

The Baptism of Children

A Guide for Parents

Ward Church

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! God has blessed you and entrusted you with a child. May your joy in this cherished gift continue throughout your lifetime!

You are not alone in this awesome responsibility. You are part of a church that deeply cares about children and desires to support, honor, and equip families. Your church wants to partner with you in spiritual nurture and development of your child.

This booklet seeks to help you:

- understand what the Bible teaches about baptism
- prepare for the sacrament of infant baptism
- lead your child to know Jesus Christ and accept God's baptismal promises.

May God bless you richly as you celebrate the baptism and as you lead your little one to Jesus!

Scott McKee
Senior Pastor
Ward Church

Why We Baptize Children

By Wilbert M. Van Dyk

Hundreds of children. Hundreds of baptisms. Hundreds of goose bumps. That's one chapter of the story of my ministry. Each time I baptize a child, my spine tingles. Why? Because of what I see happening in that sacrament.

Think of it. As a parent it's time for you to present your child for baptism. Your baby, dressed up for the occasion, lies in your arms – perhaps sleeping, perhaps wide eyed with a wonderment known only to infants, perhaps loudly protesting the indignities of this invasions into a routine schedule. At any rate, your child is unaware of the profound thing that is about to happen. The assembled congregation shifts position for a better look. And then, in my mind's eye, I see the hand of God reaching down through the roof of the sanctuary to the baptism font, to your baby's forehead. Ever so tenderly, God's hand rests on it. And then I hear God say: "This child of these believing parents is a child of my covenant and therefore belongs to the community of my people. I hereby certify that all my promises and mercies, which I have spoken to my people throughout the ages, are for this child too."

Awe inspiring. A holy moment. God has spoken, sealing his whole covenant faithfulness to a baby who does not yet understand. God has publicly identified your child as a lamb of his fold. No wonder you respond by saying, "God helping us, we will do all we can to train our child for the Lord." And no wonder the assembled congregation promises to do its part in receiving, instructing and encouraging your child within the fellowship of believers.

In Baptism God Speaks

It's essential that we see baptism as an act of God, not as our act. People didn't invent baptism. It was God's idea. Our Lord instituted baptism as part of the ministry of the church. In baptism, *God* acts. In baptism, *God* speaks. That's the heart of what I want to say about baptism. Baptism is not our profession of faith; it is God's pronouncement and a sign of his covenant mercies. Baptism is a statement that God makes to us. And God has a right to make his statement to whomever he wants – even to children who do not yet understand his words.

Let's explore that idea a bit further. Christians who say that baptism should be limited to those who are old enough to believe in Jesus Christ have turned baptism into a people-centered event. They claim that faith must come before baptism. And they view baptism as a human act, dependent on personal and conscious decision of the person being baptized. According to that position, the believer is the one who is front-and-center in baptism.

Christians who claim that the children of believing parents also ought to be baptized see things differently. To them it is irrelevant that the child does not

possess adult faith. They recognize that the primary voice in baptism is not ours toward God, but God's toward us. And why shouldn't God speak his promise to children who are not yet able to understand his worlds? We who are parents or grandparents, aunts or uncles, older brothers and sisters do not hesitate to talk to children, do we? We tell them that we love them, that they are good, or cute, or cross. We ask them whether they are hungry. We accuse them of having dirty faces and chide them for pushing cereal into their ears.

None of us thinks it is strange that we as adults speak to children who do not understand our words and who are not capable of intelligent responses. Nor should it strike us as strange that in baptism God chooses to speak his love, promise and grace to children who do not yet understand what it's all about.

Child or Adult? The Problem

But is it right? Does God, in fact, choose to speak his promises in baptism to children? Or does God choose to limit his baptismal declarations to believing adults?

Here's the problem. Not a single Scripture text or passage proves the issue of child or exclusively adult baptism one way or the other. Nowhere does God come even close to saying, "You shall baptize the children of believing parents." Nor does God come close to saying, "You shall baptize only adult believers." The issue has to be weighted on the basis of conclusions that we draw from the history of the church, from Scripture, and from related themes. Let's explore these areas one at a time.

Conclusions from History

Can we learn anything from the early church? Might Jesus or Peter or Paul have said something about baptism that, although not recorded in Scripture, lived in the memory of the early church and gave it a sense of direction? In the first two centuries of church history there is no evidence that the question of child or adult baptism was even raised. Apparently, it was not a problem. It did not become a problem until around A.D. 200. At that time a church leader named Tertullian argued, in his *Treatise on Baptism*, that children should not be baptized until they are a bit more mature. The very fact that Tertullian argued as he did demonstrates that baptism of children was practiced before A.D. 200.

Tertullian's treatise sparked differences of understanding and practice that continue to the present day. Some, like Tertullian and Gregory of Nazianzus argued against the baptism of children. Others, like Origen and St. Augustine, argued for the baptism of children. The most honest conclusion that we can draw from the history of the early Christian church is that the baptism of children was not an oddity that was introduced in later years: it was a part of the life and worship of at least *some* Christian churches from the beginning.

Conclusions from Scripture

Although the Bible does not specifically command or forbid the baptism of children, there is a wide array of biblical material that should help us understand God's will in the administration of baptism.

One Book

The starting point is the unity of the Bible. Although it has an Old Testament and a New Testament – totaling sixty-six books – the Bible is one. It has one divine Author and one central message of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament people looked forward to the coming of God's promised Messiah. To help them look forward to that coming, the Lord gave his people explicit pictures of the future sacrifice of Jesus. These pictures all involved blood-letting. Circumcision, Passover, and animal sacrifice all pointed forward to the Lamb of God, whose blood would be shed for our sin.

Because Jesus has now completed his great sacrifice on the cross, it's no longer necessary for us to circumcise infants, to celebrate Passover, or to sacrifice animals in the churchyard. In their place, the Lord has given us other ceremonies, bloodless ones. In baptism we celebrate our entry into God's people through the washing away of our sin. But that washing happens through the pouring out of *Jesus'* blood, not our own. So water will do. Similarly, in the Lord's Supper we celebrate our fellowship with God, but not through our own sacrifice. We celebrate the feeding of our souls in the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice *for us*. So bread and wine are a sufficient reminder of how Jesus' body and blood are our spiritual food.

So, clearly there are differences between the Old and New Testament. Now, that Jesus has come, baptism and the Lord's Supper have replaced circumcision, Passover and animal sacrifice. But the same God who called Abraham to faith and obedience calls us to faith and obedience today. And just as God included Abraham and his family into God's people in the Old Testament, so God includes believers and their families into that same people, which in the New Testament is called the church. Romans 4 and Galatians 3 tell New Testament Christians that when we believe in Jesus Christ, we actually become the children of Abraham. That's unity! It's wrong for us to say that the Old Testament does not concern us today. What God said to Abraham and his family is still important for us and our families. To separate the Testaments so widely is to build a wall where God has not. The Bible is one.

Covenant

One of the major themes that runs throughout the entire Bible is summarized in the word *covenant*. Covenant describe the way that God deals with sinful humanity. In general terms, a covenant is an agreement – but not an entirely equal agreement – between God and us. Because God is God, he takes the initiative in the covenant and sets its terms. In Genesis 17 God revealed those terms to Abraham: he promised to be faithful and called for Abraham and his children to respond in faith and obedience. God decided to include believers and their children in that covenant. Furthermore, God identified a particular ceremony that celebrated covenant inclusion. In the Old Testament that ceremony was circumcision.

Circumcision did not actually *make* a person a member of the covenant. As God made clear in Genesis 17, we enter into this covenant when either, like Abraham, we become believers; or, like Isaac, we are born to, or adopted by, believing parents. So circumcision was only a ceremony that *celebrated* the covenant relationship God had already established with people.

God has never canceled that covenant first made with Abraham. It was not destroyed by the faithlessness of the people. It was not annulled in the coming of Christ. Its central features remain the same:

- God's promise to be faithful
- God's call for faith and obedience
- God's concern for believers and their children
- God's insistence on a covenantal sacrament

All of these are just as much a part of the New Testament church as they were part of church life under Abraham, Moses and the prophets. God is still a covenant God, calling us to be his covenant people.

It is clear that children received the Old Testament sacrament. Genesis 17:11-12 records that God commanded circumcision to be administered to those eight days old, as a sign of the covenant between him and them. For hundreds and hundreds of years God's people understood that children of believing adults were included as members of God's community. That did not mean these children were saved. It did not take away their need to personally believe and obey. But they were included as circumcised members of God's covenant community.

Now if God had wanted to change that pattern in the New Testament church, he would have clearly said so. But there is not a shred of New Testament evidence that God did so. *Nowhere does the New Testament alter the Old Testament pattern God set by which children of believing parents were included as members of the covenant community.*

In fact, follow the New Testament pattern. The apostles went out to preach the gospel. They called upon unbelievers to repent of their sins, to believe in Jesus Christ, and to be baptized. And what happened, time and time again, when adults repented and believed? Acts 16:15, 16:33, 18:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:16 all speak the same language: they *and their households* were baptized. That's exactly the same pattern we find in Genesis: "Walk before me and be blameless," said God in Genesis 17:1 And then Abraham and his household were circumcised. "Repent and believe," said the apostles. And then believers and their households were baptized.

We cannot prove that children were part of these households. It's possible – though unlikely – that the Bible records only the conversion of people who were too old to have little children at home. But the pattern of the New Testament is the same as the pattern of the Old: when adults come to faith and obedience, they and he members of their family receive the sign of inclusion among the people of God. The New Testament believer who had grown up with the Old Testament way of thinking would certainly have assumed that children should receive the sacrament that marks them as lambs of Christ's fold.

But does the Bible really teach that baptism has now taken the place of circumcision? Yes.

In a rather complicated passage in his letter to the Colossians, chapter 2:11-14, Paul writes about the "circumcision of Christ," a phrase describing Christ's death on the cross. In that circumcision-death of Christ, writes Paul, we were included. In Christ our sins have been cut off and put to death. Paul continues, "[And you were] buried with him in baptism and raised with him." It's difficult to sort out, but at the heart of that passage is this message: in his death and resurrection, Jesus brought the central meaning of circumcision and baptism together. They both picture the removal of our sins in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They both constitute a mark on our bodies which God identifies us as members of his covenant.

Circumcision was meant for the children of believing parents. Through Jesus Christ, baptism now takes the place of circumcision. Therefore baptism continues to be for the children of believing parents as well as for new adult believers.

New Testament Hints

Several other New Testament references demonstrate that God receives our children as his own. Acts 2:38-39 is part of Peter's Pentecost sermon. To his mixed audience he said, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off." Significant, isn't it? God made a special point of reminding the New Testament church that his promises are not only for those old enough to understand. They are for little children as well.

Matthew 19:13-15 records the story of how Jesus took young children into his arms and blessed them. The disciples tried to shoo the parents and the children away. But Jesus prevented them: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them." This passage has nothing directly to do with the baptism of children. Yet it illustrates the way in which Christ took to himself, and gave his blessing to, those who were not yet old enough to understand. If Jesus did this, what could possibly prevent him from taking our children to himself as well and promising them his blessing? And what could prevent us from celebrating that fact by baptizing them?

First Corinthians 7:14 tells us that the children of believing parents are holy. Should holy children be denied the sacrament of baptism? Only if God clearly and unmistakably says that they are to be excluded. But on the contrary, as we have discovered, God nowhere excludes children of believing parents from receiving the sign of the covenant.

Only Adults?

What about the argument that there are many specific illustrations of adult baptism in the New Testament but not a single one of baptism of children?

The New Testament church was a missionary church. Missionaries back then did the same thing that many do today: preached the gospel, called people to repentance and faith and then baptized believers and their households. That is the New Testament story again and again. Because of its missionary context the New Testament gives us lots of illustrations of new converts who were baptized as adults. But notice as well that it does not give a single illustration of a person who was brought up in the Christian faith who had to wait until adolescence or adulthood to be baptized.

Immersion or Sprinkling?

What about the argument that immersion (generally considered inappropriate for the baptism of children) is the only proper way to be baptized? The New Testament does not help us with that one, does it? We really don't know whether Jesus, the Ethiopian eunuch, the three thousand Pentecost converts, or the believing households were sprinkled, poured upon, or immersed in their baptisms. So Scripture does not tell us that any of these methods is divinely required. Besides that, the quantity of water, or the extent of the coverage, or the length of time of the water does not make any difference. What is symbolized in baptism is the washing away of sins. That can be illustrated just as appropriately by any of these means.

Only Believers?

What about the argument that only believers should be baptized? After all, Scripture teaches that we should repent, believe and be baptized. Again, this was, and still is, the pattern in a missionary setting: When people did, in fact, repent and believe, they and their households were baptized. But nowhere does Scripture say that *only* those who believe may receive the sacrament of baptism. And we may be profoundly grateful that it doesn't.

Think about how hard it would be to make the right decision if we accept this premise. Imagine a child born to Christian parents and brought up in a Christian home. At what age, or at what level of maturity of understanding, would that child qualify for baptism? Does a child of three have enough faith for baptism? A child of seven? Twelve? Eighteen? No. The voice that speaks in baptism is not ours, telling God that we have finally arrived at a point where we qualify for baptism. The voice that speaks in baptism is God's voice, sealing his promises to believers and their children and calling them to trust and obey.

In view of all the testimony of Scripture, the more relevant question is not, "Why do we baptize children?" but rather, "Why should we refuse children the sacrament of baptism?"

Conclusions from Related Themes

Both the Bible and the Christian church have identified several themes that are closely tied to baptism. These themes teach us more about the relationship of baptism to the children of believing parents.

Forgiveness

One of these themes is forgiveness. In some passages Scripture specifically links forgiveness to baptism. For example, Mark 1:4 says, "John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." And Acts 2:38 commands, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Also, 1 Corinthians 6:11 relates baptism to cleansing: "You were washed, you were sanctified."

Some people conclude from passages such as these that children should not be baptized. Baptism speaks of forgiveness and spiritual cleansing. But small children are too young to repent of their sins, so they should wait until they understand what forgiveness is.

That conclusion suggests that forgiveness is an act of God that we must pry loose with our repentance. But that's incorrect. Forgiveness is not a commodity. God is not sitting in heaven with a box of forgiveness, waiting for us to pay the price of repentance. Rather forgiveness is part of God's nature. He is a forgiving

God. In repentance we open the door of our heart to receive the forgiveness that God *has already declared available*. It's like this: a child who knows that her parents are not very forgiving will not be quick to say, "I'm sorry." A child who knows that her parents are ready to forgive will be far more likely to repent. So baptism can help children to repent.

In baptism God seals us to his forgiving self. If he chooses to do so, there is no reason why he shouldn't make that declaration to children who are not yet able to consciously repent. Baptism is not a sacrament of repentance but of forgiveness. In fact, Acts 19:4-5 reveals a distinction between John's baptism and baptism in Jesus. John's was a baptism of repentance, and baptism in Jesus represents forgiveness and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Since children are, without their knowledge, participants in the sin of humankind, what could be more appropriate than to seal to them in baptism – also without their knowledge – God's promise to forgive them in Jesus Christ?

The relationship between baptism and forgiveness does not discourage the baptism of children. It recommends it.

Regeneration

A second biblical theme often associated with baptism is regeneration. Regeneration means being *born again*. Titus 3:5 speaks of "the washing of rebirth."

What is the connection between baptism and regeneration? It is not, as some people assume, that baptism regenerates us. Nor are we baptized because we have already been born again. The one does not cause the other. Rather, between baptism and regeneration there is a parallel – a parallel that helps us understand the one from our study of the other. For example, both baptism and regeneration are acts of God. Both depend on the work of Christ. Both are single events that make a difference for the future.

Many adults are born again. Many adults are also baptized. But nowhere does Scripture suggest that *only* adults are born again. Children can also be born again. Faith does not cause a person to be born again. Jesus makes clear in John 3 that being born again is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is rebirth that produces *faith*. We cannot believe unless we are first born again. Like our first birth, our second birth is not ours to control. Regeneration is our spiritual awakening, caused by God's Spirit at work within our hearts. Like baptism, regeneration is not our move, but God's move. And if God decides to effect it in children, who are we to say that it cannot be so? Since we wouldn't think of forbidding God from regenerating children, we shouldn't try to forbid God from speaking his baptismal promises to them either. So the parallel between regeneration and baptism does not discourage the baptism of children. It recommends it.

Faith

The idea that the Bible most frequently associates with baptism is faith. How does that the Bible says about faith fit with the practice of infant baptism? I'd like to suggest an approach.

Romans 4 and Galatians 3 say that Abraham is the father of believers. It was with Abraham that God established his covenant. What, then, was the nature of Abraham's faith, and how much credit did God himself claim for that faith?

Although Abraham's faith was very personal, it was not a completely private matter. In some way, known only to God, Abraham's faith had an effect on his son Isaac before he was born. Because of Abraham's faith, Isaac was circumcised at the tender age of eight days, obviously before he had any conscious faith of his own. We may wish that God had required Isaac to believe before he was included in the covenant, but God didn't. Instead, God said that Abraham's faith was important not only for himself but also for Isaac. Soon after Abraham's children were born, they were to receive the sign of covenant membership.

That means, of course, that it's possible for a person to be a member of God's covenant even before he or she can consciously enjoy all of its blessings. When Abraham believed God, he formally entered into God's covenant and immediately took on the joys and responsibilities of covenant life. With Isaac the situation was different. He formally entered God's covenant when he was born; later, as he grew in faith, Isaac personally accepted the joys and responsibilities of covenant life.

Baptism, like circumcision, does not guarantee that we will enjoy the life of faith with God's people. It only certifies that we belong *with* God's people. It promises us that all God's blessings are ours. It calls us, from as early as we can remember, to love the Lord and follow him. For these reasons, we should baptize those who enter covenant membership through the faith of their parents in the same way as those who enter it by virtue of their own faith.

The relationship between faith and baptism does not discourage the baptism of children. It recommends it.

Pieces of a Puzzle

When we begin to understand baptism as God's wonderful word of promise and ownership, then we also begin to sense the excitement that believers experience in celebrating this sacrament. The actual baptism itself is exciting. So is the way that it marks a starting point for the child, the parents and the church.

In infant baptism, God publicly places his covenant claim on the children of believing parents. It's God's plan that they should grow up in the Christian faith, blessed by Christian nurture. For the rest of their lives your children may know that from day one, they belong to the Lord, that they are a part of the community of God's people, and that God has promised to forgive their sins if they will accept that promise with a believing heart.

As covenant children grow older, they must cash in on the promises that were publicly sealed in their baptism. Think of baptism as a check that must be personally endorsed by a response of faith in Jesus Christ. Some people have used the example of national citizenship. A child receives citizenship at birth, without being consulted. Only later in life will the child be able to decide whether or not to exercise that citizenship responsibly. In the same way, baptized children are born into citizenship in God's kingdom and to the promises that were sealed in their baptism as they will face further down the road.

For your child who is baptized at an early age, baptism provides a constant reminder of the blessings and obligations of the covenant.

For us parents, baptism commits us to our responsibilities – God helping us – in raising our children. It's by means of our faith that our children are counted as members of God's covenant. And it's by that same faith that we must raise our children – God's children, entrusted to our care.

For the church, the baptism of its children means a joyful and affirmative response to the question "Do you, the people of God, promise to receive God's covenant children in love, to pray for them, to help care for their instruction in the faith and to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?" It is within the church community that covenant members, growing from infancy to childhood to adolescence and adulthood, become increasingly aware of what it means to be called by the name of Christ.

The whole argument for baptism of children of believing parents fits together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. No one piece is the whole picture. All the pieces together provide the evidence that has convinced the largest part of the Christian church throughout history to administer baptism to the children of believers. My argument for infant baptism has been that there is no biblical reason not to baptize children and every biblical reason to extend it to them. As the Heidelberg Catechism confesses in Question and Answer 74:

Infants as well as adults
Are in God's covenant and are his people.
They, no less than adults, are promised
The forgiveness of sin through Christ's blood
And the Holy Spirit who produces faith.

Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant,
 Infants should be received into the Christian church
 And should be distinguished from children of unbelievers.
This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision,
 Which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

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INFANT BAPTISM

Frequently Asked Questions

What is baptism?

Baptism is a sign and symbol that marks someone as part of God's covenant community.

From the EPC Book Of Worship (3.2):

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ. By the act of baptism, a person becomes a part of the visible Church, for it is a sign and a seal of the Covenant of Grace for believers and their children. As a sign it proclaims God's forgiveness and our redemption in Jesus Christ. As a seal, God marks us as adopted children of our heavenly Father. It indicates our ingrafting into Christ, our rebirth, the remission of sins, and our ability by the power of the Spirit to walk in newness of life.

Who can receive baptism?

We practice the baptism of people who have professed faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and have promised to be obedient to Him, along with the infants of one or both believing parents. Also, those who have legal responsibility for an infant have the right to present the child for baptism.

Does baptism "save" my child?

Only God saves people. Baptism is a symbol of grace. When your child is older, he or she must claim Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord on their own accord.

Do I need to be a member of Ward Church to have my infant baptized?

Ordinarily, yes. Baptism marks your child as part of the community of God. Normally, one or both parents become members of the church before presenting children for baptism. Exceptions are sometimes granted to parents who are in the process of pursuing membership or who have extenuating circumstances.

How soon should I have my baby baptized?

Parents should present their children for baptism without undue haste or unnecessary delay. Most babies baptized are between two and twelve months old. It is rare to administer infant baptism to children over two years of age.

What happens at infant baptism?

- A. *Parents make a commitment* to reaffirm their faith in Jesus Christ, to nurture their children in the church, and to lead their children to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, profess faith openly, and lead a Christian life.
- B. *The Congregation makes a commitment* to live like Christ before these children, to surround them with steadfast love, and play a role in bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ.
- C. *God makes as commitment* to be their God (Genesis 17:7, 10-12). He marks the child (in a covenant way), and that child becomes a part of the family of God in the same way that an eight-day-old Jewish boy was circumcised and considered a Jew even though he had not yet professed faith in Yahweh (Colossians 2:11-12).

What does NOT happen at infant baptism?

- A. The infant is not granted spiritual salvation.
- B. The parents are not released from the responsibilities of doing everything possible to bring that child to faith in Jesus Christ.
- C. The infant is not freed from the necessity of one day making a decision to accept and follow Jesus Christ when he or she is old enough to make that decision.

Does infant baptism involve Godparents?

Some church traditions recognize “Godparents” who assume responsibility along with the parents for the spiritual life of the child. At Ward Church, the entire congregation commits to the spiritual nurture of the child and, as such, stands in the traditional role of Godparents. Therefore, Godparents are ordinarily not used at infant baptisms. However, it is permitted, though not customary, to have close friends or family members stand with in support of the parents at baptism.

What is the difference between infant “baptism” and infant “dedication”?

In practice, baptism and dedication are quite similar. In both acts, the parents make a commitment to raise the child in the faith and the congregation makes a commitment to the spiritual nurture of the child. In baptism, water is used. In a dedication, no water is used.

There is a significant difference, however, in symbolic meaning. Dedication is a human act in which parents, with the support of the congregation, dedicate their child to God. The action is a human action, albeit a very important one. Baptism, on the other hand, is primarily a symbol of divine action. God reaches, claims, loves, and initiates. In baptism, we celebrate God’s role in salvation. In baptism, God is the principle promise maker.

A simple way to state the difference is that dedication is a symbol of human commitment; baptism is a symbol of divine commitment.

Can I have my child dedicated instead of baptized?

Yes. If after learning about the meaning of infant baptism, you prefer to have your child wait until he or she is older and can make their own decision to be baptized, we will arrange an infant dedication. The decision to baptize or dedicate is left to the parents.

If my child is baptized as an infant, should they be re-baptized when they are older?

It is necessary only to be baptized once. There is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5). Because baptism is a sign of God’s faithfulness, not the faithfulness of the one being baptized, re-baptism is never necessary.

What is the process for baptizing adults?

Adults who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ and have never been baptized are baptized when they join the church as members. Membership classes are offered three or four times a year.

How do I schedule a baptism?

Watch the bulletin for baptism classes and special baptism Sundays or contact our Pastoral Care Department at 248-374-7400.

The Baptism Service

By Scott McKee

The baptism of a child is a significant event not only for the parents and family members, but for the entire congregation. Ward Church is a church that loves kids and takes our responsibility to families very seriously. Your church family is an active participant in the sacrament.

Location and Time

Baptisms should take place in church during one of the regular worship services, because it is an act of the whole church. Baptism is not an individual ceremony, but an act of the Christian community. Normally, you would have your child baptized at whichever worship service you regularly attend. Special opportunities for baptism are offered once each quarter. Watch the bulletin or call the office for dates and details.

Family and Friends

Once you have attended the baptism class and secured your date, invite your family and friends to attend that worship service. You'll want to include family members (e.g. grandparents, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, cousins, etc.) and friends (e.g. neighbors, co-workers, golf partners, etc.). Don't limit your invitations to Christian people. Non-church attending family and friends are honored to be included in such a meaningful family moment. A baptism is also a great opportunity to introduce family and friends to the Christian faith and to the church in a non-threatening environment. In fact, you may never have a greater opportunity for invitation than a baptism.

What to Wear

Some parents choose to dress their child in a long flowing baptismal gown available through a Christian Supply Store. Baptismal gowns are more common in highly liturgical churches and are not necessary, though certainly welcome, at Ward Church. Dress your child in comfortable clothing suitable for an important occasion. You'll want to take some family photographs, so consider how you want to remember the day. Parents, too, should dress comfortably and neatly.

The Big Day

On the day your child is to be baptized, arrive 15 minutes before the service and go to the pre-assigned classroom (room number will be provided later) for final instructions from the deacons and officiating pastor. Baptisms are ordinarily scheduled early in the worship service as a courtesy to parents and to ensure that everyone is looking and smelling their best. When you are invited forward, stand with your child on the stage next to the pastor. Family members are welcome to take photos or videos.

Baptismal Vows

On the day of your child's baptism, you will be asked to respond to the following or similar questions:

1. Do you profess Jesus Christ as your own Savior and Lord? (We do.)
2. Do you commit yourself to raise your child in a Christian home, model Christ before your child, pray with and for your child, teach your child the Scriptures, participate in the life of the church, and otherwise do everything in your ability that one day your child also would know Christ Jesus as savior and lord? (We do.)

The congregation will be asked the following or a similar question:

Do you, the members of Ward Church, promise to partner with these parents in the spiritual nurture of their child, to set a Godly example before this child, and to be a church that welcomes, values and loves children? (We do)

After the Service

Be sure to show any visiting family members and friends around the building and to introduce your guests to some of your church friends. Some parents plan a luncheon at a home or restaurant afterwards to celebrate the event. You can rejoice that your child's spiritual journey has begun. More than that, you can know that you are not alone in the task of rearing your child. The Holy Spirit is already at work. Your church stands with you.