

St Stephen's Anglican Church, Warrandyte

Baptism Preparation

(*Vicar and author, Mark Hanson*)

Part One	Four reasons why we baptise
Part Two	How Baptism works / what happens in Baptism
Part Three	Role and responsibility of all the people involved in a service of Baptism
Notes	some observations about Validity, Symbolism and 'Christening'

Part One - Why do we baptise? - Four reasons

- because of who Jesus is
- because of what Jesus has done
- because we're called to obedience
- because we realise that we stand in need

a. **Because of who Jesus is: Baptism says: 'I stand with Jesus and want my child to stand with Jesus also'. But, what is so special about Jesus Christ that we should want to stand with Him?**

Jesus' authority - to teach

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at Jesus' teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. (*Mark 1:21-22*)

Jesus' authority - over disease

Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever . . . So, Jesus went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. (*Mark 1:29-32*)

Jesus' authority - to forgive sin

Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk"? But I want you to know that the Son of Man

has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So, he said to the man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’ (*Mark 2:1-1*)

Jesus’ authority - over nature

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?’ Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’ (*Mark 4:35-41*)

Jesus’ authority - over death

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. ‘Your daughter is dead,’ they said. ‘Why bother the teacher anymore?’ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe.’ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, ‘Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.’ But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother, and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha koum!’ (which means ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. (*Mark 5:35-42*)

So, who is Jesus? - The Son of God, and with authority!

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, baptising 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ (*Matthew 28:18-19*)

b. Because of what Jesus has done: Baptism says: ‘I believe that Jesus died and rose again’. Why is Jesus’ death and resurrection so central to faith?

Jesus really died

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’). When some of those standing near heard this, they said, ‘Listen, he’s calling Elijah.’ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered

it to Jesus to drink. 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down,' he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. (*Mark 15:33-37*)

Why did Jesus die?

Brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (*1 Corinthians 15:1-8*)

Jesus really rose to resurrected life

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you.' So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.' (*Matthew 28:1-10*)

Why did Jesus rise? - Jesus' victory over death brings us sure and certain hope

Having been buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised Jesus from the dead. (*Colossians 2:12*)

c. Because we're called to obedience: Baptism says; 'I'm willing to respond to Jesus . . .

like the Ethiopian official who was willing to learn from Philip

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' So Philip started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means 'queen of the Ethiopians'). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.' Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand

what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of Scripture (*Isaiah 53:7-8*) the eunuch was reading:

‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.’

The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptised?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. (*Acts 8:26-38*)

like the Centurian, Cornelius of Joppa, and his whole household who were willing to learn from Peter

‘We are witnesses of everything Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ‘Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptised with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’ So, Peter ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. (*Acts 10:39-48*)

like the fabric merchant, Lydia of Thyatira, and her whole household who were willing to learn from Paul

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us. (*Acts 16:13-15*)

like the men of Ephesus, who were obedient to Paul’s teaching about the Holy Spirit

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is

a Holy Spirit.’ So, Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied. Paul said, ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’

On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all. (*Act 19:1-7*)

People respond to Jesus; in two ways - enemy or ally / rejection or allegiance

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptised. (*Acts 18:5-8*)

Baptism says: ‘I’m willing to obey Jesus when he told us to undergo baptism’

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 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, baptising 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ (*Matthew 28:16-20*)

d. Because I now realise that I stand in need: Baptism says: ‘I repent of my sin and I want my child to know how to practise repentance and Jesus’ cleansing and forgiveness’.

Sin = putting other things before God / rebelling against God’s rightful position
Repentance = turning away from sin and toward God so completely that our life is changed

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has

mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.
(Romans 6:4)

Part Two - What happens in Baptism?

a. Something changes for the person who is baptised

As an ordinance from Christ (i.e. see Jesus' command in Matt 28:18-20), baptism is a mechanism given to us by God, by which God's blessings are grafted into a person of faith. The Anglican Church calls such a mechanism a 'sacrament' (see Articles of Religion - art.25).

The Anglican church says this about how Baptism works:

Baptism with water signifies: the cleansing from sin that Jesus' sacrificial death makes possible, and: the rising to new life that God gives through his Holy Spirit. In baptism the promises of God are visibly signed and sealed for us. We are joined to Christ and made members of his body, the Church universal. (APBA p.51)

and also,

. . . they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work in visibly in us and doth not only quicken but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him . . . (see Articles of Religion - art.25)

If a promise is 'signed and sealed', then it must be transferred, lodged and effectual. In other words, Christians believe that Baptism is a means of conveying God's blessings into the believer. Those blessings include eternal salvation and present-day regeneration to become a new person with a new heart aligned to God's goodness.

This is God's promise of old:

I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness . . . a new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you . . . and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my ways. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

b. The ceremony of Baptism is a visual and audible lesson for everyone who attends

Our parish brochure says the following about what happens in Baptism:

Baptism is the rite of inclusion into the life of the church, which is the gathered people of God . . . Baptism is the highest and most important ceremony of the church. It is freely available to anyone who asks for it, but a wholehearted and genuine engagement with the occasion needs careful preparation.

c. Baptism is a rite of initiation through which a baptised person is included into the church

Baptism looks like a personal ceremony, much like a wedding - so it's private and personal, right? Well, no, not really. It's communal and corporate

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body - whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part but of many (*1 Corinthians 12:13*)

in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (*Galatians 3:27*)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body. And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (*Hebrew 10:24-25*)

d. Baptism Order of Service

For more detail about the exact wording of the promises and commitments made in baptism, including 'the Decision' and 'the Creed' and the responses, we now turn to the standard form of service (*see; A Prayer Book for Australia, p.73-79*)

Part Three - Who is involved in any Baptism service?

There are four parties to any baptism:

- the person being baptised
- the person performing the baptism
- the congregation witnessing and supporting the baptism, and
- God.

Each of these parties has an essential role. Without any one of these parties, the Baptism becomes mere empty ritual and will have diminished value and life-changing effect. Let's look at the responsibilities and roles of each of the four parties.

1 The person being baptised

In the biblical texts examined above, some people were baptised who were knowing and assenting believers, but there were also many people baptised from their principals'

households who were under authority and who probably had little choice in the matter. Perhaps the most we can claim for these nameless people is that they assented to the values of the household to which they belonged.

While it is clear that people who make their own free and voluntary assent to faith in Jesus should by all means be baptised, what about those who are baptised without much say in the matter? The 'group baptisms' in the early church make a case that minors who are under the authority, nurture and guidance of their believing parents should also be baptised. This is the general position of the Anglican Church.

In the Anglican baptism service, the person being baptised should make their own declaration of assent, and in the case of infants, their guardian has authority to speak on their behalf. In general terms, it is best that the person being baptised should be knowing and assenting, so adult believer's baptism is preferred. But, as we still hold that baptism is less about our response to God and more about God initiating a deluge of blessing on us, Baptism of infants is acceptable in the Anglican Church.

2 The person performing the Baptism

In 1 Corinthians 16:13-17, the apostle Paul thanked God that his ministry of Baptism at Corinth was restricted to very few, so that the focus of power and praise should remain on Christ - in other words, Paul delegated authority to baptise to his helpers and companions and for himself concentrated upon proclaiming the Word through preaching and discipling ministries. It is clear from the general picture of the New Testament early church that performance of Baptism was not restricted to the elders and apostles, and that immediate Baptism should be made available to any who requested it. Furthermore, Jesus' command in Matt 28:19 is general to the whole church and its membership. In other words, performance of Baptism is not to be restricted to 'ministers' but may be performed by any Christian.

The constitution of the Anglican Church (i.e. the Articles of Religion - art.26) explains that the efficacy of any Sacrement is not dependant upon the standing of the Minister. In other words, any Christian may perform a valid Baptism, even if that person is in some way inadequate.

3 The congregation of witnesses and supporters

Consistent with the teaching of scripture, that a baptised person is enfolded into the body of Christ which is the whole church, we invite the assembled congregation to receive or acknowledge the baptised person with a promise of support.

Baptism is a communal event in its very essence. It's not a private event. The assembled congregation should comprise the regular membership of the local church. After all, they are the ones who will end up teaching, discipling and nurturing a newly baptised person into growing faith.

A request for a private or personalised Baptism is a red flag marker that the very essence of Baptism is not well understood.

The promises made in the Baptism service are also a reminder and teaching to the congregation about the content of their faith; the truths they espouse, the good conduct they promise to perform and the eternal hope they have grasped.

4 God

As Baptism is seen and experienced more in what God does for us rather than as our response to Him, it's axiomatic that Almighty God (i.e. God as Trinity, known and understood by Christians) is invited. The act of baptising invokes the work of the Holy Spirit. The central words of Baptism declare that it is performed in the Name of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Four 'parties' come together into one effectual event

From the claims we make about the realities of Baptism, it becomes clear that agency lies primarily with God, not with the person being baptised.

In other words, Baptism is something that God does for us rather than something that we do for God. Baptism is more about 'making ourselves open for blessing' rather than responding to a blessing previously received. Baptism is more about joining a group rather than making a personal statement.

Note on the Validity of Baptism

The criterion of a **valid** baptism is only twofold; use of water, and; pronouncement that the rite is performed in the Name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Anglican church takes a middle course between two extreme positions of ministry and faith represented by the Roman Catholic and Baptist positions.

The Roman Catholic church teaches that sacraments in themselves convey effectual grace, and that they even work apart from the faith of the people participating in the sacrament. The Roman church also teaches that Baptism is necessary for salvation, and the authority of the church can validly impose effectual Baptism despite the will of the person being baptised. These teachings have two problematic implications. First, people who have not been baptised are considered not part of the 'church universal' and are thus in jeopardy of being rejected from eternal salvation, despite their interior disposition of faith. Second, Baptism performed as a sacramental ministry of the church overrules the faith disposition of the person baptised and conveys all the blessings of saving grace, even if a person is either not responsive to God (for example; a person in a coma, or a recently deceased infant) or is alienated from God. This Roman position places the authority of the church above the response of the individual and denies God his prerogative of election, making Baptism a mechanical act of the Church.

The Baptist denomination has a more constrained view of the prerogatives and authority of the church. The Baptist position rejects a view that sacraments convey grace in themselves and instead emphasises the personal response of faith. The Baptist church teaches that the two ordinances of Jesus Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, must both be received with knowing faith in order to be effectual. This position problematically diminishes the discernment of the Church and elevates individual choice above the intention of God.

The Anglican Church takes a middle position. Anglicans do not attribute any special capacity to the minister who administers the sacrament, or to the church. Also, Anglicans are willing to count members of a household within the envelope of faith of its head.

Note on the Symbolism of Baptism

It's worth noting that Christian Baptism was derived from the first century Jewish conversion ritual of cleansing but was invested progressively with new meaning. John the Baptist appropriated the symbolic Jewish cleansing ritual and re-expressed it as a conversion of the heart, through repentance, and offered the ritual to both Jews and non-Jews alike (which was why he was so hated by the religious authorities). Next, Jesus accepted John's 'baptism of repentance' despite having no need to repent, saying that he did it to 'fulfil all righteousness', thus separating himself from the Old Covenant of the Law and moving into a New Covenant of Faith. Subsequently, Jesus instructed his church to grow by discipling and baptising. Jesus' apostle Paul then gave us the fullest understanding of Baptism; as a vital participation in Jesus' death (i.e. immersed under water) and rising to new life (i.e. emerging up from water). Therefore, the **symbolism** of Baptism is best appreciated by full immersion into water.

A final word . . . about 'Christening'.

Sometimes parents come to the church asking for their child to be 'Christened'. This is an ancient English term which may both encompass the whole baptism service and also refer to a particular part of the service where the baptised person is anointed with oil with the sign of a cross on the forehead, as the minister pronounces the person as a member of the church. In some senses, coming at the end of the service, in the drama of the moment, this 'christening' seems to be the climax of the service. A better understanding is that the climax is at the moment of Baptism and the rest is just theatre.

Conclusion - Are you and your family ready for Baptism?

Baptism is a matter of first importance for a healthy church. Therefore, we guard it with some careful boundaries. In our parish pamphlet 'Baptism', we try to make that clear;

Baptism is the highest and most important ceremony of the church. It is freely available to anyone who asks for it, but a wholehearted and genuine engagement with the occasion needs careful preparation. Firstly, you need to be sure that we are the right church for you, so we ask you to join our Sunday services for at least a month before proceeding. Secondly, so that you can be sure that you understand the implications of baptism, please watch a simple video on YouTube about Baptism, called 'First Steps' ([follow this link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPn6yVxwhNk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPn6yVxwhNk)). Thirdly, we want to meet with you and the Godparents to help everyone get ready.

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