

Why baptism?

You might be thinking to yourself; *'What would happen to me if I got baptised?'* Well the word 'baptise' is a Greek word and literally means to 'immerse' or 'plunge'. So baptism involves being immersed in heated water for a brief moment!

Why on earth do we do this? Well partly because Jesus did it (Matthew 3:13-16), and then commanded his followers to do it too (Matthew 28: 19-20). So, very simply, it's a way of publicly showing that you are following Jesus.

BUT WHY DO I HAVE TO GET WET?

It is very important to understand that the water of baptism is not actually doing anything to you spiritually. There is nothing special about the water, it is just ordinary water with no strange remedies in it. In this sense baptism is just a picture or symbol of what has already happened in your life when you decided to follow Jesus. We therefore only baptise people who have already become believers and are open about their commitment to Jesus. To see this principle in the Bible have a look at Acts 2: 38-41 or 16:14-15.

It may be helpful to see three different pictures or meanings that baptism shows.

WHAT DOES THE PICTURE OF BAPTISM MEAN?

(i) Baptism is like a bath

We all have baths because in life we all get dirty. We immerse ourselves in the water to wash away any dirt and then come out with a nice 'after-bath' feeling of being really clean. Deep down everyone feels 'dirty ' on the inside as we do things that we know are wrong, and everyone would love to feel completely clean by being forgiven. Procter and Gamble, the American pharmaceutical company, recognise this and so advertised their latest soap with the phrase 'For the first time in your life, feel really clean!' It was soon a best seller.

Baptism is to show outwardly that when we came to Jesus and asked for forgiveness, he made us clean on the inside (Acts22:16). Now we have that after-bath feeling of being 'really clean' and baptism is like a public bath that shows this.

(ii) Baptism is like a funeral and a birthday

The baptism pool is also like a watery grave. The old life that we lived before we were Christians, dies and is buried. Romans ch.6:3-4 tells us that when we

believed in Jesus, it was as if that old self was killed on the cross with Jesus and then buried with him. This is because Jesus' death was for all the sinful stuff that our old self was guilty of and he dealt with it and buried it for us.

As Jesus died, the power of our old life of sin and its grip of eternal death also died with him. This means that just as Jesus came back to a new life, we too have been given a new life to live with God. As you go down into the water and then rise up again, it is a picture of this.

(iii) Baptism is like an identity parade

Just before I got baptised, a friend asked me this profound question: *'If it suddenly became illegal to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'* It was a real challenge because I had hidden my life with Jesus from others and I was embarrassed to be called a Christian. I decided to put this right by being baptised and allowing others to see me publicly identifying with Jesus. In this sense baptism is like an identity parade that marks you out as one of Jesus' followers no matter what the cost.

In Mark 8: 31-38 Jesus tells us as his followers that it will cost him his life in order to be able to forgive our sin and give us new life with God (v.31+32). But then Jesus goes on to tell us that if we are really going to follow him, we must be willing to pay the price of being publicly known as his. Baptism identifies with Jesus in every way, including his sufferings, so that we might receive eternal life as we follow him. It is therefore a great opportunity to invite family and friends so that they can see your commitment to Christ and think through what it would mean for them to follow Jesus. The Church will therefore do the service in a way that helps them to feel comfortable and able to think this all through.

WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO?

You will be asked to simply explain how you have come to know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. You will then make some baptism vows before the congregation. Finally, you will be helped into the baptism pool or the sea and gently lowered into the water and out again. A friend will give you a towel and help you out to get changed.

Baptisms are a time of real celebration as we express commitment to Jesus. It gives God pleasure to see you obeying him and expressing devotion to him, it can be a significant help for those who are not yet Christians and most of all it is a wonderful experience that you will never regret. One lady who recently got baptised said; *"even though I was really nervous, it was the best thing I've ever done!"*