



valley presbyterian
CHURCH



*For Your
Baptism*

The Sacrament of Baptism at Valley Presbyterian Church

We are pleased to offer you this booklet as a guide for understanding the sacrament of Christian baptism. Whether you are a parent presenting an infant or a mature person about to be baptized upon your own profession of faith, we believe it is important that you understand as much as possible about the meaning of the sacrament so you can respond with integrity to the obligations you are assuming.

One of the clergy will meet with you in advance of the service to talk about the meaning of baptism and to explain the mechanics of the service itself. We urge you to invite as many family members as you wish to the service; a space will be reserved for them. If it is your child who is to be baptized, you may keep the child with you following the sacrament or take the child to the nursery for the remainder of the hour. We ask that no flash pictures be taken during the actual service. The pastor will be happy to meet with you after the service for posed pictures.

Baptism

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. Jesus the risen Lord assured his followers of his continuing presence and power



and commissioned them to go throughout the world teaching and baptizing others in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. 'My disciples were empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit to undertake a life of service and to be an inclusive worshipping community, sharing life in which love, justice, and mercy abounded.'

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.

In Baptism, the Holy Spirit binds the Church in covenant to its Creator and Lord. The water of Baptism symbolizes the waters of Creation, of the Flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the water of Baptism links us to the goodness of God's creation and to the grace of God's covenants with Noah and Israel. Prophets of Israel, amidst the failure of their own generation to honor God's covenant, called for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24) They envisioned a fresh expression of God's grace and of creation's goodness—a new covenant accompanied by the sprinkling of cleansing water. In his ministry, Jesus offered the gift of living water. So, Baptism is the sign and seal of God's grace and covenant in Christ.

As circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with Israel, so Baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with the Church. As an identifying mark, Baptism signifies

- a. the faithfulness of God,
- b. the washing away of sin,
- c. rebirth,
- d. putting on the fresh garment of Christ,
- e. being sealed by God's Spirit,
- f. adoption into the covenant family of the Church,
- g. resurrection and illumination in Christ.

God's faithfulness signified in Baptism is constant and sure, even when human faithfulness to God is not. Baptism is received only once. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to the moment when it is administered, for Baptism signifies the beginning of life in Christ, not its completion. God's grace works steadily, calling to repentance and newness of life. God's faithfulness needs no renewal. Human faithfulness to God needs repeated renewal. Baptism calls for decision at every subsequent stage of life's way, both for those whose Baptism attends their profession of faith and for those who are nurtured from childhood within the family of faith.

- a. Both believers and their children are included in God's covenant love. Children of believers are to be baptized without undue delay, but without undue haste. Baptism, whether administered to those who profess their faith or to those presented for Baptism as children, is one and the same Sacrament.
- b. The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.
- c. The Baptism of those who enter the covenant upon their own profession of faith witnesses to the truth that God's gift of grace calls for fulfillment in a response of faithfulness.

Baptism is received only once. There are many times in worship, however, when believers acknowledge the grace of God continually at work. As they participate in the celebration of another's Baptism, as they experience the sustaining nurture of the Lord's Supper, and as they reaffirm the commitments made at Baptism, they confess their ongoing need of God's grace and pledge anew their obedience to God's covenant in Christ.

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. Those presenting children for Baptism shall promise to provide nurture and guidance within the community of faith until the child is ready to make a personal profession of faith and assume the responsibility of active church membership. The session may also consider a request for the baptism of a child from a Christian parent who is an active member of another congregation. If the session approves such a request, it shall consult with the governing body of the other congregation and shall notify them when the Sacrament has been administered.



Questions to the Parents

Friends, in presenting your child for baptism, you announce your faith in Jesus Christ, and show that you want your child to study him, know him, love him, and serve him as a chosen disciple.

Show your purpose by answering these questions:

Who is your Lord and Savior?

JESUS CHRIST IS MY LORD AND SAVIOR.

Do you trust in him?

I DO.

Do you intend your child to be his disciple, to obey his word and show his love?

I DO.

Question to the Congregation

Elder, speaking to the congregation:

Our Lord Jesus Christ ordered us to teach those who are baptized. Do you, the people of the church, promise to tell this child the good news of the gospel, to help her (him) know all that Christ commands, and by your fellowship to strengthen her (his) family ties with the household of God?

WE DO.

The minister shall pray for a blessing to attend this ordinance after which, calling the child by his or her full name, the minister shall say:

(Name) -, child of the covenant, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

While saying these words, the minister shall baptize the child with water alone, without adding any other ceremony.

Following baptism the minister may then charge all present to be faithful in their response to God through the Sacrament just administered. The minister shall declare that the child is a member of the household of faith and that both parents and congregation are faithfully to provide spiritual nurture for the child in the belief and confidence that God will bring the child to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The service is to be concluded with an appropriate prayer for the child and for all the children and families of the congregation.

At the time of baptism, the child shall be recorded as a baptized member of the church, and shall be numbered among those for whom the session has responsibility. The session shall offer continuing counsel, encouragement, and aid to the families under its care, nurturing their children in the Christian faith and, at the appropriate time, receiving them as active church members. Furthermore, the session shall counsel the families under its care to prepare their baptized children for participation in the Lord's Supper. It shall advise families that baptized children who do participate in the Sacrament should do so with an understanding of the significance of the invitation to the Lord's Table and of their response in faith.

One Baptismal Rite

Only one order for baptism is provided. Baptism is the same sacrament whether the person being baptized is an infant, child, youth, or adult. When baptizing children, however, the parents are asked to respond to a question asking for their commitment to the nurture of the child in a Christian home.



Although baptism is personal, it is also a communal sacrament, since baptism incorporates one into the community of faith. For this reason, baptism ordinarily is celebrated in the midst of the worshiping congregation rather than in a home or in a private ceremony in the church building.

The congregation should have an opportunity to be part of the celebration and to welcome the new members of the body of Christ.

Moreover, except for extraordinary circumstances, baptism takes place in the congregation where it is expected the person being baptized will be nurtured.

Baptismal Water

The original baptismal font at Valley Presbyterian Church is now a water feature located on the Plaza, north of the Sanctuary. Water from the font is used for every baptism at VPC, whether in the Sanctuary or Chapel.

Water is the primary and essential symbol in baptism. In early civilizations, water was regarded as one of the four basic elements in the universe, and it is still a powerful symbol for us today. Water is basic to life. Before each of us was born it protected us in our mother's womb. We cleanse our bodies with it. It brings cooling refreshment. It sustains life on our planet. Without water we would die. We are reminded of the promise of Jesus in John 4:13,14: "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a well of water welling up to eternal life."

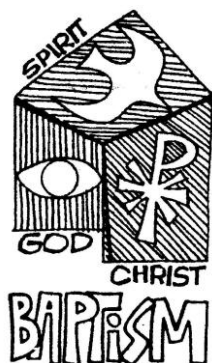
Baptism is a sign of initiation into the body of Christ and therefore administered only once in a person's lifetime. The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, is the sacrament of "continuation," and is administered often as a reminder of God's grace toward his people in all circumstances.

Godparents and Sponsors

In an earlier age when life expectancy was quite short, parents chose "godparents" for their baptized children. Godparents were expected to rear their godchildren in the event of the death of the real parents. As life spans have grown the need for godparents has all but vanished. However, Presbyterians call upon the congregation to act as sponsors of those being baptized, both children and adults, in the sense that the congregation pledges to support them with Christian nurture through worship, education, fellowship, and caring.

Name of the Candidate

The name of the candidate for baptism is announced as part of the presentation. The use of a person's name marks adoption into the family of God. One's name is an extension of one's identity, a sign of one's uniqueness as a human being.



Baptizing in the Name of the Triune God

Christian baptism is "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" in fulfillment of the command of the risen Christ (Matthew 28:19). Grounded in Scripture, this formula has been used throughout Christian history in the initiation of Christians into the community of faith. All branches of the church regard this formula and the use of water as the essentials of a valid baptism. These words thereby mark "the one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5) that unites all Christians in the one holy catholic (universal) and apostolic church.

Nurturing of Children in the Christian Home

Each Christian family will want to establish their own practice for training their children. The following suggestions are meant to help you think about ways you will help your child "to be his disciple, to obey his word and show his love."

- 1 . Bring family prayer to the child's cradle.

Though the child may not understand your words or actions, he/she will soon learn that something important is happening, and will look forward to your prayers at the cradle. Your own intentions will be strengthened and expanded as you pray together for your child and for one another as parents.

2. Teach your child to pray.

A simple bedtime prayer can be the start of a lifelong habit of prayer for your child. One favorite is:

Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
Watch me through the starry night; Wake me up in the morning bright.

A simple grace before meals.

God is great; God is good; Let us thank him for our food.

3. Share family devotions at the breakfast or dinner table.

Book stores stock a variety of Christian story books for all ages of children and youth. As your children grow, take a few minutes at the table to read a story, discuss what it means at the child's level, and conclude with a brief prayer.

4. Be alert to "serendipity" moments.

A serendipity is a moment of surprise, an unexpected opportunity. Respond to your child's questions with answers at his/her level. If you don't know the answer, say so and then go get the answer from your pastor or Christian friend.

5. Celebrate your child's "Baptism Birthday."

As the child grows older, take out the baptismal certificate and show it. Tell your child about the ceremony and how you felt about it. If other members of the family were there, talk about what a wonderful time you had that day, celebrating the child's baptism. Let them know how special it was to you, and invite them to ask questions about baptism.



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May 2025