

A Common Understanding of Baptism

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In the Sacrament of Baptism, God draws people to Himself through His action in Our Lord Jesus Christ. They share in Christ's suffering and glorification and so participate in that baptism of Christ which was accomplished on behalf of all in His death and burial and was made available to all when, risen and ascended, He poured out His gift of the Holy Spirit. God's grace is thus made manifest and available to His people.

Baptism, whether of infants or adults, is an expression of faith: we are washed by water and the Word, die to sin and are reborn through the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit enables us to address the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ *as* our Father and to acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* Lord. We are called and committed to live a new life before God, in faith and hope and love.

In Baptism, by God's grace we become children of God by adoption, members of one family of the Father of all, sharers in the divine life, and heirs to the kingdom living in the hope of the resurrection. Configured to Christ, dead, buried and risen, we die to sin and are made alive with Him to God. United by the Spirit in love, service, suffering and joy, we are incorporated into His Body, which is the Church, where faith is nurtured and deepened and we are enabled to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit to the glory of God.

In Baptism we are initiated into Christ's life and mission in the world and become the living proclamation of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. This Christian life, begun in Baptism, is furthered in confirmation, and is nourished and drawn towards fullness in the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

All Christians are baptised into the one Christ and share in the life of the Holy Trinity; their Baptism unites them with Him and with one another. Thus Baptism is entry into the one church of Christ which is the great sign of the unity of mankind.

One in Christ, the community of the baptised is sent into the world to bear witness to Christ's redeeming work. The one Baptism which Christians share looks to its fulfilment in the one visible Church in which all will share the same faith, the same ministry and the same sacraments.

Administration of Baptism

Baptism is administered by washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such a washing may be by immersion, or pouring or a sprinkling in which the water is seen to flow on the candidate. Baptism so administered may never be repeated.

In normal circumstances Baptism is administered by an ordained minister (in the Roman Catholic Church by a Bishop, Priest or Deacon, in the Uniting Church by a Minister of the Word). The intention of the minister, expressed in the liturgical acts, is to fulfil Christ's commission: "make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you". The minister should use an order of service which meets the official requirements of the respective church.

Baptism is to be administered to those who confess the Christian faith, and, when there is a founded hope for their Christian upbringing, to infants presented for Baptism. Normally Baptism should be in the presence of a congregation of God's people who welcome those baptised and take responsibility for their instruction and nourishment in the faith. Such responsibility involves nourishing the baptised within the family of the Church, equipping them for witness and service in the community, and preparing them for confirmation.

The following elements should also find their place within the order of service for Baptism:

- a. the reading of a passage of scripture related to Baptism;
- b. the preaching of the Word, expounding the significance of the sacrament;
- c. the acknowledgment of God's initiative in salvation, of His continuing faithfulness, and of our total dependence on His grace;
- d. the declaration of the forgiveness of sins;
- e. the invocation of the Holy Spirit;
- f. the renunciation of evil;
- g. profession of faith in Christ by the candidate, or by the parents or sponsors;
- h. profession of faith by the congregation;
- i. the promise (in the case of infants) by parents or sponsors to instruct the child in the truths and duties of the Christian faith, and to bring him up to love and obey the Lord within the family of the Church;
- j. prayer for the person baptised;
- k. the affirmation that the person baptised now belongs to the Holy Catholic Church, is incorporated into the Body of Christ, so becoming a witness to the Gospel;
1. the reminder to all that Baptism into the people of God leads to a life in the Spirit, nurtured in worship and marked by growth in holiness and obedience