

## Spiritual Formation Through Baptism

*"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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

-Matthew 28:18-19

The fact that Jesus, right before He returned to heaven, commanded that His followers be baptized indicates the high value He places on baptism. So what is the significance of baptism? The meaning of baptism is actually rooted in the Old Testament with its themes of turning from sin, being cleansed and purified, and being dedicated to God. The theme of 'going through the water from death to life' is powerfully illustrated through the accounts of Noah and his family being brought through the flood, and the Israelites leaving bondage in Egypt by walking through the Red Sea. God loves to give people physical experiences that speak to spiritual reality!

When John the Baptist arrived on the scene calling people to "be baptized as a sign of repentance" (Mark 1:4-5) his message was consistent with the Old Testament's emphasis on turning from sin and being cleansed. So John was understandably confused when Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized. Jesus didn't need to repent or get clean . . . but Jesus did want to identify with the very people He wanted to make clean and set free. But His baptism was so much more, as we discover in Matthew 3:16 and 17: *"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

The baptism of Jesus was a marker event in which His Father's blessing and the presence of the Holy Spirit was confirmed upon Jesus. And Jesus wants us to follow His example! His heart is that all His followers would participate in a physical act (water baptism) that would confirm the inner reality of being cleansed and forgiven, loved, and empowered. With such meaning who wouldn't want to be baptized?

After Jesus returned to heaven Peter proclaimed the good news of Jesus' salvation after which people asked: *"what shall we do? Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."* (Acts 2:37-41)

The book of Acts is full of stories of people who believed the gospel message, repented (had 'a change of mind' and turned towards God), received forgiveness, were made alive in Jesus with the filling of the Holy Spirit, baptized in water as a sign of their identification with Jesus, and were embraced as part of God's family, 'the body of Christ.' And as the church grew leaders like Peter and Paul taught about the significance of baptism:

- Baptism is an outward sign of our inner cleansing (1 Corinthians 6:11). Our English word baptize comes from the Greek word baptizo, which means to dip and immerse, and was used to describe dipping a cloth in order to dye (change) it. Baptism doesn't change (save) us but reflects we are changed from the inside out because of Jesus.
- Baptism anchors our identity in Jesus (Galatians 3:27).
- Baptism marks our oneness with God and His plans and His people (1 Corinthians 12:13 and Ephesians 4:4-6).
- Baptism identifies us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Colossians 2:12) calling us to live in new life as we read in Romans 6:1-5 (The Message):

*"So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land! That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country."*

Jesus said: *"If you love me, keep my commands"* (John 14:15). Followers of Jesus are called to obey and be baptized not out of obligation but in response to love to Jesus. It is a meaningful and powerful way of proclaiming one's devotion and allegiance to Jesus as Lord, as the One whose sacrifice allows us to move from death to life.

Baptism also reflects the spiritual reality of moving from aloneness to oneness with God's family. In baptism we join in solidarity with Jesus' followers around the world and to a local church. When you are baptized at The Meeting Place you will rise up from the water hearing your church family's celebrate your obedience to Jesus and saying: "welcome home; we're so glad you are part of us!" The Meeting Place expresses such belonging and commitment through the Covenant Community.