

What is Baptism?

Water baptism is a symbol of a Christian's conversion and commitment to Jesus Christ. We first read about baptism in the Bible in the gospel accounts of John the Baptist. John was the last prophet before Jesus and his ministry was to prepare people's hearts to believe in Christ. John baptized people who were repenting of (turning from and forsaking) their sins. Before John only non-Jewish converts to Judaism were baptized. John's baptism taught people that God requires *everyone* to have a spiritual conversion to Him.

Jesus also taught the need for conversion when he said, **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"** (John 3:3). There is one and only one condition for spiritual rebirth and that is faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As John 3:16 states:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Whenever a person puts their faith in the Lord Jesus, God forgives their sins and gives them a new life by filling them with his Holy Spirit. This is what John the Baptist called being "baptized in the Spirit." This is a spiritual baptism that only God can do. Water baptism is physical, outward, and follows a person's conversion as an expression of their new life in Christ. The water represents cleansing from sin and the going under and up from the water reflects our spiritual union with Jesus' death and resurrection—being dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ (Romans 6:4).

Who Should Be Baptized?

Since water baptism is a physical symbol of a person's new life in Jesus Christ, those who have made the decision to repent of their sins and trust Christ as their savior should be baptized. This means that babies or children too young to make that decision ought not be baptized. *At FCC we practice a prayer of dedication for children rather than baptism, as consistent with Jesus' practice recorded in Mark 10:13-16.*

In the early church new believers were usually baptized immediately when they believed in Jesus, as a profession of their repentance and faith. Because baptism is so closely associated with Christian conversion, some have taught that baptism is actually a requirement for salvation. Although there are 5 passages in the New Testament that can appear to teach salvation by baptism, this pales in comparison with the over 90 passages that clearly teach that **salvation is through faith alone, by God's grace alone and not by any external action on our part.**

How Do We Baptize?

Upon a believer's public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, a person can be baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). We baptize by total immersion in water, which was the usual practice of the early church (see Matthew 3:16).

Why Should I Be Baptized?

Certainly the way I live out my Christian life is more of a testimony to my commitment to Christ than is a ceremony like baptism. And since baptism doesn't save my soul, why bother?

The same could be said about marriage. Certainly your lifestyle of love and devotion to your spouse demonstrates your commitment to him/her more than participating in a wedding ceremony and, according to state law, no one has to have a wedding ceremony to be considered husband and wife, you only have to pledge your mutual consent and sign a paper.

But virtually every part of a wedding ceremony is symbolic of the new union and devotion being made; the ceremony doesn't make the couple married or faithful, but it shows how significant this joyful yet solemn commitment is and those attending celebrate the beginning of this new life with the new couple.

Baptism is just like a wedding. Besides this, Jesus was baptized to identify himself with our sinful condition. We are baptized in order to follow his example and identify ourselves with his death and resurrection. Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize believers and they in turn both taught and performed water baptism.

It is the rite of initiation into the body of Christ, his Church. Just as circumcision was the physical rite of initiation into the people of God under the old covenant, so now **baptism pledges our faith in and allegiance to Christ and his church** under the new covenant (Colossians 2:11-14).

Communion

If baptism is like a wedding ceremony, then communion is like a wedding ring. A wedding ring is a token of remembrance. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover feast with his disciples, he said, "**Do this in remembrance of me**" (Luke 22:19). According to Jesus' own words, the bread is a symbol of his body that was broken (pierced and scourged) for us and the fruit of the vine (we use grape juice) is a symbol of his blood that was poured out for us. Jesus' death paid the just penalty for our sins. We do well to remember that we have been bought with a price!

Because communion is a remembrance of Christ's work on the cross and only those who believe in Christ benefit from that work, then communion is to be taken/observed only by Christians. It is also a time for a believer to examine his/her life, particularly regarding any unresolved conflicts with other believers, because communion (i.e. common union) is to be a present symbol of love and unity between fellow believers in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:15-17). Finally, communion is a proclamation of the Lord's death until his return, which all believers eagerly anticipate (1 Cor. 11:20-34).

At FCC we practice what is called *open communion*. That means anyone who is a practicing follower of Jesus Christ, regardless of church affiliation, is welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper with the congregation. We believe the spiritual union among all believers in Christ is more significant than the fact that we belong to a diversity of organizations or denominations.

Scripture References

Romans 6:4 "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."

Mark 10:13-16 "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them."

Matthew 3:16 "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him."

Colossians 2:11-14 "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. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross."

1 Corinthians 10:15-17 "I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

1 Cor. 11:26-29 "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

Our Beliefs and Practices of

Baptism & Communion



JANESVILLE, WI

"Bringing People to Faith and Maturity in Christ."