



## **Baptism**

If the purpose of Baptism is to publicly identify a believer in Jesus Christ, you may well be asking yourself, “What was the significance of my Baptism as a baby?” In the New Testament, we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them and prayed for them and told His disciples to welcome them. But He did not baptize them, and He did not tell anyone else to baptize them. Baptism is for those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ alone for their salvation.

If you were baptized as a child, it was the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your Baptism as an adult can be viewed as the fulfillment of your parents’ wishes. It in no way repudiates the Baptism you received as a child.

While recognizing the right for other churches to practice infant Baptism if it conforms to their theology, the congregation of Willow Creek Community Church understands Scripture to teach that only professing believers qualify for Baptism.

1. Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have submitted themselves to His sovereignty.
2. Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and the newness of life believers experience by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.
3. Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.
4. As a biblical rite of initiation into the body of Christ, the Baptism of a believer may be considered a prerequisite for becoming a member of the church.

Although the old covenant practice of infant circumcision is sometimes given as a rationale for infant Baptism, the biblical definition of the functions of circumcision and Baptism shows that those two institutions fulfilled different purposes in their respective covenants. The equation is never made in the Bible between the circumcision of male infants in the old covenant, and the Baptism of born-again believers, much less of infants, in the new covenant. However, Willow Creek Community Church encourages Christian parents to present their children for the ceremony of dedication, whereby God’s blessing is formally invoked upon the children, and the parents publicly commit themselves to raise the children in accordance with the teachings of Scripture.

Because the symbolism of Baptism requires a more adult level of cognitive and developmental readiness, the Elders require that children be in Grade 6 or older to be baptized at Willow Creek. Proverbs 20:25 issues a significant caution against the danger of making a vow before adequate knowledge, forethought, and reflection have been given. In an effort to prevent young people from making a premature commitment they may not fully understand, this minimum age has been established.

Baptism recognizes and celebrates the redemptive life change that is continually occurring within our church. The Elders encourage new believers and believers who have not yet participated in adult Baptism to be baptized by immersion. The Elders’ position is that Baptism by immersion



paints the truest picture of dying to sin and arising to Christ and new life. While the Elders strongly encourage immersion Baptism, we do recognize that some individuals may request Baptism by the sprinkling of water rather than full immersion, either because of a strong personal preference or based on a compelling physical reason or disability. In these cases, the Elders ask that a brief explanation be given during the registration process.

### **The biblical foundation for Baptism**

Jesus' final recorded words to His followers before His ascension to heaven express the importance He placed on Baptism. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands His followers, “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Baptism does not provide salvation for an individual, but rather serves to identify the individual publicly as a follower of Christ. In passages such as Acts 2:41, 8:12, and 10:47–48, the act of Baptism follows an individual’s decision to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. The New Testament records the Baptisms of adult believers only. In Romans 6:1–11, the apostle Paul describes the immersion of Baptism as a means through which the believer identifies with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ: Going under the water represents Christ’s death—and a believer's death to sin; coming out of the water illustrates His resurrection and the believer's new life in Christ.

Baptism is an act of obedience to Christ that follows an individual's acceptance of salvation by God's grace alone. Baptism isn't a prerequisite for salvation; however, if an inner commitment to trust Christ alone for salvation has been made, then the outward symbol of that commitment—Baptism—should follow, as is modeled throughout the New Testament in the lives of those choosing to follow Christ.

### **When can I be baptized?**

We invite those who are interested in taking water baptism to pursue that opportunity with their local campus. We have pastors on staff who will guide those who are interested in taking that next step.