

# Baptism - What We Believe

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## History of Sprinkling

In 251 a man named Ovation was dying. He was not a Christian. He professed faith in Christ. The doctor said if he was immersed it could kill him. So they doused him with water and figured that would be a good substitute under these circumstances. The only problem was that Ovation didn't die, he got well. When he got well, the church leaders suggested that he be baptized. He refused. Later he was nominated for a church office and denied because he was not baptized. This has become known as the Ovation Controversy. This was the first recorded example of anything practiced in the name of baptism other than immersion.

Pope Stephen in 753 put forth a Papal decree that sprinkling would be an acceptable substitute in cases of necessity. This was the first official endorsement by any church of anything other than immersion. It was not until 1311 that the Roman Catholic Church council of Ravenna in Switzerland voted that sprinkling was officially accepted as a suitable substitute for immersion. Notice that this was done by a council of men, nearly 1300 years after the beginning of the church. Later on sprinkling was accepted by the Church of England by a vote of Parliament and the Westminster Assembly by a vote of 25 to 24 in 1643.

## Infant Baptism

Infant baptism goes back to the Augustinian teaching of original sin; that babies are born with the guilt of Adam's sin. At COMMUNITY, we believe the Bible teaches that we are not responsible for the sin of Adam and Eve, but our sinful nature has continued since Adam and Eve made that wrong choice in the garden thousands of years ago. We wait until children are old enough to believe and understand the true meaning of baptism before we baptize them at COMMUNITY.

## Baptism of Confirmation

Some churches practice a "baptism of confirmation" for children. This ceremony is intended to be a covenant between the parents and God on behalf of the child. The parents promise to raise their child in the faith until the child is old enough to make his own personal confession of Christ. This custom began about 300 years after the Bible was completed. The Bible neither prohibits this practice, nor endorses it. However, this is different from the baptism talked about in the Bible. Biblical baptism is for those old enough to believe and to publicly confess their personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

## How Do You Decide When To Baptize Your Children?

The other common question that arises about baptism is how to know when a child is old enough to be baptized. This can be a little bit harder to discern. There is no verse in the Bible we can read to learn what the proper age for a child to be baptized is. In fact the Bible has little to say about this issue specifically. But we can again apply the same principle we've been using—once someone has committed their life to Jesus, he/she is ready to be baptized. So once a child is capable of making such a decision, then he/she is also capable to decide to be baptized. But how can we know for sure whether they really know what they are deciding? We can't. As parents, we know our children better than anyone else, so we just have to do our best to discern whether they really understand their commitment. And once we feel confident in this, we can support and encourage their decision to be baptized.

One option many parents choose is to avoid asking their younger children whether they want to get baptized, since often children can tend to give the answer they think their parents want to hear. Instead, these parents will wait until their kids come to them asking about it. That's what my wife and I (Carter) did with our kids, and it seems to have worked well. Our 8-year-old and later our 6-year-old approached us and seemed very anxious to take the step of baptism. We asked them a number of questions to help us discern whether they really seemed to understand the gospel and the true meaning of baptism. To the best of our knowledge they did, so we got the privilege of baptizing them in front of family, friends, and the entire church family! What a great celebration.



## Who Is Allowed to Baptize People?

There are some churches that only allow ordained ministers or priest to perform the ordinance or sacrament of baptism. The reason these churches practice baptism this way is because these churches place a very high emphasis on the actual act of baptism, believing that the water itself infuses grace on the individual. That is why many churches call baptism a “sacrament.” It means that a person or thing is being consecrated or being made sacred. Because of this high view of the actual liturgy (or church practice) of baptism, these church traditions require that a priest or ordained minister perform the sacrament.

In the Christian church, we believe that any believer can baptize another believer. Part of the reason we take this perspective is because we believe the real supernatural work of grace in a believer has been accomplished, first on the cross, and second by your faith and trust in Jesus, not because of the water itself. The Christian church also tends to de-emphasize the separation in some traditions between ministers and lay people. In our view, all believers are ministers and missionaries, and no one is a VIP in the eyes of God. Therefore, we encourage any person who has chosen to take that step in baptism to simply ask the person or people who have been the strongest spiritual influences in his or her life to perform the baptism. That can be a pastor, a parent, a child, a friend, a small group leader. . . As long as they too have been baptized, they qualify!

## What Should I Wear To A Baptism?

We'll answer that question in a couple of ways. First, if you are the one being baptized, you should wear what you normally wear, but also bring a towel and swimwear if necessary. Some churches will provide certain garments to be worn during baptism such as a T-shirt or some other form of clothing. Ladies should make sure that they have a swim-top to wear under their shirt if that is the church's practice, in order to avoid any embarrassment.

If you are attending a baptism, wear what you would normally wear to church. In some church traditions, the morning of a baptism for a relative or friend is an occasion where one would expect to dress in suit and tie. In the Christian Church, there are no cultural expectations for a person to wear anything other than what he or she would normally wear.

## What Should I Do or Say During a Baptism?

If you are the one being baptized, you will step into the pool with the baptizer. Different people have different practices or sayings once you are both in the baptismal, but most will ask you a final question about your faith and if you are committed to following Jesus, so be prepared to simply say, “Yes.” As you are being baptized, be sure to pinch your nose so that you do not choke on a bunch of water as you go down. That's it. . . This is your moment with Christ, so soak it in and remember the celebration in heaven that is happening at that moment!

If you are the baptizer, here are a few tips. First, be sure to walk through the process with the person you are baptizing prior to the service to alleviate some of his or her nerves. Pray with the person. Offer encouragement, and tell her that it's OK to be nervous if she is. Second, when the moment arrives, get into the baptismal first and then turn around and help the other person get in (This is not totally necessary, but I think it makes things a little bit easier, and calms the baptizee's nerves a bit).

Third, there are different things a baptizer will say at the moment of baptism, so there s some flex here. You might offer some personal words of encouragement if you know the person, and then pray with him or her in the water. Pray for wisdom, guidance and spiritual protection for the new believer. Fourth, ask the person something like, “Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for your sins so that you may be with him eternally?” The person will answer yes. Then place one hand on the person's back, and with your other hand grab the baptizee's wrist (make sure she holds her nose!). As you baptize the person say, “[Name], because of your confession of faith, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Last, help the new believer out of the baptismal. That's it!