

Baptism

Frequently Ask Questions
By Danny Parmelee

What is Baptism?

In the New Testament the Greek word baptizo is used to describe the practice of people who were turning their life around and committing it to God. The first group of people were being baptized by “John the Baptist” (Matthew 3) in anticipation of Jesus Christ, and after that Jesus (Matthew 3:13-16), his disciples, and the early church continued this practice (Acts 8:36). And it was *more than just a practice*; it was an ordinance (a command) by Jesus Christ himself.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 obey everything I have commanded you”.

How was Baptism performed?

The Greek word baptizo means “to plunge, dip, immerse” something into water. Before the word was used in direct association to the practice of baptism, ancient Greeks used it to describe a ship being totally sunk. With this understanding of the Greek, the most obvious way baptism was performed was by full immersion. That is that a person would be completely immersed under water and come up again. When Jesus was baptized it says that he “came up out of the water.” There is not a manual on how to baptize, but in all instances in the bible it suggests that people were completely immersed.

Does someone need to be baptized by water to be “saved” or go to heaven?

The quick answer is No. The prime example would be the person who is hanging on the cross next to Jesus. The man confesses his sin and turns his life to Christ just moments before his death. Jesus says to him “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43) Now this man did not get off the cross and get baptized.

With that said, baptism is an outward symbol of something that has already inwardly taken place. Baptism doesn’t save someone from their sin; it is an act of profession that the salvation has already occurred.

What is the symbolism behind Baptism?

One of the major symbolisms of baptism is that of dying and rising with Christ. In other words, when a person goes under the water it symbolizes their old life being buried...just as Christ’s body was buried. Then when a person comes out of the water it symbolizes their new life in Christ because Christ was raised from the dead...and they also look forward to their resurrection with Christ. This symbolism is talked about by Paul in his letter to the Romans:

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life...” (Romans 6:3ff)

Another symbolism of baptism is that of being washed. When we commit our lives to Christ and accept his forgiveness we are forgiven of our sins. Many times this is expressed as being washed clean. (1 Corinthians 6:11, Ephesians 5:26)

Why do some churches baptize infants?

The Roman Catholic tradition holds to the idea that water baptism actually saves a person or washes away sin as a means of grace. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the sacraments (like baptism and the Lord's Supper) actually cause grace to happen. So, years after the early church Roman Catholics started baptizing babies in fear that if the babies weren't baptized and died, they would go to hell. Now certain denominations don't hold that same theology that is "saves" babies (like Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodist), but some have carried on Roman Catholic tradition of infant baptism. Luther, Wesley, Calvin, and other leaders of the Reformation would refuse to believe that apart from faith, one could be saved.

Does epikos do baby or child dedications?

Absolutely! While we don't practice infant baptism, we think that a great way to celebrate the birth of a child is through a baby dedication. This also serves as the parent's commitment to do what they can to raise the child in the ways of the Lord. Plus, it's a way for the epikos church family to stand behind the parents and new little one/s. Sometimes parents also choose to have "sponsors," who may take an extra role to support the child and parents. At a dedication service the child, parents, and sponsor's usually come up to the front of the church (sometimes with other families) and a pastor will say a few words and pray a blessing on the child. This much like what Jesus did as he laid hands and prayed for the children in Matthew 19:13 "Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them...Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Some parents choose to do this when the child is very young and others wait until the children are older. It's really whatever you are comfortable with.

When should someone be baptized?

In all the instances in the Bible, Christians got baptized *after* they had put their faith in Jesus Christ. For some, like the Ethiopian eunuch, this took place immediately after their faith commitment. When a person makes a sincere commitment, there isn't a "waiting period" or time that they need to prove they really are following Christ. So our take is, after you make a faith commitment, take the step of showing it publicly through baptism. If you committed your life to Christ awhile ago and just have never proclaimed it publicly through baptism, it's never too late!!!

Why should I be baptized?

Jesus was baptized

Jesus commanded to be baptized

The disciples and early followers were baptized

It is a public profession of your faith

You get the support and accountability of the Christian community

It can be a momentous and special time in your life

Who has the authority to baptize?

In the New Testament there wasn't necessarily official titles, degrees, or certifications for people performing baptisms. So really any believer has the authority to baptize another person. Most often a baptism is performed by the pastor, or by someone who had a spiritual influence in the person's life. We always keep in mind that the important part of the baptism is what Jesus has accomplished in our life. I think it is important to do baptism in the context of community whenever possible, which usually is through the local church. It doesn't make much sense to hold some sort of "private baptism" since the point of it is public declaration of what Christ has done in your life.

If I was baptized as an infant should I be baptized by immersion?

After looking at all the information above and biblical precedence, I personally think that a person should be baptized by immersion after they make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ. Since that would be impossible to do as a baby the answer is **Yes**.

Do I have to be baptized as a believer to be a covenant member of Epikos?

Yes. It is part of our constitution and bylaws that all those wanting to be covenant members must be baptized as believers. All people are welcomed to participate as much as they want in Epikos, but to have covenant membership status you must meet that qualification.

So why am I still hesitant to get baptized?

Only you can answer that question...but what I've found that most hesitations have to do with being embarrassed. And it's true, baptism is an awkward humbling experience. So I challenge people to ask, "what is really holding me back from taking this faith step?" If you have more questions, let's talk about it!

Where does epikos do their baptism services & what is the process?

Most of the time we do our baptism services in the summer, somewhere on the shores of Lake Michigan. We schedule 2-3 services every summer but are willing to schedule as many as we need to in order to celebrate this important step of faith. Usually there are about 5-10 people who get baptized at every service. Each person who is interested in baptism will go through this FAQ with a pastor or church leader. If you fully understand what baptism is and is not, then you added to the schedule of one of the services. You are then required to write a short testimony that you will share at the service.

Writing a Short Testimony for Epikos baptism Service.

Please write down what you are going to share at the baptism service. Since others will be sharing too, we don't need you to share every detail of your life. You basically want to share with people who you were before Christ was in your life and who you are now. Every person's story is different and God works in different ways in people. We're so excited for this step of faith you are taking. Important things to include or to consider.

1. Who you were or what you were like Before Christ (Behaviors, Attitudes, Feelings)
2. When did you start to realize your need for Jesus?
3. When did you commit your life to Christ or How did this happen? (through a friend, at church service, by yourself,) For some people they know the exact day and time. For others it has been a process but there may still be a time period explained.
4. What are you like now (Behaviors, Attitudes, Feelings)

Example:

My name is Danny Parmelee, I had the privilege of growing up in a loving family in the small town of Waupaca, WI. My parents took me to church and worked hard to raise me as a "good boy." By the time I was in high school though, I strayed from their guidance and looked for fulfillment in partying, drinking, drugs, relationships, success ... anything but God. As I did many of these things I was left with such an empty feeling. When I was in college I started going to a small group bible study. Even though I was doing that, I was still living an empty life because I was still trying to fill it with those other things. On Dec 5th 1997, (which was my birthday) I went out partying. I came home that night feeling so empty again and understood that the only real fulfillment would come through a relationship with God through Jesus. That night I committed my life to Christ. He has filled me with so much joy, peace, and freedom. Everyday I desire to grow more in my relationship with God.