

Tell me about ... baptist church

Believers' Baptism

What is baptism?

Sometimes people refer to what we do in Baptist churches as "adult baptism", but that is not really correct. In fact we practise believers' baptism. The difference is that the requirement for baptism is not the reaching of a certain age but the necessity for the person to believe in Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour and Lord (*see the leaflet, Tell me about Becoming a Christian*).

We baptise by immersion, which means that the person being baptised goes down completely into the water (i.e. is totally immersed). The word baptism comes from the Greek baptizo, which means to immerse or submerge in a fluid.

Why be baptised?

First of all, Jesus commanded his followers to be baptised. He said to his disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28. 19). He did not see baptism as

an optional extra! If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, then you will want to be obedient to him, for Jesus also said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (see John 14. 15)



Secondly, Jesus himself was baptised at the beginning of his ministry here on earth (Matthew 3. 13-15). In doing this, he set an example for us to follow. When we are baptised, we follow in his footsteps.



Thirdly, baptism was practised in the early church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible. On the Day of Pentecost 3,000 new believers were baptised. Throughout Acts we read of people being baptised, including St Paul (Acts 9. 17-18).

Fourthly, baptism is an act of witness. Because of all that it symbolises, it is a powerful witness to all who see it (see below). The act of baptism is an outward visible sign of what has happened to us inwardly and spiritually. It says that the person being baptised has become a Christian and is following the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our responsibility to witness for Christ whenever we can (see Acts 1. 8) and baptism is one way God has given us to do this.

What does baptism symbolise?

1. A sign of cleansing We show that the sins of our life before becoming a Christian have been 'washed away', just as water washes dirt from our bodies.

2. What Christ did for us When we are baptised, we are acting out a kind of drama, symbolising Christ's death (as we go down into the water), his burial (as we are submerged in the water) and his resurrection (as we rise up out of the water). By our action we are saying that Christ died and rose again for us.

3. What has happened in our lives We are also acting out what has happened in our own lives when we became Christians. Our old lives, centred around ourselves are ended, 'put to death' if you like,

and new lives of following Jesus have begun. See Romans 6. 3-7 where St Paul speaks about these things.

4. It is a declaration of loyalty Baptism is called a sacrament by the church. The word comes from the Latin *sacramentum*, which means 'oath of allegiance'. A Roman soldier made a *sacramentum* to the Emperor. It was the seal upon his promise of loyalty. Baptism is an outward 'seal' upon our declaration of loyalty to Christ.

How is it done?

In the church, below the platform, there is the baptismal pool. It is about four metres long and two metres wide and has steps at both ends.

The Minister goes into the pool, followed by the person being baptised. Then the Minister asks the person two questions like this: have you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour and Lord? do you promise to follow him with the help of the Holy Spirit for the rest of your life?

Upon a positive response, the Minister then baptises the person, saying the following words, "I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

What next?

As baptism is all a part of becoming a Christian, it is linked with church membership. We are baptised into Christ and into his 'body', which the Bible says is the church. Therefore baptism is the normal way of entry into the church (see I Corinthians 12. 13). For more information about church membership, see the leaflet, *Tell me about Church Membership*.



What baptism is not!

Baptism does not make a person a Christian. Rather, it shows what has already happened in the person's life. If there was no faith in Christ in the person being baptised, there would be no meaning to their baptism. Furthermore, there is nothing special about the water. It is not 'holy' or 'blessed' in any way. It is ordinary tap water. It is what the person does that is significant, not the water itself. Baptism can be seen as the climax of the process of becoming a Christian. However, it should not be seen as the climax of the Christian experience. Instead it should be seen as part of the Christian pilgrimage, in obedience to Christ. He has much more for us as we continue to obey him and follow him day by day!

A Final Question

In the early church, baptism followed on from belief in Jesus Christ. Philip explained all about Jesus to an Ethiopian as they were travelling on his chariot out in the country. They came to a lake and the Ethiopian said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" The answer was, 'no reason at all!' and we read that he and Philip "went down into the water and Philip baptised him." (Acts 8. 26-39 tells the story)

The final question is, why shouldn't YOU be baptised?

You can talk to the Pastor or one of the Deacons about it.

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