

Baptism Information Sheet¹

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

THE WEDDING ILLUSTRATION

Imagine a wedding. The bride and groom stand side-by-side in the front of the church. They take turns promising, "till death do us part." These two young lovers don't look any different on the outside, but in just a few moments they will be married-united for life by invisible cords. Signifying that unseen union the bride and groom exchange rings. They identify the couple as husband and wife.

Imagine that an unmarried couple is watching. They decide that they want to get married too. So they give each other rings. No commitments, no vows are made, just the symbols of union. As they walk out of church right behind the last grooms man, their hands, like those of the bride and the groom, bear the accepted token of lifetime love. But only the couple that has made the commitment to each other is really married.

Symbol is not substance. Marriage depends on a commitment, not on bands of gold. The same is true of becoming a Christian. What may outwardly identify you as a believer does not make you one. The wedding rings do not marry the couple. Nor does being baptized make you a Christian. They are fitting symbols, but without the reality of commitment, a ring-like baptism is void of meaning.

BIBLICAL PASSAGES CONCERNING BAPTISM

Of course, the real significance of baptism cannot be defined merely with the analogy of a wedding ring. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commands his followers to "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit..." Baptism is the means by which followers of Christ are identified. It is also a public step of obedience to Christ's command and as such it represents your willingness to follow him as your Lord with all of your heart.

In passages such as Acts 2:41, 8:12, and 10:47-48 it is evident that baptism follows an individual's decision to trust Christ alone for salvation. The New Testament only records the baptisms of adult believers. Baptism was never intended to save an individual, but to publicly identify a person with Christ.

¹This information is adapted from material provided by Willow Creek Community Church entitled, "For Those Considering Baptism".

In Romans 6:1-11, the apostle Paul explains how baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going under water pictures Christ's death and coming out of the water illustrates his resurrection. When you are baptized, you are actually acting out what you believe for all to see.

You do not have to be baptized to have Christ, any more than you must exchange rings to be pronounced man and wife. But if the inner commitment to trust Christ alone for salvation has been made, then the outward symbol of baptism should be as valued and as visible as the gold ring on a newlywed's finger. This is a very special time in your spiritual journey and our prayer is that God will do a great work in you as well as in others through your testimony.

A WORD CONCERNING INFANT BAPTISM

If the purpose of baptism is to publicly identify a believer in Jesus Christ, the question may well be asked by some, "What was the significance of my baptism as a baby?" In the Bible, we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them, prayed for them, and told us to welcome them. But he did not baptize them, and he did not tell anyone else to baptize them. Baptism is for those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ alone for their salvation.

If you were baptized as a child, it was the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your baptism as an adult can be viewed as the fulfillment of your parents' wishes.

While this decision is ultimately made by the church's pastors/elders in consultation with their parents, the guideline that we follow at North Wake is that we prefer not to baptize any children under the ages of 10-12. This is for the purpose of helping to assure that the children are able to fully understand the significance of the symbolic nature of baptism. We have also found that the older the child, the more they are able to "own" their decision and see it as a profession of a lifelong commitment to follow Christ.

AM I READY TO BE BAPTIZED?

Baptism is for believers. A believer is someone who has realized that their sin separates them from God and places under the wrath of God (Eph. 2). They have given up all efforts to reach God through good works or religious activity. They have concluded that only Jesus Christ's death on the cross for their sins can bridge the gap between them and God. A believer is someone who has decided to trust Christ alone for their salvation and has chosen to follow Him as their Lord.

If you have come to that point in your spiritual journey, then the answer is yes; you are ready to be baptized. Just as the bride and groom tell of their love for one another through the symbol of rings, you should also want to show the world through baptism of your union with Christ. Let the invisible miracle that's happened in you show through the celebration He ordained for you.

CHILDREN AND BAPTISM

INTRODUCTION

Faithfully preparing a young person to follow the Lord in the obedience of baptism is an important responsibility that is entrusted to Christian parents and to the church. We believe parents are responsible for instructing their children and overseeing their spiritual development. The church is responsible for sustaining the ordinance of baptism and guarding it from abuse.

AT WHAT AGE SHOULD A YOUNG PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

We recommend parents wait until their child is at least 10-12 years old before beginning the process. Please note that this is a recommendation and not a mandate. The Bible does not give us a precise age for baptism. All we can legitimately infer from biblical teaching on baptism is that a child must be able to give a credible profession of faith. We believe there are many younger children who could make such a profession but who may not be ready for baptism. We also believe there are older children who could give a "credible" profession but might still not be spiritually ready. As a matter of policy we do not set an age requirement. Instead we leave it up to the parents, in consultation with the NW Elders and Pastors, to discuss baptism with their child and discern when the candidate is ready to begin the preparation process.

WHY WAIT?

Our reasons for encouraging young people to wait until at least until age 10-12 are driven mainly by a desire to maximize the spiritual benefit for the candidate. Here are some things we encourage parents to consider before beginning the baptism preparation process:

- Even though a child may be mentally and spiritually ready earlier, more will be ready at the later age. It may be better for a young person to wait until they are older rather than bringing them through the process and then needing to discourage them from continuing midway through.
- Baptism can be a very meaningful experience and we want it to be one that a person remembers. The older the child is the more likely the experience will be remembered and cherished. If they are older when they are baptized, people are more likely to look back on this experience with confidence that it reflected a conscious and sincere resolve to follow the Lord.
- For a young person to wait and anticipate an experience is important and rare in a "me-oriented" culture that continually tells our young people, "If you want it, you can have it and you can have it now."
- The promises we are making in baptism should not be made lightly. Encouraging a young person to wait emphasizes the significance and importance of baptism.
- The older age allows us to more thoroughly prepare the candidate. This process for baptism can be an intellectual stretch for 9 year olds and would require substantial simplification for younger children. (David Michael, "Preparing Young People for Baptism" 19-20)

THE IMPORTANCE OF A MENTOR

We strongly encourage fathers, as spiritual leaders of their families, to come along side their child(ren) in a mentor role before Baptism. If the father is unbelieving or is otherwise unable to fill this role, consider a strong believing man from your family's small group, an Elder or Pastor. North Wake is excited to partner with parents in this time of mentorship, as well as provide helpful resources and direction during this time of preparation. This is a great way to ascertain if your child is ready for baptism.

CLOTHING

We advise you to wear your swimming suit with a large t-shirt over it. Bring a change of clothes and a towel to dry off with.

THE SERVICE

North Wake's next Baptism Service is at Patterson Hall Field (at SEBTS) during the 10:30am outdoor Easter service. Each candidate will have the opportunity to briefly tell his or her story of coming to know Christ (see attached sheet). Children will be asked more directive questions such as, "Why it is that you want to be baptized?" and "Have you placed your trust in Jesus as your Savior?" Please feel free to invite family and friends to witness this celebration, as it is a powerful expression of the grace and mercy of God. Once you've completed this form please contact Rob Craig to step up the candidate interview.

ANY QUESTIONS?

If all of this has raised any questions in your mind, please contact one of our pastors at the church office (556-1546).

BAPTISM TESTIMONY

As you know from reading the information in this packet, baptism is for believers, those who have clearly decided to trust Christ alone for their salvation. If this is true of you, please use the following questions as a guideline for writing out your personal testimony. Once you've completed this form please call the church office to set up a meeting with a staff member at least one week prior to your baptism. Please bring this form or a copy (you may keep the original) to this meeting.

Name _____

YOUR STORY - A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

1. Where were you spiritually before receiving Christ and how did that affect you - your feelings, attitudes, actions and relationships? _____

2. What caused you to begin considering God/Christ as a solution to your needs? _____

3. What realization did you come to that finally motivated you to trust in Christ? _____

4. Specifically, how did you receive Christ? _____

5 How did your life begin to change after you trusted Christ? _____
