

## ***“Why Be Baptized?”***

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Matthew 3:13-17

Baptism....*what does it mean to you? Why be baptized?* In the 21<sup>st</sup> century not too many people are contemplating those questions. Many in our culture look upon baptism as an archaic, irrelevant ritual of a bygone era. On the other hand, I believe those gathered here this morning have a certain degree of understanding and interest in baptism. After all, Baptism is one of our two sacraments and most, but not all, have been baptized. On this *Baptism of the Lord Sunday* I invite those have and those who have not been baptized to ponder the meaning of baptism. *Why be baptized? What’s it all about?* In good Presbyterian fashion we first give our attention to the Bible. From Matthew’s account of Jesus’ baptism we read.....

**<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup>John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup>But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup>And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” ...*The Word of the Lord***

Jesus has laid down his hammer, taken off his tool belt and headed south to find his cousin John who now smells of locust and honey, and can always be found standing in the muddy waters of the Jordan River. Jesus gets in line, waits his turn and wades out into the water, standing right next to real live sinners like you and me. Only Matthew records a curious conversation between Jesus and John. Jesus is eager to be baptized but John resists baptizing him. <sup>14</sup>*John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* <sup>15</sup>*But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.*

The first time Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Matthew he states his need and desire to be baptized. Jesus saw that being baptized was foundational to his life and ministry. *Why? Do you believe baptism is foundational to your life and how you will live?*

To help us better understand the how and why of baptism I have prepared a little quiz for you. I believe quizzes can be excellent learning tools!

**True or False: The Pastor decides who will be baptized in a Presbyterian Church.**

False While the pastor is often the one approached about baptism it is the Session who decides who will or will not be baptized.

**True or False: During the sacrament of Baptism, the water becomes magically empowered by God's Spirit.**

False The water is not the focus. It is not "holy water" even if the water is from the Jordan River. The water is simply a symbol...a visible sign of an invisible reality.

**True or False: Parents presenting their children for baptism are to be active members of a congregation.**

True The Book of Order states, "*When a child is being presented for Baptism, ordinarily the parent(s) or one(s) rightly exercising parental responsibility shall be an active member of the congregation.*" Our Session, on a few occasions, has made an exception by allowing baptisms of infants whose parents are not members of a congregation. These exceptions were allowed based on prayerful deliberation and promises made by family members to be connected to a church where the infants will grow up. Our Session has always taken very seriously their responsibility to make sure that there is a faith connection between a congregation and the child.

**True or False: When a Roman Catholic or a member of another protestant church joins a Presbyterian Church they must be re-baptized.**

False Presbyterians recognize the baptism of other faith communities and do not require re-baptism.

**True or False: The congregation promises to be a partner in nurturing the baptized individual in the Christian life.**

True This is one reason we do not practice private baptisms. Baptism is a sacrament of the community of faith where the members of the family of faith promise to love, teach, counsel and help the one baptized to grow in faith, hope and love. Baptism is a family affair!

**True or False: Presbyterians believe that baptism is necessary for salvation.**

False Faith in Christ and only faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. Salvation is a journey of the heart and mind which does not require external or tangible signs like the sprinkling of water. Water is merely the sign of the invisible reality of the Spirit's work in the individual's life and we believe that the water helps to *concretize* the invisible reality of grace.

**True or False Baptism symbolizes our union with Christ.**

True As you can see by the accompanying quote from our Book of Order:

*“Baptism is the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ. Jesus through his own baptism identified himself with sinners in order to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus in his own baptism was attested Son by the Father and was anointed with the Holy Spirit to undertake the way of the servant manifested in his sufferings, death, and resurrection.”* W-2.3011

Baptism is a sign of becoming one with Christ himself. When Jesus was baptized he publically demonstrated his solidarity with every human being who ever lived. By being baptized along with every other sinner who came to John, Jesus identified with all who have fallen short, suffer and die. I think that takes in every human being who ever lived! Baptism is a sign that Jesus is one of us and we are one with him!

As Paul writes, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* (Galatians 3:27) We not only believe in Jesus, but we also identify with him and his way of living in the world. Baptism reminds us that we are *“in Christ and he in us!”*

**True or False: Baptism symbolizes our dying and rising with Christ.**

True Again, from the Book of Order:

*“In Baptism, we participate in Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Baptism, we die to what separates us from God and are raised to newness of life in Christ. Baptism points us back to the grace of God expressed in Jesus Christ, who died for us and who was raised for us. Baptism points us forward to that same Christ who will fulfill God’s purpose in God’s promised future.* W-2.3002

Paul makes this perfectly clear in his letter to the Romans, <sup>3</sup>*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* <sup>4</sup>*Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:3,4)

Baptism symbolizes all of our baggage.....brokenness....wrong turns.....failures....sin, whatever you want to call it, have been buried with Christ and left in the tomb and a new person is being raised to new life. *“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old has passed away the new has come.”* (II Corinthians 5:17) Baptism symbolizes what God is doing in our life and in the world. The One who sits upon the throne says, *“I am making all things new!”* (Revelation 21:5)

**True or False:** As an identifying mark, Baptism signifies the faithfulness of God, the washing away of sin, rebirth, putting on the fresh garment of Christ, being sealed by God’s Spirit, adoption into the covenant family of the Church, resurrection and illumination in Christ.  
W-2.3004 (a. to g.)

True This is, in fact, a summary of the meaning of baptism as found in our Book of Order.

*“Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to discipleship. Baptism gives the church its identity and commissions the church for ministry to the world.”* W-2.3006

By being baptized Jesus established a deep and humble identification with humankind. It was the beginning of his ministry and he clearly established a bond with humanity that pleased God. It is no wonder that, when Jesus came out of the baptismal waters, God declared, *“This is my Beloved with whom I am well pleased.”*

When it comes right down to it, this is what baptism means to me....because Christ is in me and I am in Christ, I am looked upon as *beloved* in God’s eyes. I often don’t feel beloved, actually just the opposite, and I know I certainly don’t measure up to God’s standards, your standards or my own standards....I fail often and I know I am a sinner....but when I return to the baptismal font I remember that I am beloved in God’s eyes. And that’s where life begins for me!

The great Reformer, Martin Luther, was plagued, at times, by a sense of worthlessness and despair. To drive out those demons, he kept an inscription on his desk that read, “**Remember, you have been baptized.**” Often he would touch his head and remind himself, “*Martin, you have been baptized.*” *Why be baptized?* To remember that we are God’s beloved.

In our Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* we are invited to remember our baptism through a Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant and, today, Denise and I will lead us through that Baptismal renewal service. I invite those who have not been baptized to also participate and remember God’s love for you. As you reaffirm your baptismal covenant may God bless you with the assurance that “***You are God’s beloved with whom God is well pleased!***”

### **Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant**

