

The decision to be baptized is one that you should only make after you have prayed about it and given it a lot of careful thought. This information will help you better understand the meaning of baptism and whether or not you truly want to be baptized.

As you read it, think about whether you have ever asked Jesus Christ into your savior. Only those who have done this are ready to be baptized. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior, you have made the most important decision that you will ever make in your whole life. It is a decision that not only affects your life here on Earth, but it also means that you will be living in heaven with Jesus forever along with everyone else who has accepted Him as their Savior.

If you have never asked Jesus to be your Savior, or if you are unsure that you have, here is all that you need to do:

Admit that you have sinned and ask Jesus to forgive you for all the wrong things (sins), big or small, that you have done. All of us have done wrong things that separate us from being friends with God. The Bible says in Romans 3:23 that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” If you ask Jesus to forgive you, He ALWAYS will.

Believe with all your heart that Jesus died on a cross to be punished for the wrong things that you have done. When we do wrong things, we deserve to be punished. The Bible says in Romans 6:23 that the punishment for wrong things (sins) against God is death. Jesus did not die on a cross for the wrong things that He had done but for all the wrong things you have done. He did this because He loves you more than anyone else could. He wants you to be forever friends with God.

Choose to live for Jesus. This means that you want to obey Him and do what He wants you to do. If you truly love Jesus, and if you are truly thankful that He died on a cross to take your punishment, then obeying Him is the best way to show Him how much you love Him and how thankful you are for what He did.

If you have never asked Jesus to be your Savior and you would like to do that, you can pray and talk to Him like this:

Dear Jesus,

I'm asking you to become my Savior. I am so sorry for all the wrong things that I have done. Please forgive me. I believe with all my heart that You died on a cross to be punished for all of the wrong things that I have done or ever will do. Thank You for loving me so much that You died for me. I want to live the rest of my life doing what will please You, but I'm going to need Your help. Please help me to live the way that You want me to live.
Amen.

If you just prayed this prayer and asked Jesus to be your Savior, please tell share this news with us! We love celebrating this important life change! Once we know that you have made this decision, we can help you learn more about Jesus and the awesome life that He has in store for you.

Baptism in the Old Testament

It might surprise you that we begin to look at baptism in the Old Testament because many people think that baptism didn't even start until the New Testament. Since baptism is a Greek word not found in the Old Testament (which was written in Hebrew), some people think that baptism isn't found there. This isn't true.

At Mt. Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, God chose the Israelites to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). Because God is holy and righteous, His people and the objects or sacrifices used in worshipping Him had to be holy or clean. If people or objects came in contact with something unclean, they had to be baptized/washed in order to be made clean again.

God commanded the nation of Israel in the Old Testament to perform many baptisms. These baptisms, most of which are found in the book of

Leviticus, were ceremonial washings with water. Sometimes these baptisms involved washing objects like the parts of the animal given as a burnt offering or the bronze laver of the tabernacle. Usually, these baptisms involved people who came in contact with unclean things or who, like the high priest on the Day of Atonement, were going to participate in spiritual ceremonies.

Baptism in the Old Testament, then, teaches us that we need to be holy and clean as God's people. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, the Bible says in 1 John 1:7 that "the blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from all sin." We are made holy and clean by the forgiveness of all our sin through faith in Jesus, not because we are baptized. When people are baptized, their baptism symbolizes that they have already been made holy and clean through faith in Jesus and that they want to live holy and obedient lives before God

Misuses of Baptism in Jesus' Day

By the time Jesus came to earth, the religious leaders of Israel had added many more of their own baptisms/washings besides the ones God had given them. These man-made baptisms were done for a very wrong reason: to make a person feel righteous and clean before God when they really weren't. People performed these baptisms/washings to be clean on the outside but their hearts did not truly love God and want to obey Him.

In Mark 7:1-10, Jesus spoke harshly to religious leaders who misused these baptisms/washings:
The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were unclean, that is, unwashed.

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with unclean hands?"

He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men"

And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"

It is very important to understand that baptism does not make you righteous and clean before God; only faith in Jesus Christ does that for you.

To be baptized in order to be righteous is to make the same mistake that the Pharisees and teachers made in Jesus' day. No one can depend on human works to save them.

Baptism and John the Baptist

When John the Baptist began his ministry to prepare the way for Jesus' ministry, he called the people of Israel to repent of their sins and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. We find his words in Matthew 3:1-6:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

This baptism by John did not save people; it was their faith that saved them, but God required this baptism so people could show that they were truly sorry for their sins and needed God's forgiveness. Only by seeing themselves as sinners in need of God's salvation would the people of Israel be ready for the coming of Jesus Christ as their Savior. In the same way, when you are baptized, you are showing that you are very sorry for your sins and that you don't want to continue sinning. You are also admitting that you need God's forgiveness for your sins and that you have found that forgiveness by trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior. For you to be baptized but then live a life of careless disobedience makes your baptism meaningless.

Baptism and Jesus Christ

Why, then, did Jesus come to John to be baptized? Jesus didn't have any sins to feel sorry about. John the Baptist himself wondered about this. Matthew 3:13-17 says:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

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. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Jesus said that He needed to be baptized by John in order "to fulfill all righteousness." God's law, given through Moses in Exodus 29:1-4, says that every man who became a priest had to be washed/baptized. The Bible says that Jesus is our high priest who represents

us before God so He had to be baptized to fulfill God's law. If Jesus had not been baptized, He could not be our high priest; or if He had served as our high priest without being baptized, He would have sinned by breaking God's law.

There was another reason for Jesus' baptism by John: it was to identify with all of us sinful people in order to save us (Isaiah 53:12). Just as Jesus became a human being to save us, He also was baptized to be like us, yet without any sin of His own.

Sometimes people want to be baptized to follow Jesus' example, but none of us can be baptized for the same reasons that Jesus was. His baptism to be our high priest and to identify with sinful people is unique. Jesus' baptism can remind us, however, of His great love that caused Him to identify with our sinfulness. It also reminds us that He is the high priest who sacrificed Himself and made a way for us to have a forever friendship with God.

Baptism and the Apostles

After Jesus was raised from the dead, and before He returned to heaven, He gave His disciples these final instructions found in Matthew 28:18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

With this command, Jesus' disciples became apostles. They wouldn't be disciples, or learners, any longer. The word "apostle" means "one who is sent." Jesus was sending His apostles with the power of His authority to go to the people of all the nations with the important mission of making disciples of them. Making disciples involved teaching them about salvation in Jesus Christ and obedience to His commands. The apostles were also responsible for baptizing those who became Jesus' followers.

Jesus told His apostles to baptize people "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Notice that even though the three Persons of God are mentioned here (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), it is in only one name. This refers to the Trinity of God: three Persons in one God. By being baptized into the name of all three Persons we recognize and confess that all three Persons of God are involved in our salvation. God the Father loved us enough to give His one and only Son for us, God the Son loved us enough to give His life to pay the price for our salvation, and God the Holy Spirit loves us enough to show us our need for salvation and apply the benefits of that salvation to us.

In keeping with this ministry that Jesus gave to His apostles, our church is committed to teaching people in the communities around us about Jesus Christ and His salvation. Like the apostles, we, too, baptize those who become His followers. Since Jesus' concern was for all the nations of the world, we are also committed to sending people out from our church to other parts of the world to teach them about Him. Perhaps you will want to take the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to people in other countries. Our work as Jesus' followers is not done until everyone on earth has had the opportunity to accept Jesus as their Savior.

Baptism and the Holy Spirit

When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior by faith, the Holy Spirit is given to us and He baptizes us into Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:26-27 says:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 says that everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ is baptized into Him by the Holy Spirit:

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

A very important passage is Romans 6:1-11:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

According to this passage, when we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into Jesus Christ we are united with Him in:

- His crucifixion and death on the cross making us dead to sin
- His burial so our bodies of sin have also been buried and sin no longer has controlling power over us
- His resurrection making us alive to God
- His seat in the heavenly realms, our true and eternal home

This baptism by the Holy Spirit unites us with Jesus Christ so that His victory over sin and death and His eternal life become ours. This baptism takes place apart from any water at the moment when we put our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. It is very important for you to understand that being baptized with water does not give you salvation in Jesus Christ. Everything that you need for the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life in heaven is given to you the moment that you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior. By being baptized with water you are simply bearing witness to the work of the Holy Spirit that already occurred in you when you accepted Jesus as your Savior.

Misuses of Baptism in Jesus' Day

Baptism of fire.

John the Baptist referred to this baptism when he preached about Jesus. This baptism symbolizes God's judgment that Jesus will bring upon ungodly people when He returns to earth. John's words are recorded in Matthew 3:11-12:

"After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Jesus' baptism of death.

Before He died, Jesus referred to His coming death as a baptism. Jesus asked James and John, two of His disciples:

"Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" – Mark 10:38

After this question, Jesus told James, John, and the other ten disciples that He would give His life as a ransom for many people, clearly showing that this question referred to His death.

Baptism into Moses.

1 Corinthians 10:1-2 says:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

This passage of Scripture obviously refers to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on dry ground. By obeying Moses and crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites became united to Moses as their leader and head. Even so, Jesus Christ is our leader and the Head of the Body of Christ to which we belong by faith.

Baptism for the dead.

There is only one reference in the entire Bible to this baptism and it is found in 1 Corinthians 15:29:

If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for the dead?

Bible teachers are unclear about what this baptism refers to. It could refer to unbelievers who came to accept Jesus as their Savior as a result of a believing loved one on their deathbed urging them to accept Christ so they would see them again in heaven. Thus, one of the reasons that these unbelievers would believe and be baptized was for the sake of their loved one who died so they would be reunited with them in heaven someday.

Although the interpretation of this verse is unclear, we can be very sure that it isn't teaching that a believer can be baptized to get an unbeliever who has died into heaven. Each person is responsible for their own relationship with God before they die.

The baptism of Noah's ark.

This baptism is described by Peter in 1 Peter 3:18-21:

Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ....

Noah and his family were saved in the ark from God's judgment upon the earth in the flood. We are saved from God's judgment by being in Jesus Christ by faith. These verses clearly teach that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ save us, not baptism.

What Does Baptism Do?

Baptism glorifies God the Father.

By being baptized you are showing that God is absolutely holy and righteous and that His standard is perfection. Baptism affirms that God's righteous standards never change and that they are and always will be nothing short of perfect. By being baptized you are admitting that you have fallen short of God's perfect standard and that you are unable to please God and enjoy eternal life with Him. You are removing any false image that you are perfect and admitting that you cannot have a relationship with God based on your own good character or good works.

Baptism glorifies God the Son, Jesus Christ.

By being baptized you are showing that you are truly trusting in Jesus Christ alone to save you. You are admitting that the forgiveness of your sins and your friendship with God is due to nothing that you have done but depends completely on Jesus' death for you on the cross and His resurrection to new life.

Baptism glorifies God the Holy Spirit.

By being baptized you are showing that it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that you became aware of your sin and realized your need for salvation. It is the Holy Spirit who has united you with Jesus Christ so that the victory over sin and the gift of new and eternal life accomplished by His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven are already yours from the moment you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Register for baptism at
westshorefree.org/baptism