

Baptism Preparation

– some basic theology

What Does Baptism Signify?

- **God has a purpose for our lives** – that we might worship and serve him and so know his abundance (John 10:10¹). We don't experience this since we are separated from God by sin (Romans 3:23²).

Scripture asserts our fundamental need as human beings is to be reconciled to God, to each other and to ourselves. This is put in terms of “salvation”, “redemption”, “new birth”, “liberation”, being “set free” and so on. Whatever term we use, this is the work of Christ which is the only basis on which we are reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-19;³ Colossians 1:19-22;⁴ Ephesians 2:1-9;⁵ Galatians 5:1⁶).

- **Baptism signifies this work of Christ in our lives** – it is a sign of God's grace. So baptism is not primarily about our faith (though faith needs to be present if its benefits are to be realised). Rather baptism is about what God has done and is doing in the person. (See also ‘Who Should Be Baptised?’ below).
- **Baptism is a sacrament**⁷ of God's redemptive work in the individual (John 3:1-8; Acts 2:22-24, 32-39; Romans 6:3-4⁸).⁹ As such it is a pledge of God's on-going work within us. The nature of a sign¹⁰ is that there is a linkage between the “signifier” and the “signified” where the signifier enhances that which it signifies through the “stirring up” of faith. (e.g. A handshake both connotes “friendship” even while it *enhances* the friendship to which it refers, yet is not the actual friendship itself).¹¹
- **Baptism is the rite of entry into the church** as the new covenant people of God (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; 12:27; Romans 12:5; Hebrews 7:23, 8:6-7; 12:22-24). As such it opens up to the one baptised the “benefits” of being “in Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Through our baptism we are made members of one another in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Romans 12:5).
- **Water is a sign**, not just of cleansing but of both death and life:
 - Genesis 1:1-2 (watery deep – chaos, threatening); Romans 6:3-4 (baptised into Christ's death), yet *c.f.*..
 - Exodus 14:(5-9, 19f.f.) or 21-29 (God saves / brings life from the deep and cleansing); see also John 7:37-39 – *Fountains of Living Water* and 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 – *Moses baptism into Christ the rock from which the living water flowed* (both images of water as life giving and sustaining).
 - John 13:5 – *Jesus Washes His Disciple's Feet* (water as purifying, cleansing).
 - John 2:1-11 – *Jesus turns the ritual water into wine* (water as a sign of abundant grace, cleansing and redemption).

Why Be Baptised?

- Because it **bears witness** to God's work of grace achieved through Christ (Mathew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38).
- Because we are **commanded** to (Acts:2:37-38).
- Because it is **pastorally useful**: It enhances / enlivens / solidifies our life in Christ together (1 Corinthians 12:13; 10:17).

Who Should Be Baptised?

- The promise and benefit of baptism are made to **those who hear the Gospel and respond**, and to their **“children and to all who are far off”** Acts 2:38-39. The “unconscious” child participates in baptism through faith of those who make the promises. See:
 - Mark 5:21-24, 35-43 – *Jesus Heals the Elder's Daughter* (see also Luke 7:1-10 – *Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant*).
 - Hebrews 8:1-6 – *A Better Promise*. If the old covenant included children how can the new and “better covenant” not?
- In the case of infant baptism, **commitments are made on behalf of the child** by parents and representatives of the faith community (God parents), and supported by those who participate in the liturgy. In this process the one baptised becomes “a child of God” and so the heir to all that God has promised to us (Romans 8:16). Later the child lays claim to this inheritance for themselves through a public profession of their faith at confirmation.
- The essence of these commitments are about **“repentance and faith”** (Acts 2:39). Both are required (for baptism to be of benefit), but it is God’s work from beginning to end (Jesus is the baptiser – Mark 1:8; Romans 8:29-30).

¹ “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” *John 10:10*

² “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” *Romans 3:23*

³ “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” *2Corinthians.5:17-19*

⁴ “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him...” *Colosians.1:19-22*

⁵ “You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast” *Ephesians .2:1-9*

⁶ “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” *Galatians 5:1*

⁷ Ltn., *sacrāmentum* meaning obligation, oath or pledge.

⁸ 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.” *Romans 6:3-4*

⁹ The 1662 Book of Common Prayer defines a sacrament as, “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.” Some Protestant traditions avoid the word “sacrament”. Reaction against the 19th-century Anglo-Catholic renewal movement led Baptists to prefer instead the word “[ordinance](#)” – that is, practices ordained by Christ to be permanently observed by the church. “Sacrament” stresses mainly, but not solely, what God does, “ordinance” what the Christians do. See further above “it is the nature of the sign...” and below “because it is pastorally useful...”

¹⁰ By analogy to modern linguistics, a “sign” has two inseparable sides (like a coin or a sheet of paper): the *signifier* (in language the “shape” of a word, its letters or speech sounds), and the *signified* (the concept or object that appears in our minds when we hear or read the signifier). Note how neither the sign nor the signifier and signified are to be confused with the reality of that to which they refer (the *referent*), even while they are connected to it.

¹¹ The on-going faith enhancing / pastoral aspect of Anglican sacramental theology reflects its dual roots in the Catholic tradition and the Reformation. The Catholic heritage is perhaps most strongly asserted in the importance Anglicanism places on the sacraments as a means of grace and sanctification while the Protestant tradition has contributed a marked insistence on “lively faith” and “worthy reception”.