

What is a parent's role in Baptism?

Baptism does not assure the salvation of children. That is, baptism alone does not insure that a child will grow into a strong, faithful, God-fearing, loving person. It is God's grace that works in the lives of believers. God's grace is present through the Holy Spirit's working in the reading and preaching of His Word, through the sacraments and through prayer.

If the parents of baptized children instruct them in the Word of God, pray with them, and have them actively participate in the worship of God (including participating in the sacraments), they will be exposed to the grace of God. Although the church is to support the nurture of children who are baptized, the parents are to nurture their children in the faith.

When you bring your child before the congregation for baptism, you as a family, and the leadership and membership of Hebron Church covenant together to raise your son or daughter "in the Lord" in such a manner that your child may truly glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Understanding Baptism for Presbyterians

- We baptize with water because Jesus was baptized in water by John the Baptist.
- Baptism is a sign of God's love for us and a seal (or mark) upon us that we are included in His family of faith.
- Baptism is an affirmation of God's love for us, which God gives to us without our knowing or agreeing to it. This gift from God is not dependant on our knowledge or love of God.
- Baptism takes place within a service of worship with the community of faith.
- A minister, the person being baptized, the family, and the church community are all participants in a baptismal service.
- A person is baptized "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."
- A person needs to be baptized only once in his life. This mark of God's love can never be revoked or worn out.



*Baptized in the name
of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.*

The Sacrament of Baptism

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What is the Sacrament of Baptism?

Baptism is the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ. Jesus, through His own baptism, identified Himself with sinners in order to fulfill all righteousness. In baptism, we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection. In baptism, we die to what separates us from God and are raised to newness of life in Christ. In baptism, the Holy Spirit binds the Church in covenant to its Creator and Lord. The water of baptism symbolizes the waters of creation, the flood and exodus from Egypt.

How does Baptism relate to the Old Testament?

In Genesis 17:7, God calls the saving relationship that He established with Abraham an "everlasting covenant" - a covenant of salvation from generation to generation. The mark of this covenant of salvation with Abraham and his descendents was circumcision - a seal of the righteousness of Abraham's faith prior to his circumcision. In Genesis 17, God tells Abraham that the infants born into his house were to be circumcised on the eighth day "throughout your generations". Why circumcision? It appears that in the Old Testament, the uncircumcised were "unclean" (Isaiah 52:1), as both the words "unclean" and "uncircumcised" are used. Circumcision symbolizes a cutting off of our uncleanness and the shedding of blood (sin and blood atonement) by an act of another person (God) from the part of the body which represents the source of life.

How are circumcision in the Old Testament and Baptism in the New Testament Related?

Both represent an outward sign of an inward cleansing (a cleansing of the heart). The promise of God to Abraham (that God would save His people by His grace through the gift of faith) did not change from the Old Testament to the New Testament; only the sign of the promise changed from circumcision to baptism. A parallel exists with the Lord's Supper being the New Testament sign replacing the Old Testament celebration of the Passover. Jesus gave the disciples bread and wine, representing His body and blood shed for them, in place of the lamb that was eaten at Passover. Similarly, baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of salvation. As circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with Israel, so baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with the Church.

Does Baptism save us?

Just as circumcision did not save an Old Testament believer, baptism does not save a New Testament believer. Rather, baptism is an act of setting apart — from a worldly life to a holy life. Baptism is the outward evidence of an inward cleansing, or, again, a setting apart. We are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-10). With the case of an adult believer, such as Abraham, the sign evidences the work of God to bring that person to faith.

Why do Presbyterians believe in infant Baptism?

Presbyterians and many other Protestant denominations believe in infant baptism because infants as well as their parents are included in the covenant of salvation and belong to the people of God. Although Abraham, an adult who came to faith, was circumcised after his regeneration, Isaac, his son, was circumcised when he was only 8 days old. The sign was given, not based upon what either Abraham or Isaac did (i.e., express their faith); rather, it was given to show God's faithfulness to His promise to Abraham. Thus, it is the same with infant baptism. Parents are presenting their children for the giving of the sign that God will be faithful to bring believers, and their descendents, to faith. Once the child comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the parents can celebrate God's faithfulness to His promises. We do not re-baptize the child after he or she comes to faith because there is only one baptism (see Ephesians 4). Furthermore, such an act would make it appear as if the child's decision, not God's grace, was the genesis of the child's faith.

Both redemption from sin through the blood of Christ and the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit are promised to children of believing parents (Acts 2:39). Infants are, by baptism as a sign of the covenant, to be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision. In the New Testament, baptism has been instituted to take its place.