

Baptism - What We Believe



History of Sprinkling

Before Jesus physically left the earth, he challenged his followers with this mission: *“Go then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and then teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* -Matthew 28:19-20

In Jesus’ own words, being disciples, his followers, is something that involves baptism. Baptism is Jesus’ idea, Jesus’ command, and integral to the mission for his followers. At COMMUNITY an important part of finding your way back to God is making the decision to be baptized.

WHY BE BAPTIZED?

There are many reasons why we believe that baptism is important for every person who chooses to follow Jesus. It starts with Jesus’ own example in the Gospels (see Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-22) and continues into the Book of Acts with the first Christian communities. Throughout the New Testament, we see that each time a person declares his or her faith in Jesus, this public proclamation is followed by baptism (some examples include Acts 2:37-41, Acts 8:26-40, Acts 9:1-19, Acts 10:44-48, Acts 16:13-15, Acts 16: 25-40).

Baptism illustrates Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Romans 6:3, Colossians 2:12). It declares our death to the old ways of living and the start of our new life as a son or daughter of God (Romans 6:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17). In baptism, a Christ-follower is forgiven, redeemed, and justified. There is mystery in how this happens, but we trust in Jesus’ example and the example of Christians throughout church history that were baptized as part of their journey of finding their way back to God.

HOW DO WE BAPTIZE?

At COMMUNITY, we follow Jesus’ example of baptism by immersion for both adults and children who are old enough to make a personal decision.

Later church history gave us many forms of baptism (anointing, sprinkling, spraying, sprinkling with sand if water wasn’t available, etc...), but we believe baptism by immersion is the preferred method because every baptism recorded in scripture was a baptism by immersion (see above examples from the Book of Acts). Sprinkling as a church practice came several centuries later. We don’t see examples in the New Testament of Christ followers being sprinkled or confirmed, only baptism by immersion (or as close to immersion as was possible).

Sprinkling likely began as a way to assuage the fears of parents for their sick children’s salvation (infant mortality rates were high in the ancient world) or in cases when immersion wasn’t possible (illness, injury, proximity to water, etc.). Parents who feared their sick children would not recover began choosing to have their children sprinkled around 250 CE. The regular practice of infant baptism or sprinkling didn’t become normalized until the late 400’s CE. Regardless, sprinkling was always a last choice.

Given the lateness of the practice and the clear biblical preference for full immersion of believers, we at COMMUNITY hold with immersion. Immersion also best symbolizes a burial and resurrection.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Everyone who believes in Jesus and desires to publicly commit to him (Acts 2:41, Acts 8:12, Acts 18:8). We at COMMUNITY know that many people were sprinkled or confirmed in other church traditions. This is most often a decision made by a person’s parents when an individual is an infant or young child. If you’ve been sprinkled or confirmed and are considering immersion baptism, you aren’t alone. This decision does not negate the choice your parents made; rather it confirms their desire as you choose to make a commitment to God on your own. In the New Testament, baptism is always connected to a person’s personal faith in Jesus. Baptism is a decision every person needs to make for himself or herself.

If this is something you have further questions about, we urge you to talk with your Campus Pastor or someone you trust who has been baptized and can help you discern your next steps.

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CHILD DEDICATION

While we do not practice baptizing children, we do have a practice at COMMUNITY where parents can make a public declaration of intent before God and their church community to raise their child in the faith until the child is old enough to make his or her own personal commitment to Jesus. We call this Child Dedication and it occurs a few times a year. If you are interested in participating in Child Dedication, please talk with your Kids' City Director or Campus Pastor.

WHEN IS MY CHILD READY TO BE BAPTIZED?

This can be hard to discern. There is no instruction in the Bible regarding the proper age, but we can apply the same principles discussed above. Once a child is old enough to commit their life to Jesus, they are ready to be baptized. Through Kids' City, we offer a family baptism class that leads parents and children through a series of questions to test their understanding and helps parents discern whether their children understand the significance of baptism and what having a relationship with God is about. As a parent, you are the best person to evaluate your child's understanding and readiness to make this commitment. Once you feel confident in this, you can support and encourage your child's decision to be baptized.

WHO IS ALLOWED TO BAPTIZE?

At COMMUNITY any baptized Christ-follower can baptize another Christ-follower. We de-emphasize the separation between pastors, staff and attenders. In our view, all Christ-followers are equal in the eyes of God. Therefore, we encourage people making the decision to be baptized to ask someone who has been a strong spiritual influence in their lives. That can be a pastor, a parent, a child, a friend, or a small group leader. As long as that person has been baptized, they qualify!

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TO MY BAPTISM?

COMMUNITY will provide a t-shirt. Bring shorts, a change of undergarments, and a towel. Some people like to wear a swimsuit under their clothing, but it isn't necessary.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING MY BAPTISM?

If you are the one being baptized, you will step into the pool with the person baptizing you. Different people have different practices or sayings, but most will ask you a question about your faith and whether you are committed to following Jesus so be prepared to simply say, "Yes." As you are being baptized, feel free hold your nose. This is your moment with Christ, so soak it in and remember the celebration in heaven that is happening!

I'M READY TO BE BAPTIZED! WHAT DO I DO?

Great! We recommend contacting your small group leader or your Campus Pastor or a staff member to talk about your decision. They will be able to make the arrangements for your baptism. Most likely, they'll ask you to write a few paragraphs about your story to be read before you are baptized. This is a great chance to reflect on and then share what God has done in your life!

SOMEONE HAS ASKED ME TO BAPTIZE THEM, WHAT DO I DO?

If someone has asked you to baptize them, that is a great testimony to your ability to live out your faith in inspiring and transformative ways! Take some time to recognize how the Holy Spirit is working in your life and theirs!

The day of the baptism you'll be given a t-shirt to wear. Bring shorts, a change of undergarments, and a towel. Instruct the person beforehand to hold their nose with one hand (if desired) and grab their own wrist with the other. You will hold on to their other wrist with one hand and place your hand on their back with the other. As you guide them backward, encourage them to do their best to keep their feet planted on the ground and bend at the knees. This will make it much easier for you to lift them back up out of the water.

As you enter the water, position the person near the front of the baptistery (be aware that you're about to dunk them backwards). Once they're positioned, and their testimony has been read, you're ready! It's traditional to ask, "Do you, ____, take Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior today?" Give them a chance to say "Yes" or "I do!" Then say, "I now baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!" Dunk them under gently and pull them back up. This is a moment you'll never forget!