

Baptising Children

A Guide for Parents

What is baptism?

In Hope Church we baptise **believers** by full immersion in water. Baptism is not a ritual for religious people, it is a powerful and spiritually significant outward sign of an inward reality. It speaks of death and resurrection¹ - i.e. dying to our old life *without* Christ and being born again into new life *with* Christ. Often, in the Bible, a person would become a Christian and *immediately* be baptised in water²; there was no delay. This is because baptism is not a sign of *maturity* in Christ but a sign of *new life* in Christ. As soon as a person can confess Jesus Christ as Lord and decide for themselves to follow Him, they are able to be baptised.

Does baptism save?

The Bible is very clear that salvation and baptism are very closely related³; the two always go hand-in-hand. In the Bible, however, baptism *never* precedes true saving faith. Saving faith *always* comes first.

The Bible nowhere instructs parents to baptise babies. For some parents, infant baptism is undertaken with the mistaken view that it will somehow make their child 'Christian' and ensure their entry into heaven. The Bible nowhere teaches this. The act of baptism, when divorced from saving faith, does *nothing* to ensure a person's salvation.

Only Jesus can save. That salvation is only because of His death and resurrection. It is only offered as a free gift. It is only received by faith in Him⁴.

Baptism, then, is both a public witness to a person's new life in Christ and a declaration of His Lordship.

Can my child be baptised?

In Hope Church, we don't set an arbitrary age limit on baptism. If a child has a genuine faith, there is nothing to stop them being baptised. However, if a child is not ready (i.e. doesn't have a full understanding or doesn't have a genuine relationship with Christ) it

¹ Romans 6:3-5

² Acts 2:41; Acts 8:36-38; Acts 10:47-48

³ Acts 2:37-38

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; John 1:12-13; John 3:16; John 3:36

can rob a child of the joy of baptism at a later date when they do 'own' their faith and have made a commitment themselves to follow Christ as Lord.

That is not to say that young children cannot have a genuine salvation experience and a real relationship with God – far from it. Many people come to faith as young children. We do, however, advise caution when considering baptism for children.

Here are a few questions to ask:

1.) Does my child have a genuine relationship with Jesus?

Some children grow up in a Christian home and attend church but don't have a personal saving faith in Jesus. A parent will need to be convinced that their child has a genuine relationship with Jesus before considering baptism.

2.) Does my child have understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection?

The Gospel – or 'good news' - is described by Paul as 'the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes'⁵. A parent will need to be convinced that their child understands Jesus' death on the cross as our substitute, being punished for all our sin⁶. This is about forgiveness. They will also need to understand His resurrection as the means by which we receive eternal life⁷. This is about fullness of life now and eternal life in the Kingdom to come.

The Gospel is about God's grace – how He blesses us in ways we don't deserve⁸. For instance, none of us deserve forgiveness. None of us, by our own good deeds, can earn our way into heaven. It is all because of Jesus' finished work on the cross, not our good lives. Salvation is a free gift to the undeserving.

Our response to the Gospel is receive the gift of salvation by faith. The Bible says that those who *believe* are saved⁹. This is not a passive kind of faith (even the devil has a belief in Jesus), but the kind of faith that pursues Jesus and leads to a transformed life in Christ.

Parents will need to be confident that their children understand the Gospel of grace.

⁵ Romans 1:16

⁶ Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 3:18

⁷ John 11:25; Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23

⁸ Romans 1:17; Ephesians 2:8-9

⁹ John 3:16; Romans 5:1; Galatians 2:16

3.) Does my child understand what baptism means?

Some people who were baptised at a young age didn't understand the significance of what they were doing at the time. Others can't clearly remember being baptised because they were so young. Subsequently, there can be regrets about not waiting a few years until it was more meaningful to them and they had made a deeper commitment to Christ. Our counsel to parents is to be sure that their child understands baptism and that it is a genuine expression of their child's personal relationship with Christ.

If, as a parent, you are confident that your child is ready for baptism - and wants to be baptised - please fill in a baptism form (available at the Information Desk on Sunday) and hand it in. We will then arrange to meet with you to discuss the baptism of your child.