

Baptism

AT WESTMINSTER



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“I HAVE CALLED YOU BY WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE W

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Baptism is one of two sacraments celebrated by the Presbyterian Church (USA). The other is the Lord's Supper. Both take place in worship with the congregation gathered, and both are in response to things Jesus did and asked us to do.

But what does it mean? These words from our constitution help us answer that question.

Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is God's gift of grace and also God's summons to respond to that grace. Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to discipleship. Baptism gives the church its identity and commissions the church for ministry in the world.

God's faithfulness signified in Baptism is constant and sure, even when human faithfulness is not. Baptism is received only once...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.¹

Throughout our Confessions, baptism is lifted up and explained as being central to who we are as the church, and what it means to be a recipient of God's grace.

Now to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of [children] of God...²

Water is the primary visible symbol for baptism. Jesus was himself baptized in the waters of the Jordan River, and water is important in many Bible stories as the element of creation (the Spirit of God swept over the waters to begin the creation story), destruction and salvation (as in the story of Noah), healing (Naaman washing to be cured of leprosy), ministry (Jesus washing the disciples' feet) and hospitality (offering a stranger a cup of cold water). The water we use in the celebration of baptism is plain, ordinary water. It reminds us that God uses ordinary elements and ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary.



*“You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and
marked as Christ's own forever.”*

¹ From *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), 2005-2007*, Part II, *Book of Order*. Copyright 2002, Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), W-2.3006-2.3007, Baptism: Grace, Repentance, Commissioning; and Sign and Seal of God's Faithfulness.

² *The Second Helvetic Confession*, 1561, *The Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church (USA), 1999, 5.187.

YOUR NAME, YOU ARE MINE. IN THE BAPTISMAL WATERS, I WILL BE WITH YOU...” ISAIAH 43: 1B-2A

More recently the church commissioned a new catechism for teaching our beliefs to the children of our congregations. Here are the questions and answers children are taught as a way of helping them articulate their faith:

Q 42. What is baptism?

A. Through baptism I am adopted and welcomed into God’s family. In the water of baptism I share in the dying and rising of Jesus, who washes away my sins. I am made one with him and with all who are joined to him in the church.

Q 43. Why are you baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit?

A. Because of the command Jesus gave his disciples. After he was raised from the dead, he appeared to them, saying: “Go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19).

Q 44. What is the meaning of this name?

A. It is the name of the Holy Trinity. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet, there are not three Gods, but one God in three persons. We worship God in this mystery.

From: *Belonging to God: A First Catechism*, Geneva Press, 1998.

Why do we baptize infants?

The baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God’s love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.

Book of Order W-2.3008

So what does it mean when a young person or adult is baptized?

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.

Book of Order W-2.3008

Why don’t we have godparents?

In the Presbyterian Church (USA) the entire congregation serves as those who guide and nurture, teach and love. The congregation takes a vow of ministry in the liturgy of the baptism rite. The question is asked, “People of God, will you promise to uphold and support (Name _____) in their life in Christ?”

All respond: “We will with God’s help.”

“An Alternative Service for the Sacrament of Baptism,”
Book of Common Worship, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

How can the sacrament be administered?

Most commonly the sacrament is administered by the sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of the person. But our policy allows immersion as well, and arrangements can be, and have been made, to use the baptismal pool at a neighboring church, when immersion is requested.

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LOGISTICS

Infant Baptism – Parents wishing to present their child or infant for baptism should contact the church office to arrange a date. Currently, baptism is celebrated on the second Sunday of each month except during the season of Lent; and there is time for three families to present their children at each service. It is expected that parents will attend a Baptism Seminar, usually led each month prior to Baptism Sunday by a minister and the church educator. Child care is provided by reservation during the seminar.

It is not required, but you may ask someone who is an elder here at Westminster or in any PC(USA) church to stand with you during the baptism. The church office can help you with a list, if you are not sure who the Westminster elders are.

On Baptism Sunday parents may wait with their child in the Parlor, where the service can be heard; they may bring their child with them to worship; or they may leave their baby in the church nursery and go during the hymn prior to the sacrament to bring the baby to the Sanctuary.

There will be questions asked about the parents' intent to raise their child in the faith, questions which will be discussed at the Baptism Seminar.

Please advise visiting family members that they will be able to see best if they arrive early and sit toward the front or near the front. Please be certain they understand that there is to be no photography during the worship service with the exception of videotaping from the balcony. Our ministers will be happy to pose with you for a photograph following the service, if you wish.

Youth or Adult Baptism – Persons who have not been baptized as infants or children and who desire to make a profession of faith will be examined and received by the Session at either a regular or called meeting. The persons will be invited to come forward to the Chancel to answer questions about their intent, and to kneel when it is the time to celebrate the sacrament.

Following the sacrament, there are words of welcome for children, youth and adults as we celebrate together as members of the family of God.



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