

GRACE

Community Church New Plymouth

Loving God, Loving God's People, Loving Gods World

BAPTISM

It is very important to understand what baptism is, why we practice it, who may be baptized and what it implies.

What is it?

Baptism is a sign of repentance and faith. It indicates that forgiveness of sins is available in Jesus Christ. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward reality. It symbolizes the washing away of sins, which is only possible through Jesus sacrificial substitutionary death on the cross.

"... and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body by the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who ha gone into heaven and is at God's right hand..."

1 Peter 3 v 21

"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ ... If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Galatians 3 v 26,27,29

"In Him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead."

Colossians 2 v 12

Why do we practise it?

Baptism is a biblical requirement instituted by Jesus when He gave instructions to His disciples

"... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28 v 19

Our Church takes its instructions and authority from God as He expresses it through His Word, the Bible. He commands us to baptize His followers in His name. This marks them as belonging to Him. Baptism signifies a new start in life and it is an initiation rite of entrance into the church. It is a sign that reminds us that God has purchased our rescue from death and damnation through His substitutionary death on the cross. Baptism is an act which expresses what God has done for us in Jesus. Its direction is from God towards us rather than from us towards God, as a confession of faith.

It celebrates what God has done for us.

Who may be baptized?

Baptism is a privilege that is extended to believers and their children.

Firstly, it is reserved only for Christ-followers. A christ-follower is not someone who just makes a mere intellectual assent about Jesus but is rather someone who has a personal, active faith in Christ as Rescuer and Controller of their life.

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Act 2 v 38

Baptism symbolizes a cleansing from sin which only Jesus can offer and if the person being baptized has not experienced forgiveness and a restored relationship to God it is a meaningless ritual.

Secondly, this sign can be conferred to children also who are part of God’s covenant family.

“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 v 39

This means that at least one parent or both parents must be Christ-followers to qualify for their child to be granted this sign of the promise.

“For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his (believing) wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”

1 Cor 7 v 14

Believer’s children are “set aside for God” and elated to the promises of God.

This does not mean that the child is saved (water is incapable of doing that: 1 Peter 3 v 21) but it does serve as a sign pointing the child towards an obligation that they have of repentance and faith in Jesus.

“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Acts 20 v 21

Those who express their faith in God are entitled to be baptized. It is not just a perpetuating family or religious traditions but an acknowledgement of divine ownership where God in symbol reminds us “I will be your God and you will be my people.” There are many examples of this in the Bible where people are baptized marking them as belonging to God.

What it implies?

A Future Fulfillment

It demands a commitment of personal faith in Jesus Christ at some stage of their life or a rejection of that offer by refusing to accept Christ’s offer of forgiveness personally. Thus if there is no faith of the parents it merely becomes an empty church ritual and has absolutely no significance. The parents will be required to give evidence of their personal faith in Jesus as well as make public commitments to keep the faith and teach their child the faith.

A Belonging to His People

It certainly makes sense that if you are to honour God and be baptized (or have your child baptized) that you would want to make your commitment to Jesus a reality in living a godly Christian life that pleases God and that you will have an active association with His people who gather in His name. It goes without saying that you will want to be with other Christ-followers regularly on Sundays and also mid-week growth group meetings.

The promises made must be kept because after all they are made to God. If the promises are to be honoured then surely it means that being part of the church's life is essential in that it encourages us to live a life that pleases God and clearly marks us as belonging to God and His people. Also it means we have an obligation to God and others to serve others in the Body of Christ, His church, of which we are a part. Belonging to the Christian family is a great privilege and our responsibilities to God and other Christ-followers must be honoured.

A Lifelong Commitment as a Christ-follower

Baptism also implies a commitment to a holy life.

“... don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Romans 6 v 1 -4

What it is not!

It must be made clear that if baptism is refused the child “will not suffer”. Baptism is no “fire-insurance” policy that the church offers but rather a salvation offer that Jesus makes to anyone who will believe in Him and follow Him according to His ways prescribed in His Word the Bible.

Our church believes in the baptism of believers ...

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household ... then immediately he and all his family were baptized ... the whole family was filled with joy, because they had come to believe in God.”

Acts 16 v 31,33,34

... and their children.

A last word about godparents

The use of godparents has a historical basis that has been blurred and misunderstood. Originally godparents functioned *firstly* as **sponsorships** which confirmed the suitability of the parents who requested baptism for their child and *secondly* as **suretyship** which gave the guarantee that the baptized child would be brought up to trust in God and live a life that honours Him. However, over the centuries things have changed and the current perspective on godparents is that they function to ensure that the parents who make the vows at baptism actually fulfill their promises. If you still wish to appoint godparents our requirement is that they must also be Christ-followers seeking to live out their faith in every day life in a way that pleases God. It defeats the purpose originally intended just to ask a really nice friend or family member to be a godparent! If there is no real faith then it is a useless appointment.