful and historic 'Apostles Creed' which can be found on page 9.

With respect to "example" this ought to include worshiping together as a family so that your child will learn the importance of our communal praise of God for the wonderful blessings of the gospel. Also, young children will soon learn from your example as parents, that how you live is an outworking of what is most important in your life. So, when they see Jesus alive in your life and home through the way you love and serve Him and through the way you love, serve, and forgive others, they will see the importance of loving Him also.

The church community itself is described as a family in Scripture (Rom. 12:10; 1 Tim. 5:1-2) and for this reason the congregation is also asked to make a solemn vow to help you fulfil your responsibilities as a Christian parent. It is for this reason that we baptise children of members only.

It is our prayer is that your child will come to understand the wonder of God's love and learn to rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.



Further Questions

What are some common misconceptions about infant baptism?

It is wrong to baptise believer's children as they do not have faith

It is correct to say that at a very young age, children, especially infants, are incapable of having faith. However, faith must never be seen as a reason for baptism, even in the case of believing adults. The reason for baptism is always being a member of the covenant of grace. Baptism is not a sign and seal of our faith, baptism is a sign and seal of God's promises to us in the covenant.

Baptised children are automatically saved

Baptism saves no one. All children are born sinful and therefore under the judgement of God. The only salvation the Bible knows is through faith in Christ. Thus, baptised children must come to faith after their baptism if they are to be saved. Covenant membership won't save them. God calls on all those in the covenant to respond in faith to His offer of salvation in Christ.

Baptism must be done by immersion

Immersion is a valid, but not required, mode of baptism. In fact, baptism can be rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person, as Scripture clearly represents purification from sins as the essential element in the symbolism of baptism (see Ezekiel 36:25; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21). Some argue that the baptism of Christ (Matt. 3:16) and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:38) imply baptism must be done by immersion. But we cannot categorically say that Jesus and the Ethiopian were totally immersed. They may well have gone waist deep into the water and had water splashed over their heads. Indeed, since the real meaning in baptism is washing in Christ's blood, and water is only a symbol, it is of no importance how much water is used.

What's the difference between adult baptism and infant baptism?

There is no difference. There is only one baptism (Eph. 4:5) and when an adult or an infant is baptised, the promises signified and sealed are exactly the same.

If I was baptised as an infant, what do I do now?

If you were baptised as an infant and have come to faith in Christ, you perform your public Profession of Faith. A Profession of Faith is a public acceptance and affirmation of the promises that were sealed in your baptism as an infant. To put it another way, in your baptism God said "my child"; in your profession of faith you say "my God". For more information see the "Profession of Faith" booklet.

What if I haven't been baptised and I'd like to be?

If you are an adult who has come to faith in Christ and you have not yet been baptised, we would love to baptise you. Once you have read through this booklet and decided that you would like to be baptised, please contact the church office (office@bpcc.com.au) or one of the pastoral team. We will then arrange a time to meet with you and discuss the details. In that meeting you will likely be asked to share the story of your journey to faith and to explore what baptism signifies and why you'd like to be baptised. We would also draw your attention to the vows you will make as part of your baptism on pages 12–13 of this booklet.

What if I would like my child baptised?

If you would like your child to be baptised, please contact the church office. We will then arrange a time to meet and go through all of the details. Please note that given the corporate significance of baptism (as a sign of inclusion in the visible people of God) we only baptise children of BPC members. If you would like more information about formal membership please attend a 'Membership Course.' For more information, contact the church office or see our website (www.bpcc.com.au).

FORM FOR THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS

What the Lord has revealed to us in His Word about baptism can be summarised in this way:

First: Baptism teaches that we and our children are sinful from the time of conception and birth. This means that we are all under the judgment of God and for that reason cannot be members of His kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. Therefore, we ought to be displeased with ourselves, humble ourselves and turn to God for our salvation.

Second: Baptism is a sign and seal that our sins are washed away through Jesus Christ. For this reason, we are baptised into the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our baptism into the name of God the Father is His assurance to us that He makes an everlasting covenant of grace with us and adopts us as His children and heirs. Therefore, He surrounds us with His goodness and protects us from evil or turns it to our benefit. When we are baptised into the name of the Son, we are assured by Christ Himself that He washes us in His blood from all our sins. Christ joins us to Himself so that we share in His death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ we are liberated from our sins and regarded as righteous before God. Baptism into the name of the Holy Spirit is the assurance that the Spirit of God makes His home within us. While living within us, the Spirit continually works to strengthen and deepen our union with Christ. He makes Christ's work of washing away our sins a reality in our lives. He also helps us each day to live the new life we have in Christ till we shall one Day be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Because all covenants have two sides, baptism also places us under obligation to live in obedience to God. We must cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must trust Him and love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We must abandon our sinful way of life, put to death our old nature, and show by our lives that we belong to God. If we through weakness should fall into sin, we must not despair of God's grace, nor use our weakness as an excuse to keep on sinning.

Baptism is a seal and totally reliable witness that God is always faithful to His covenant. Our children should not be denied the sacrament of baptism because of their inability to understand its meaning. Without their knowledge, our children not only share in Adam's condemnation, but are also received into God's favour in Christ. God's gracious attitude toward us and our children is revealed in what He said to Abraham, the father of all believers: "I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). The apostle Peter also confirms this with these words, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39).

Therefore, God formerly commanded that children be circumcised as a seal of the covenant and as a declaration that righteousness comes by faith. Christ also recognised that children are members of the covenant people when He took them in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them. Since baptism has replaced circumcision, our children should be baptised as heirs of God's kingdom and of His covenant. It is the sacred duty of believing parents, aided by these great promises, to bring up their children instructing them in the fear of the Lord, by prayer and example of Christian living, and so by the Spirit of God lead them to conversion and faith. (see Romans 4:11; Mark 10:16; Ephesians 6:1–4; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; Joshua 24:15; 2 Samuel 12:16; 1 Chronicles 29:19; Job 1:5; Matthew 17:15; Mark 7:26; 1 Kings 9:4; 2 Timothy 1:5)

Address to Parents:

Names of Parents, as you have now heard, baptism is given to us by God as proof that He does make a covenant with us and our children. We must, therefore, use the sacrament for the purpose that God intended and not out of custom, simply because it is expected of us, nor superstition thinking that the sign of baptism in itself guarantees salvation. You are asked to give an honest answer to these questions as a testimony that you are doing what God commands.

First, do you confess Jesus Christ as Your Lord and Saviour, accept the promises of God, and affirm the truth of the Christian faith which is proclaimed in the Bible and confessed in the articles of our Christian faith as taught in this church of Jesus Christ?

Second, do you believe that your child, Full Name, though sinful by nature right from the beginning of his life, and consequently deserving of God's judgment and even eternal death¹ is by God's mercy, holy in Christ and therefore, as a member of Christ's church, ought to be baptised?

Third, do you realise that this child will have to confess Christ as his own Saviour when he comes to the age of accountability? And so do you promise in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community, to do all in your power to instruct Full Name in the Christian faith, cause him to be so instructed, and to lead him by your example into a life of Christian discipleship?

Answer: By the grace of God, we do.

Full Name, I baptise you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The minister invites the congregation to stand, and addresses them as follows: Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive Full Name in love, pray for him and help care for his instruction in the faith? Do you promise so to order your life and witness as a congregation that he may grow up in the knowledge and love of God, and be surrounded by Christian example and influence?

Answer: By the grace of God, we do.

FORM FOR THE BAPTISM OF ADULTS

Our risen Lord Jesus said to His followers: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). By giving us this sign of being washed with water our Lord tells us that we are unclean before God. Our sins need to be taken away if we are to enter the kingdom of God.

Let us come before the Lord in prayer and humbly confess our sins.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have strayed from Your ways like lost sheep.

We have left undone what we ought to have done, and we have done what we ought not to have done. We have followed our own ways and the desires of our own hearts. We have broken Your holy laws in our thoughts, words and deeds. Through our sins we have deserved Your condemnation. O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, Who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us and hear our prayer. Amen.

People of God, in our baptism we are assured that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us of all sin, and that His Spirit renews us from day to day. We and our children are called back to the triune God in a restored covenant relationship. For when we are baptised into the name of the Father, God the Father assures us that He adopts us as His children and surrounds us with His love and care even in times of testing and trial.

When we are baptised into the name of the Son, God the Son assures us that through His death and resurrection we are set free from the condemnation of sin, and are made right with God by faith in Him alone.

When we are baptised into the name of the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit assures us that He, the Giver of faith and new life, will live within us and change us by His power from day to day until at last we shall be presented spotless before God in the full splendour of life eternal.

So God, who promises us all these things, calls us in this sacrament to begin living that new life in purity and holiness. He made a covenant with us: "I will be your God, you will be My people." He calls us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. He calls us to be on His side in the battle against Satan and his works, both within ourselves and in the world around us. Jesus calls us to carry our cross in His footsteps and accept suffering as living members of His body.

If then through weakness we fall into sin, it is He who calls us never to doubt His mercy nor to remain in sin or give ourselves up to despair. We are to remember joyfully that God's covenant with us is for ever, and so with His help we can overcome and are encouraged to go on in His service.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, It gives me great joy, on behalf of Session, to present to you Name(s) of Candidate(s) for Adult Baptism, who has expressed the desire to join this Christian church and has been instructed in the teachings of our faith. He has professed his faith before Session and now wants to do so publicly before this congregation and so receive the sacrament of baptism. We thank our Lord who in His grace has called him and brought him to this turning point in his life, trusting that He who began a good work in him will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus.

Profession:

Each candidate says the following. Candidates may be encouraged to use their own words but the following areas are to be covered substantially:

1. I profess that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Saviour, and I want to follow and serve Him as His disciple. I believe He is the Son of God sent to redeem the world. I love and trust Him as the One who saves me from sin; I continue to turn from my rebellion against my Lord, and embrace Him as Lord of my life with repentance and joy.

2. I acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarised in the Apostles' Creed and our Confessions and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation.

3. I accept the gracious promises of God sealed to me in my baptism and affirm my union with Christ and His church which baptism signifies.

4. I promise to do all I can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen my love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church and its means of grace, honouring and submitting to its supervision and discipline, and I join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord wherever I am.

OR: alternatively, if there are too many people for each to speak or it is deemed inappropriate for each to make a full verbal confession, the minister may address the following questions:

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to redeem the world; do you love and trust Him as the One who saves you from your sin; will you continue to turn from your rebellion against your Lord, and do you with repentance and joy embrace Him as the Lord of your life?

2. Do you acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarised in the Apostles' Creed and our Confessions and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

3. And, baptised members, do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism and do you affirm your union with Christ and His church which baptism signifies?

4. Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church and its means of grace, honouring and submitting to its supervision and discipline, and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord wherever you are?

Name(s) of Candidate(s), what is your answer to these questions?

