



NORTH RIDGE  
COMMUNITY CHURCH

*"Connecting in Community with Jesus and Each Other"*

Baptism

# What is baptism?

Baptism is the visible word of God that we are cleansed in Christ's blood, buried with him unto death, that we might rise with him and walk in newness of life. In the Reformed Church, baptism is always performed in the context of a congregation of God's people. The congregation commits itself to the spiritual nurture of the infant, child, or adult who is being baptized. Baptism is the mark of corporate, as well as individual faith. The journey of faith that begins in individual baptism continues in the church community.

Baptism is a sign and seal of God's covenant of grace with us and our children. A sign is a promise, a signal, a visible representation of a reality that is yet to be seen. Baptism, a sacrament of the church, is a sign of what God has already done for you and continues to do within His people. A sign that points us to a deeper reality. A visible sign of invisible grace. Theologian John Calvin noted that baptism is, "An outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promise of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith" (Institutes, IV.xiv.1)

The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way, "Sacraments [baptism and communion] are holy signs and seals for us to see. They were instituted by God so that by our use of them He might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and might put his seal on that promise. And this is God's gospel promise: to forgive our sins and give us eternal life by grace alone because of Christ's one sacrifice finished on the cross."

# What happens during baptism?

In baptism God promises by grace alone to forgive our sins, to adopt us into the Body of Christ, the church, to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us, and to resurrect us to eternal life with Him.

As parents, you promise to raise your children to know Jesus by teaching them God's Word, teaching them to pray, and being Godly examples for them to follow.

As members of the church family, you also promise to invest yourself in loving and encouraging other parents and children to know and follow Jesus, using your God-given gifts and actively participating in the life of the church.

Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience, to love and trust God completely, to forsake the evil of the world, and to live a new and holy life.

# What is baptism a sign of?

Water is the key ingredient in cleansing. It is the water that takes the dirt and grime from our body, removes it, and makes us clean. Likewise, the water of baptism is a sign that just as water washes away dirt from our body, so the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ wash away all my sins.

*“To be washed with Christ’s blood means that God, by grace, has forgiven my sins because of Christ’s blood poured out for me in his sacrifice on the cross. To be washed with Christ’s Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed me and set me apart to be a member of Christ so that more and more I become dead to sin and increasingly live a holy and blameless life” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 70)*

*“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolized baptism that now saves you also—no the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saved you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with the angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.” 1 Peter 3:18-22*

*“Don’t you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized 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 have a new life.” Romans 6:3-4*

In baptism we acknowledge that we have made mistakes, sinned, and fall short of our sinless God. Baptism reminds us that our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ alone and that as forgiven people we may now thank him by living our lives for him.

# Why do we baptize?

**We baptize because God asks us to.**

*“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”*

Act 2:38

*“Whoever believes in me and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*

Mark 16:16

*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, 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 28:18-20*

# What about baptizing babies?

## Baptism's Background

Nearly every Christian church affirms the Biblical origin of baptism. In the Old Testament God chose to bless Abraham saying, *"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."* Genesis 17:7

The "covenant" is God's promise to be our God and our descendants God, now and always.

God then asked Abraham and his descendants to recognize this covenant by establishing a sign .... circumcision. *"This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision. And it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised"* Genesis 17:10-12a. The sign designated by God for those who followed Him was the circumcision of all baby boys on the eighth day. For over 4,000 years the blood of baby boys marked the entrance of the covenant relationship with God. When Jesus came to earth, he not only shed blood through his own circumcision, but more significantly through His death on the cross.

Colossians 2:11-12 states, *"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead"*.

The sign of the covenant was changed from circumcision to baptism because the sign of blood was fulfilled through Jesus. Baptism is now the bloodless sign of the covenant with God.

## Baptism of Babies

Up to this point there is agreement regarding baptism. The church affirms that the sign of the covenant changed from circumcision to baptism, the question that remains is if the time of the sign changed: Do we baptize infants or are we now to baptize adults only? At North Ridge Community Church we believe that God Continues to call his church to baptize the babies of believers. The sign of the covenant has changed from circumcision to baptism (Colossians 2:11-12), but the time of the covenant sign has not changed. Our reasons for this belief are four fold.

# Reasons we baptize babies

## 1. Biblical examples of infants in the early church being baptized.

*“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household ... At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”*

Acts 16:31-33

As one would expect, the entire family (adults, children, and infants) were all included in the act for being baptized.

In 1 Corinthians the Bible equates the crossing of the Red Sea with the baptism of Israel. *“I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea”* 1 Corinthians 10:1-2. This baptismal event included infants and children who were carried across the sea in the tender arms of their parents.

## 2. Infant baptism is meant to be a tangible expressing of the grace of God.

*“When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit ... so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*

Titus 3:4-5

In infant baptism, only three out of the four parties make promises: the congregation, the parents, and God all express promises. The fragile infant is able to do nothing ... nothing except receive the gift of God. Infant baptism is meant to capture the essence of how each person enters into the Kingdom of God—by grace alone.

*“For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith - and not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”* Ephesians 2:8-9

*“We love because God first loved us.”* 1 John 4:19

## 3. It is true that the New Testament does not explicitly state, “Thou shall baptize infants”.

But it is also true that the New Testament does not explicitly comment on the genetic cloning, narcotics, or incest. The point being that the silence of the New Testament regarding the age of baptism is not proof against infant baptism, but support for it. Remember the background of baptism regarding circumcision on the eighth day. For 4,000 years the people of God had been carrying out the sign of the covenant with their children. If this practice were to change, we would most certainly expect the bible to speak to this change. In general, a standing procedure stands unless we are notified to the contrary. In the case of infant baptism, the Bible does not notify us of such a dramatic change.

#### 4. The history of the church confirms the baptism of babies.

For 1,550 of the church's 2,000 years of existence infant baptism was the universally accepted practice ... handed down from the disciples of Jesus themselves. It was not until 1550 that one branch of the church decided to discontinue baptizing infants in the response to abuses of the practice in the church. Specifically, some in the church were abusing infant baptism by considering it to be the means of salvation rather than the sign of grace.

When baptizing infants it is essential to focus on the meaning of baptism. Baptism is a visible sign of God's invisible grace. Baptism itself does not give salvation to any child. We acknowledge the need for each person to receive Jesus Christ as their own personal Lord and Savior. Romans 10:9 states, *"If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* When we baptize infants, we recognize God's grace in the present and look forward to its fulfillment in the future. Each person must respond to God's grace in a personal way by receiving the gift of grace, Jesus Christ, and publicly confessing faith in him. Families with differing views on baptism exist, are loved, and are welcomed into full partnership into North Ridge Community Church family. We do not require all children to be baptized ... but we do encourage it because of the aforementioned biblical basis. Ultimately we respect the parents' decision to choose according to their conviction in this matter.

## Does baptism save?

The answer is a resounding "no"! The Bible is very clear that only Jesus saves.

Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* John 14:6. He did not say "Baptism is the way, the truth, and the life". Baptism is a sign to us of what God has already done and made available to us through Jesus. But in and of itself, baptism has not saving value. It is a valuable sign of salvation, but not the means of salvation.

## What about infant dedication?

We affirm the biblical teaching of infant baptism. Not as a guarantee of salvation, but as a sign of God's faithfulness. We also recognize and respect parents who hold different convictions. Baptism was never intended to divide us, but to unite us. Unite us as we all desire our children to enjoy a personal relationship with God. Parents who have a personal relationship with God, rely on His grace, and are genuinely motivated to raise their children in the ways of Jesus Christ may have their children dedicated. North Ridge Community Church will baptize or dedicate infants after the parents have met with the pastor and/or an elder and have a good understanding of the covenant of baptism.

# Do I need to be baptized as an adult?

If you have never been baptized, then the answer is “yes”. Jesus said in Mark 16:16 *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”* Baptism does not save you, only faith in Jesus Christ does that. Baptism does not make you a believer, but it does show that you already believe. Baptism is the outward sign of the commitment you make in your heart.

If you were baptized as an infant, the answer is “no” ... you do not need to experience the outward sign again. *“There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”* Ephesians 4:4-6. If you were baptized as an infant, you do not need to experience baptism as an adult.

It is important to remember that baptism is not an act of salvation, it is a sign of salvation. We are not saved by baptism, we are saved by the grace of God as we receive Jesus Christ.

## The process and requirements for requesting baptism

In order to participate in baptism you will first need to go through the Ignition Membership process at North Ridge Community Church. After completing the membership class, you will be required to meet with Pastor Doug and/or members of the Leadership Team. At that time you may ask more questions about baptism or arrange baptism for yourself or your children.

If you are currently an active member at North Ridge Community Church and would like to talk more about baptism, or to schedule your children for baptism, please contact Pastor Doug at 563-285-7819 or [pastor@northridgecc.com](mailto:pastor@northridgecc.com) to schedule a meeting.

