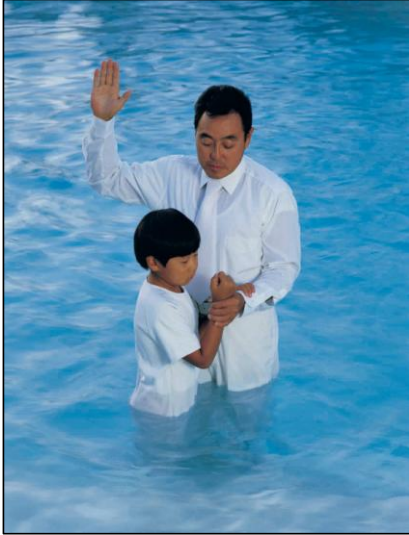


Baptism

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Baptism is a traditional ordinance and ceremony in many Christian religions with various symbols and meanings associated with it. Baptism can be performed in rivers, pools, fonts, and even bath tubs. Some churches will baptize small children and others will only baptize adults.

The Commission and Blessings of Baptism

Before his ascension into heaven Jesus told his apostles to teach and baptize all nations (Matthew 29:19-20). Because baptism is a requirement for membership in the Church of Jesus Christ, this commission is as strong and applicable today as it was the day the Lord commanded it.

When we exercise faith in Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and are baptized, we are forgiven of our sins through the Atonement of Christ and can receive the Holy Ghost. This process is reminiscent of what Paul was told by Ananias following his dramatic conversion: “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16).

Baptism is a gateway through which blessings may flow when an individual exercises his or her moral agency (free will) to be baptized. It is after baptism that we are able to receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost (Moses 6:52).

Baptism shows obedience and a willingness to follow Christ. When Jesus Christ was baptized he did so “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Jesus was baptized not because he was in need of forgiveness from his sins, but because he wanted to set the example for everyone to follow. The narrow path that Jesus encourages us to follow will lead us to eternal life in the celestial kingdom—which path is made possible through the ordinance of baptism.

Baptism and the Misconception of Original Sin

Original sin is a doctrine which assigns the sin of Adam upon every person born into mortality, and that baptism washes away this original sin. It is difficult to accept that a loving and just Father in Heaven would punish any of his children for the sin of another human being. The fall of Adam created consequences for us all, but not a sin for which we must be forgiven through baptism. The Second Article of Faith (AOF) states: “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (AOF 1:2).

Baptism is an Essential Ordinance

Jesus told Nicodemus “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Jesus reinforced this doctrine while visiting the people of the Americas, but in a blunter and urgent tone: “Whoso believeth in me, and is baptized ... shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned” (3 Nephi 11:33–34).

The Method of Baptism

The Bible suggests that baptism was performed by an individual being completely submerged into the water. Not only does this suggest the individual being older in age, but it is symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ—being buried into the water to symbolize death, and then being brought back out of the water to symbolize the resurrection. Put another way, it is the death of the old person and the resurrection of a born again person in Jesus Christ (see Romans 6:3-5 and D&C 20:73-74). When compared to a baptism by the sprinkling of water on one’s head, baptism by immersion provides a fully scriptural and symbolically rich method of being baptized.

Baptismal Covenants with the Lord

One of the most important aspects of baptism is the covenants we make with the Lord. Covenants are two-way promises, meaning we promise to do certain things, and in return the Lord promises to do certain things. The covenants we make at baptism include: “[to] come into the fold of God; bear one another’s burdens; stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all places; and serve God and keep his commandments.” When we are baptized and keep the covenants of baptism, the Lord promises to: “forgive our sins; pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon us; give us daily guidance and the help of the Holy Ghost; let us come forth in the First Resurrection; and give us eternal life” (Gospel Principles, 133-134).

The baptismal covenant is renewed each Sunday with the partaking of the Sacrament (bread and water). These covenants are mentioned in the sacrament prayer. See the Sword Series™ paper on the sacrament.

Appropriate Age for Baptism

The scriptures are very clear that we are to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Consider the words of Peter: “... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). The spiritual process that leads to baptism begins with faith; faith then leads to repentance, and then baptism follows. The question is at what age can this process really be meaningful? Can an infant have faith or repent? Most assuredly the answer is no. So what is that age when accountability and understanding takes place?

There are varying opinions among the many sects of Christianity today on what the “age of accountability” is. One may argue that this differs from child to child, depending on their intelligence and maturity. To simplify the process, and since the Bible does not suggest a specific age, the Lord revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith that the age of accountability is eight years old, regardless of intelligence or maturity (D&C 68:25, 27).

Baptism is Performed by Those in Authority

Baptism can only be performed under the authority and direction of a bishop by those who hold the office of priest

in the Aaronic Priesthood or those holding the Melchizedek Priesthood. Having two priesthood witnesses present, baptisms are performed by completely immersing the candidate into the water (all parts of the body including hair), and then bringing them out of the water (symbolizing death and resurrection).

Conclusion

The Biblical account of Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:13-17) provides the perfect example for all Christians. The Savior chose to be baptized to “fulfill all righteousness;” sought out the individual who held the authority to baptize (John the Baptist); and was submerged completely in the water by John the Baptist to complete the baptism. What a wonderful gift given to us by our Heavenly Father.

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