

Baptism... some questions



Is baptism essential to get to heaven?

No. Being accepted by God now and forever in heaven depends not on what we have done or by being baptized. Rather the right to heaven comes as a gift when we rely on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Why then baptize?

Because Jesus tells us to do so. As well baptism is a visible reminder that we belong to Jesus and his people regardless of how we feel. And that's an encouragement when our faith is not strong.

What is "christening"?

The word "christen" is not found in the Bible. It comes from the false idea that baptism automatically makes child a Christian whatever the spiritual commitment of the parents.

Do we need godparents?

The short answer is: no. As a parent or parents you take both the vows on behalf of your child and the role of guiding them in the future.

Why has the church changed its approach?

The Presbyterian church has sought to recover the Bible's teaching on baptism as it was sometimes seen in the past as an occasion that required little spiritual commitment.

What if we don't feel ready?

If this is the case, we would encourage you to keep on your spiritual journey. Come to worship; read the Bible; take an introductory course on getting to know God. We are here to help you to know God and his only Son Jesus.

In the meantime you might consider having a service of thanksgiving for your child. If you want to learn more about this option, please speak to our pastor.

What next?

Our desire is that you as parents or a parent gain the true blessing of baptism—making vows before God that they are able and intend to keep. So before the elders (church leaders) approve a baptism they need to be satisfied that:

At least one **believing** parent is committed to regularly worshipping with their local church, and ensuring that their child receives Christian training at home and church

Parents who are new to church are asked to take part in a course of about **six weeks** that helps them understand the Christian faith. An elder may also have some involvement in this process. Over a period of **around six months** attendance at Sunday worship, as parents grow in their faith, and as the church gets to know them, then the baptism is able to be considered by the elders.

No-one of course can guarantee that they get to church every week. We understand this, especially with young children, but that is our aim. This may mean that priorities are rearranged in order to fulfill the vows required to be made. Parents are naturally expected to have been baptized themselves.

We want to help you come to experience the joy of knowing God and following Jesus for yourself. We wish to help you on the journey to faith, as we know that it is the most important step you can ever take in your lives and in the life of your child.

A request: we do ask that photography and video filming not occur during a baptism as they can be very distracting. However, you are welcome have an reenactment afterwards in the chapel.

To follow up your enquiry please contact either:

The church office: Tel (08) 8723 9028

Email: mountpc@bigpond.net.au

Pastor: Rev Gary Ware: Tel (08) 8725 0228

**MOUNT GAMBIER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Can we have our child baptized?



Thank you for your enquiry about baptism for your child. We appreciate your concern for his/her spiritual wellbeing. Please read this leaflet thoughtfully.

Can we have our child baptized?

Baptism is a sacrament or a church ceremony commanded by Jesus Christ. He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." (Gospel of Matthew chapter 28 verses 19,20) Nearly all Christian churches agree on the necessity of baptism, but the reason the Presbyterian Church baptizes children as well as adults begins with the promise God made to his people Israel in the time before Jesus came.

Baptism and children

Back then, God included children as part of his people. As a sign of this he gave male circumcision to the Israelites to show that they belonged to his family and that he would bless them as they trusted and obeyed him. Just as children were included then, so Jesus Christ includes them in his church now. Instead



of circumcision, Jesus gave the sign of baptism to show that a person belongs to him and his church. It's a picture of God's washing away our record of wrong and of new life. Today God's promises aren't tied to one ethnic group, but for are all who follow Jesus and their children. But what does it mean to follow Jesus?

Baptism and believing

Following Jesus begins with God. This world belongs to God - he made it and everyone in it.

God has declared his Son Jesus to be the ruler or Lord of this world - and that includes all people. However each one of us has rebelled against our Creator and gone our own way. This results in us being separated from God - we can do nothing ourselves to end that gulf of separation. But God has done something. Out of his great love for us, God sent Jesus into the world to take the punishment due to rebels. That is why Jesus died on the cross. He died so that we could be forgiven, be made friends with God and treated just as if we had never rebelled.



A Christian is a person who:

- owns up to their rebellion and disobedience to God;
- believes that Jesus is God's Son who died for rebels, taking their punishment; and
- relies upon Jesus to forgive them and submits to him as ruler of their life.

When we turn back to Jesus, we are welcomed into God's family and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and eternal life. We will then want to treasure Jesus and honour God as supreme in every part of our life.

Baptism and parents

Now while God makes these promises to Christian parents and their children, babies can't claim the promises for themselves. Rather their parents must act for them. For this to happen, one or both parents need to be following Jesus as part of God's family, the church. Otherwise baptism loses its meaning. Parents bringing their children for baptism declare they are followers of Jesus by answering several questions.

These questions involve making vows or binding promises with God and the church as witnesses:

1. Do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
2. Do you trust in the righteousness* of Christ alone for your salvation?
3. Do you promise to pray for *him*, set a godly example in your actions that by God's grace *he* may be a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ all his days?
4. As part of your godly example, do you promise to be faithful in meeting with God's people in public worship?

(*righteousness means Jesus' perfect life, death and rising from the dead by which God accepts us as his friends.)

So baptism is about promises—God's promise to bless you and your child. And your promise to God to live as responsible members of his family and to bring up your child to trust and obey him and his Son Jesus.

Baptism and the church

At a baptism the church members make this promise:

This sacrament lays special responsibilities upon you, the people of God. Will you be faithful to your calling as members of Christ's Church, so that by God's grace, this child may grow up in the knowledge and love of Christ?

Thus there is an expectation upon the church that they will have a continuing responsibility for your child, by providing love, friendship and Christian teaching to you as a family.