

Baptism FAQ Sheet

*Adapted for our local context from the Baptism FAQ Sheet put together by Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, IA.
<https://www.lutheranchurchofhope.org/west-des-moines/>*

Q: Why do Christians baptize?

Jesus commands his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," (Matthew 28:19). This is not a polite suggestion, it is a command from Jesus which he gives as his "last words" before his ascension into heaven.

Q: How did the first Christians baptize in response to this command of Jesus?

The Book of Acts tells nine stories of baptism as practiced by the early Christian church:

- 2:14-42 3,000 people in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost
 - 8:12-13 Simon and the men and women of Samaria
 - 8:35-40 Ethiopian eunuch
 - 9:1-19 Saul (Paul)
 - 10:44-48 Gentiles in Caesarea
 - 16:11-15 Lydia and her household
 - 16:31-34 Jailer at Philippi and his entire family
 - 18:5-11 Crispus, all his household, many of the Corinthians
 - 19:1-10 Some disciples in Ephesus
 - 22:6-16 Paul's conversion / baptism story retold
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Q: So what can I learn about baptism from the Book of Acts?

One very important learning is that the early Christians baptized entire households, women, and Gentiles (people who were often overlooked by the religious leaders of Jesus' day). The Book of Acts (and the entire Bible for that matter) offers no age, gender, or ethnic restrictions for those who are baptized. (See Galatians 3:27-28). Baptism is a gift from God offered to all as a "mark" of faith in Jesus Christ.

Q: Is that why Lutherans and many other Christian denominations practice infant baptism?

Yes, and there are other reasons too: Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:14). In the Bible - time and time again - God initiates our relationship with Him. God chooses us first and then waits for our faithful response. The practice of circumcision for eight-day-old boys in the Old Testament was a sign of God choosing the male offspring of Abraham and Sarah (See Genesis 17:10-12). An eight-day-old infant cannot choose to believe in God or accept him as personal Lord and Savior. Instead, God chooses these infants to be included as a part of His family. So it starts with God.

Q: Isn't faith a pre-requisite for baptism? How can an infant have faith?

In the Book of Acts, adults are baptized after coming to faith. For adults who desire to be baptized in the church today, this still holds true. Come to faith first (repent; turn back to God), then be baptized to mark the conversion and to be cleansed of all sin. An infant certainly cannot deduce that Jesus is Savior and Lord, or believe in him. Yet for infants and children, a public statement of faith is not a requirement for baptism. So instead, parent/s, sponsor/s, and the church speak on behalf of the infant regarding faith. If infant baptism is nothing more than something we (parent/s, sponsor/s, and the church) do one day for the sake of family tradition or because we just think it's the "right thing to do" and then forget about it - it loses significance and is a hollow ceremony. Baptism is not an end to itself. It is a starting point. It is the planting of the seed of faith, which will be nurtured through the proclamation of the Gospel over the days, months, and years to come by parent/s, sponsor/s, and the church.

Q: Is there something the church does, then, to "mark" the event when baptized children do come to faith in Jesus Christ?

Yes - confirmation. As baptized infants grow, faith grows through the hearing of God's Word. When they mature spiritually to the point of making a public affirmation of the Christian faith (saying "yes" to God!) - typically after a three-year confirmation teaching ministry for junior high students - they confirm their faith.

Q: What should I do if I'm an adult and have never been baptized? Is it too late?

Absolutely not. Lutheran Christians baptize infants, children, youth, and adults regardless of age, gender, race or ethnic background. Jesus tells a story (see Luke 15:11-32) of a father whose son runs away from the family home. After a time away, this son realizes how lost he now is without his father, and decides to return home and beg to become a slave in his father's house. But once the father sees his son, he immediately celebrates and welcomes him back into the family with open arms! So it is with our Heavenly Father - God - and his love for all those who have run away from him.

Q: If I was baptized as a child, then left the church, and now have experienced a conversion to faith in Jesus Christ, can I get re-baptized?

The Bible tells many stories of conversion to the Christian faith, but no one story of rebaptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you have already been baptized, a second baptism will not change God's love for you. You can, however, participate in a "recognition of baptism" service if desired.

Q: Does baptism serve as an "insurance policy" for salvation?

God saves us for new and eternal life through the waters of baptism only when that water is connected with God's word, and more specifically God's word that proclaims the resurrection of our Lord (1 Peter 3:21, Romans 6:4). It's not the water by itself that saves us, then, but water together with the promise of God's saving grace. We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8). We can have assurance of salvation when God's promises proclaimed at baptism are claimed and confirmed.

Q: If I was baptized in another denomination, should I get baptized now as a Lutheran?

No. There is no such thing as a Lutheran baptism, or a Catholic baptism, or a nondenominational baptism, etc. Christian baptism that happens with the words "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" is the same, regardless of where it takes place. Provided you were baptized in the triune name of God, you do not need to be baptized in a Lutheran church to become a part of this Christian community.

Q: Why do some churches "dunk" the people who get baptized, and other churches don't?

You might be surprised - the answer is a historical and climate-based one, not biblical. When the church originated in the warm climates of the Middle East, immersion baptism was the preferred means. When Christianity expanded into parts of Europe, immersion ("dunking") became a major problem in the winter! Consequently, the practice of "sprinkling" water emerged. Both practices are acceptable for us as Lutheran Christians.

Q: Who can baptize?

For the sake of order in the church, ordained pastors who are called to the public ministry of Word and sacraments preside at a baptism. In extraordinary circumstances or in the case of an emergency, any Christian person can baptize someone with any kind of water in any kind of setting "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Q: When can I get baptized?

Baptism is a public event for the whole family of God to celebrate, and all of our brothers and sisters in Christ (the whole church) should be welcome to participate. At St. Peter, we schedule baptisms around the family's preference and the availability of the church during worship. If a family prefers a smaller worshipping body, we encourage them to look at having the baptism at our Saturday evening worship service.

Q: What do I need to do to sign up for a baptism?

Please contact the church office at 608-326-6411 or stpeterpdc@hotmail.com to schedule a Baptism Preparation meeting with the pastoral team and to take the first steps in scheduling a baptism.