

Week 4. Holy Baptism

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Note: Extra commentary of mine is given within square brackets [].

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1. Baptism: Wherein the Promises of God are visibly signed and sealed for us

a) Introduction

The gospel concerns the coming Kingdom of God. When we tell people about God's Kingdom, we conclude by inviting them to become members - to enter the Kingdom. Entrance into the Kingdom of God requires repentance and faith. The act of repentance, which is a turning toward Jesus, is for the forgiveness of sins, and can [should?] be expressed outwardly in water baptism. God promises the gift of forgiveness to all who repent. Baptism is an outward expression of that act of repentance and symbolizes the washing away of our sins.

[Baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace, a sacrament. A sacrament, as opposed to an ordinance¹, is an outward sign of an inward and heavenly grace. Both the *Articles* and the service of *Holy Baptism* imply the presence of divine grace in the rite of Holy Baptism. Nevertheless, this doctrine does not necessarily mean that the Anglican Church espouses *baptismal regeneration*²; baptism may mean only that God is at work in this person's life and we cannot know when. We should also remember that holy baptism is not meant to stand alone in the Anglican Church but is completed by confirmation where baptised persons answer for themselves. See later discussion, pp 4-5]

¹ An ordinance does not imply divine grace at work but is an action carried out in obedience to Christ's command alone.

² The belief that baptism actually saves or makes the person being baptised a Christian from that moment on.

b) New Testament Baptism

John the Baptist was the great prophet who, in the first century, prepared the people of Israel for the coming of Jesus. He said that God was about to do a new and wonderful thing through his Messiah (the chosen one, i.e. Jesus). [. . .] Now it was going to be possible to know God and serve him through his Son, (i.e. enter the Kingdom of God). To any person who wanted to know God and was willing to turn toward Jesus (i.e. repent), John offered, on God's behalf, the free forgiveness of all their sins, i.e. the removal of the barrier between mankind and God.

To drive home the remarkable step the person was making, and its consequences, John dipped (plunged?) the person in the river Jordan (baptised them). A good bath in the local river was a great symbol of what was happening. That person's sins were washed away, and s/he rose from the water a new person. It would be an event the person would never forget.

The disciples of Jesus continued the practice of baptism, although Jesus himself did not baptise anyone (Jn 4.2).

After Jesus' death the practice of water baptism continued along the same lines - [however, see below where this is expanded]. Peter said to a crowd of Jews, "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name [the authority] of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins", Acts 2:38. If you turn to God through Jesus Christ you will be forgiven everything you have ever done wrong. From then on you will be his friends forever.

Given this understanding of baptism, it would seem to be an act of adult commitment. A child who is seven days old can't repent, yet it does seem that infants were baptised with their parents during the New Testament period. The reason for this is that in the past God has always worked with families. If one member is blessed, all are blessed. Thus if the father believes, then the children are "blessed" by their father's faith. For this reason the children of a Christian home were baptised in infancy, since they could already be "children of God", or may be some day, (see Acts 16:31-34; 1Cor.7:12-14).

We will meet many people having Christian parents who have always believed in Jesus, while others will tell us that at a certain point of time they became Christians. Picking the right moment to baptize is no easy matter.

c) The Meaning of Christian baptism

The baptism of John the Baptist and Christian baptism do differ in that the latter was done in the name of Jesus or the Trinity although both are a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Act.2:37-38). In simple terms, Christian baptism is a sign of repentance and the washing of forgiveness.

Yet there is another particular implication which specifically applies to Christian baptism. It is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Repentance and belief moves a person into the Kingdom of God, and thus into the presence of God. The New Testament speaks of this as the coming or "baptism" [with] the Holy Spirit - a washing with the Spirit. He fills us (see Act.2:38). So it is most likely that water baptism also symbolises the coming (washing) of the Holy Spirit.

There are three extra implications of water baptism which are often spoken of in Christian circles. Although there is much truth in these points, there is little Biblical support for their *link with water baptism*. [APBA advocates the first two of these. See Holy Baptism service in the appendix.]

i) A death to sin

For a Christian, forgiveness entails their sinful nature being nailed to the cross of Christ. Jesus' death and burial is, for the believer, the death of sin and the burial of their sinfulness. Their old life dies with Christ on the cross and is buried with him. That doesn't mean we are now sinless, but it does mean we are that way in God's sight and eternally so. As far as heaven is concerned, we even now stand before the throne of God, perfected in his sight (Rom 6:1-4, cf. Col 2:11-12). Yet the "burial" or baptism that Paul is speaking of in these passages is most likely not a baptism in water but rather a baptism in suffering - i.e. he is speaking of our identification with Christ in his suffering on the cross. [This objection seems to be an isolated one in terms of the general testimony of the Church Universal. See APBA p. 57.]

ii) Entry into the church

Water baptism is often spoken of as a symbol of entry into the church. Many see it as a public confession of Christ and thus a means of becoming a member of "the body of Christ" - they see it as a way of joining in fellowship with other believers. There is little biblical support for this view. It seems more likely that water baptism, as an expression of repentance, is between us and God. [See APBA p. 58.]

[Indicates perhaps the individualistic character of this presentation. Even Presbyterian writers I have consulted believe that baptism has a wider reference than simply the individual {<http://www.hornes.org/theologia/peter-leithart/sacramental-efficacy>}. Undeniably, baptism is the normal entry into the visible church.]

iii) A sign of the new covenant

In the Old Testament God's covenant (or agreement) with the people of Israel was sealed in circumcision. Often believers see baptism as the seal or sign of God's promise of a new and unbreakable covenant based on Jesus' death for us. Again there is little biblical support for this point of view. The problem stems from a failure to understand the meaning of "baptism" in Colossians 2:9-12. In this context it means "immersed" into (identified with) Christ's death. Circumcision for a believer is a spiritual thing of the heart (Rom.2:28-29).³

d) What does Baptism do?

Three views exist as to what the rite of baptism actually does. The first says that it *causes* what it symbolises. That is, if it is carried out lawfully, it brings into being or produces then and there what it signifies⁴ (*ex opere operato* = by virtue of the act performed).⁵ On this view, when one is baptised, one automatically receives what baptism signifies. One problem with this understanding is that it implies that everyone

³ However, see http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/apologetics/Covenant%20Theology%20&%20Justification/Ligon_s_covtheology/07.htm towards each of this excellent article. If troubled by the mode-of-baptism question, this article is eminently readable.

⁴ Historically, the reason that the phrase came into existence was that the Pre-Reformation church had to decide whether those baptised by schismatics or heretics (for example) or by immoral priests had received valid baptisms. They decided that the baptisms etc. were valid because of the principle of the efficacy of the sacrament to carry out what it signifies.

⁵ Some would argue the same principle with reference to Holy Communion.

baptised is regenerate, that is, “born from above” (John 3.5) when surely the church does contain people who are part of the visible church but not (as yet) part of the invisible church. Such a mixture also occurred in the apostolic church (1 John 2.19). Second, argues John Stott⁶, the famous evangelical, regeneration (Titus 3.5) and justification (being declared in the right, according to the Bishop of Durham) always go together as two sides of the same coin. However, justification is always understood following the Reformation to be by faith alone. Hence, Stott’s conclusion is that the salvation coin of regeneration and justification must involve faith.

At the polar opposite is a **second** view that the sign or symbol in no way conveys what it stands for. On this standpoint, baptism is an empty token. A **third** opinion argued by Stott is that baptism only “works” when faith is present. The Anglican prayer books’ liturgies, therefore, must be read as describing what occurs when faith is active in a person’s life whether early in life or later in life. An infant may be baptised and receive all the promises of the baptismal service but until this person comes to personal faith by believing his/her heart that Jesus has been raised from the dead (Rom 10.9), the promises have not become activated. Godly family and godly instruction will facilitate and promote that movement but the person must still reach out in faith for all the promises of baptism to be realised.

e) Family and Believers' Water Baptism

Churches such as the Baptist Church and the Churches of Christ perform only adult baptisms. Infant baptism is performed in churches such as Roman Catholic, Anglican (Episcopalian), Methodist (Uniting), Presbyterian etc.

Christians today, do not allow this issue to divide them since it has nothing to do with a person's standing in the sight of God. Entry into the Kingdom of Heaven has nothing to do with the method of water baptism.

Those who hold to believers' baptism say that only a believer can be properly baptised, i.e. a person who has reached adulthood and has given their life to Jesus. Those who hold to family baptism say that God works in families such that the

⁶ See his article, http://www.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_112_1_Stott.pdf

children of a Christian home are "blessed". These children are therefore baptised as an act of faith in anticipation (hope) of their personal acceptance of Jesus.

f) Summary

1. Water baptism is a sign or symbol of repentance and its consequence (forgiveness of sins).
2. The water itself does not save.
3. A person can be a Christian without water baptism.
4. It is a sign to the person being baptised.
5. Christians are divided on when we should be baptised and how. This is because the Bible is not clear on the subject [or it may be because these matters are not important?].
6. Infant baptism today is sometimes a social custom. Baptism of a child of unbelieving parents is useful, in that the family is brought under the sound of the gospel.

g) Conclusion

A minister friend of mine in the Congregational church, on one hand practices family baptism, i.e. the baptism of infants from a Christian or nominal Christian home, and also believer's baptism. If anyone gave their life to Jesus while he was witnessing or preaching, he marched them down to the local beach and gave them a good dip "in the name of Jesus"! So there's lots of different ways Christians practise baptism. The important thing to remember is that the "rite" itself is a sign or symbol of:

1. repentance (i.e. the turning away from self to Jesus) and;
2. its consequence (i.e. forgiveness - the washing away of sin and rising up out of the water as a new person in Jesus).

2. Discussion

a) Imagine you were an Anglican minister with non-church families coming to you for baptism. How do you think you would handle this situation in a way that would honour Christ?

b) What would you do with an Anglican who wanted to be "re-baptised" with full immersion because he had come into a new experience of Christ's life in his own experience and wanted to mark that with baptism.

c) What would you say to someone who said that you hadn't been properly baptised because you had been only sprinkled with water as a child?

3. Appendix: Service of Holy Baptism

1. Hymn

2. *The priest greets the people in these or other suitable words.*

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

3. *A Sentence of Scripture appropriate to the day or the occasion may be read, or the following dialogue used.*

There is one Body and one Spirit;

there is one hope in God's call to us.

One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism,

one God and Father of all.

4 *The minister may continue with these or similar words*

Baptism is the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When he had risen from the dead, he commanded his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We have come together today to obey that command.

Baptism with water signifies the cleansing from sin that Jesus' death makes possible, and the new life that God gives us through the 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.

So we welcome you, *name(s)*, with your sponsors [and families].

We give thanks for you, and pray that you may know God's love and faithfulness for ever.

5 *The minister says*

Let us affirm our trust in God's mercy, and confess that we need forgiveness.

[Let us pray.]

A pause for reflection

Lord God, you created this world, and made us in your own image. Forgive us when we turn away from you.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy

Lord God, through your Son you overcame evil and death. Rescue us from slavery to sin.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy

Lord God, by your Spirit, you restore us to fellowship with you and with one another. Breathe your love and freedom into our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

The priest says

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you your sins, and keep you in life eternal. Amen.

6 *A song of praise (for example, 'Glory to God in the highest') may be sung.*

7 *The priest says*

Let us pray.

The community may pray silently.

The priest then says or sings the Collect of the Day.

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

8 *The Reading(s) from the Old Testament and/or the New Testament as appointed.*

9 *All stand for the Gospel Reading.*

Before the Gospel reading:

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to ...

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

After the Gospel reading:

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

10 *The Sermon.*

Silence may follow.

THE PRESENTATION

11 *The priest invites the sponsors to stand in view of the congregation.*

12 *The minister may say these or similar words.*

Children are baptised in response to God's all-embracing love. Parents and godparents who have responded to that love come now to bring their children for baptism. Before this congregation they must express their own trust and commitment to the promises of God, and their intention to bring up their children in the faith and practice of the Church. In due time *these children* should make their own response to God, and be prepared for confirmation.

13 *The priest says to the sponsors*

Will you accept the responsibilities placed upon you in bringing *name/this child* for baptism?

I will.

Are you willing to answer on behalf of *name/this child*?

I am.

By your own prayers and example, by your friendship and love, will you encourage *name/this child* in the life and faith of the Christian community?

I will, with God's help.

THE DECISION

14 *The priest says*

Before God and this congregation, you must affirm that you turn to Christ and reject all that is evil:

Do you turn to Christ?

I turn to Christ.

Do you repent of your sins?

I repent of my sins.

Do you reject selfish living, and all that is false and unjust?

I reject them all.

Do you renounce Satan and all evil?

I renounce all that is evil.

Almighty God deliver you from the powers of darkness, and lead you in the light of Christ to his everlasting kingdom. **Amen.**

15 *The minister says*

Let us together affirm the faith of the Church:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,**

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father;
from there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The priest says to the candidates and sponsors

Do you affirm this faith as yours?

I do.

Will you each, by God's grace, strive to live as a disciple of Christ, loving God with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself, until your life's end?

I will, with God's help.

16 The priest says to the congregation

You have heard *these our brothers and sisters* respond to Christ. Will you support them in this calling?

The congregation answers

We will.

THE PRAYERS

17 The minister says

Let us pray.

Grant, merciful God, that *these persons* may be so buried with Christ in baptism that the new nature may be raised up in *them*. May the fruit of your Spirit grow and flourish in *them*.

God of grace,

hear our prayer.

Give to *their* sponsors and their families the desire to share with *them* what you have revealed in your holy gospel.

God of grace,

hear our prayer.

May *they* know Christ's forgiving love and continue in the fellowship and service of his Church. May *they* proclaim, by word and example, the good news of God in Christ.

God of grace,

hear our prayer.

We pray for the world in which we live, for peace and harmony among all people.

Bring healing and wholeness to the sick [especially ...]
to those who mourn and to all in need.

God of grace,

hear our prayer.

We thank you for the ministry we have in your world and to each other in the household of faith. Hasten that day when the whole creation shall be made perfect in Christ.

God of grace,
hear our prayer.

The Lord's Prayer may be said here if it is not said later in the service.

THE BAPTISM

18 At the place where the water for baptism is, the priest begins the thanksgiving.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks that at the beginning of creation your Holy Spirit moved upon the waters to bring forth light and life. With water you cleanse and replenish the earth; you nourish and sustain all living things.

Through the waters of the Red Sea you led your people out of slavery into freedom, and brought them through the river Jordan to new life in the land of promise.

We give you thanks for your Son Jesus Christ: for his baptism by John, for his anointing with the Holy Spirit. Through the deep waters of death Jesus delivered us from our sins and was raised to new life in triumph.

We give you thanks for the grace of the Holy Spirit who forms us in the likeness of Christ and leads us to proclaim your kingdom.

And now we give you thanks that you have called *name/these your servants* to new birth in your Church through the waters of baptism.

Pour out your Holy Spirit in blessing and sanctify this water so that those who are baptised in it may be made one with Christ in his death and resurrection.

May they die to sin, rise to newness of life, and continue forever in Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we give you praise and honour in the unity of the Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**

19 Each candidate is brought to the water.

The minister baptises by dipping the candidates in the water, or pouring water over them, saying

Name, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

AFTER BAPTISM

20 When all have been baptised, the priest makes a cross on the forehead of each person, saying

Name, I sign you with the sign of the cross to show that you are marked as Christ's own for ever.

The priest addresses all the newly baptised

Live as a disciple of Christ: fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith.
and the congregation responds, saying

**Confess Christ crucified,
proclaim his resurrection,
look for his coming in glory.**

21 The minister says

God has brought you out of darkness into his marvellous light.
and the congregation joins the minister in saying

**Shine as a light in the world
to the glory of God the Father.**

22 The minister continues

God has called you into his Church.

The congregation joins the minister in saying

**We therefore receive and welcome you
as a member with us of the body of Christ,
as a child of the one heavenly Father,
and as an inheritor of the kingdom of God.**

THE GREETING OF PEACE

23 All stand. The Greeting of Peace is introduced with these or other suitable words.

In baptism, God has made us one in Christ.

His Spirit is with us.

The priest says

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

All may exchange a sign of peace.

24 The gifts of the people are brought to the Lord's Table. They may be presented in silence or a suitable prayer, such as follows, may be used.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.

Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.

Accept and use our offerings for your glory

and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God for ever.

**The Sacrament of Holy Communion now takes place beginning with the Great
Thanksgiving.**