

Meaning and Purpose of Baptism

Like all religious rites, baptism cannot be fully explained. Indeed, much of its beauty, thus power, lies not in words but by entering the drama itself.

However, a few things can be said with confidence:

Baptism is a visible symbol of God's inclusive love.

Therefore, it is God's pleasure and kindness that is being expressed in the sacrament of Baptism, as by the generous pouring of water, we are reminded that we are similarly cherished and valued as God's own. Baptism, then, is symbolic of renewed and hopeful life, in that water restores, cleanses and nourishes.

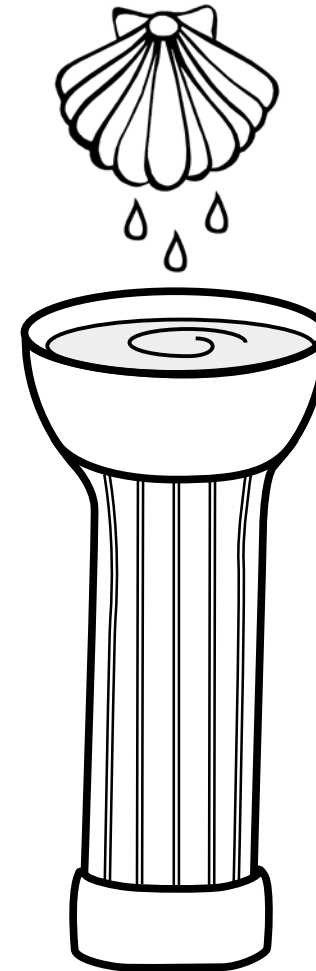
Baptism is also a celebration of belong-

ing...belonging in the very heart and mind of God, yet also participating in a community of faith, a community who through their regular gathering, genuinely seeks to care for and encourage one another along the Christian pathway.

Finally, baptism is a clear sign of our faithfulness to the way of Jesus Christ. As such, this sacrament is a lasting reminder that by being joined to Christ by the Spirit, we are at one with him in a just, compassionate and reconciled world.

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Children and Baptism



Baptism welcomes and connects us to the family of God, a world-wide community of disciples of all ages and races. During a baptism the whole congregation makes promises to support the one being baptized.

The Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament – something that is sacred, or holy, and has special significance for Christians. During the ritual of baptism, everyone has the opportunity to experience the reality of God's grace and God's love which are freely given.

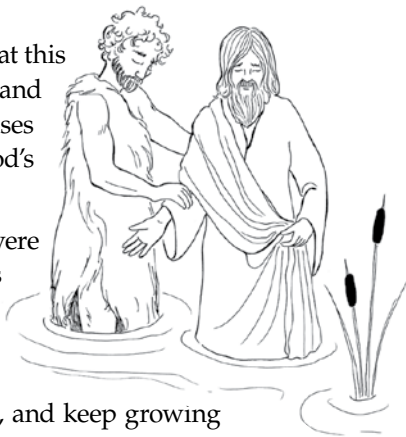
Baptism is an act of the church by which someone is welcomed in a special way into the Christian community and becomes a member of the church, the Body of Christ. With the visible, outward sign of water, the church recognizes that the one being baptized has a new life in Christ.

Baptism is a visible symbol of God's love. The word "baptize" means to sprinkle or immerse in water. In biblical times water was both a precious product and a religious symbol for purification, renewal, and life. The water used in Baptism is a symbol of cleansing, restoring, and giving new life.

From the days of the early church, the children of believing parents have been baptized and nurtured in the family of God. This acknowledges that children are also part of the covenant relationship with God. When these children are older, they can make their own profession of faith in Christ, affirming the faith into which they were baptized.

The baptism of children clearly indicates that this is God's action. God's love is always with us and does not result from any act of ours. The promises we make in baptism are in response to God's gracious love.

Remember your baptism. Those who were baptized as infants often celebrate this experience by lighting their baptismal candles each year to remember that day. Whenever we participate in the baptism of others, we say again the baptismal promises, and keep growing in our understanding of the importance of this act in our lives.



In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

(Mark 1:9-11)

In baptism, we acknowledge that we too are God's beloved children.

Baptism rituals and practices vary from church to church, but there are some common elements:

- baptism usually takes place during public worship, when the community is gathered
- the worship leader gives the names of the one being baptized
- the one being baptized (or their parents/sponsors) makes promises
- the faith community pledges support, and promises that they will be part of the ongoing journey of faith of the one being baptized
- the worship leader offers prayers for the one being baptized
- sometimes gifts are given



Ways to include children in the sacrament of baptism

Children can...

- be invited to gather near the font
- carry the water to the font
- present the gifts (candle, certificate, Bible)
- make welcome cards



Parents can...

- talk about some of the symbols of baptism
 - water** — restores, cleanses, and brings new life
 - candle** — God's presence
 - white clothes** — new life
 - sea shell** — an ancient symbol of baptism
- explain the promises that are made by parents and the congregation
- help children learn and join in the responses to the questions to the congregation
- make sure that children have an unobstructed view during a baptism

