

Infant Baptism



Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

Baptism and the Reformed Tradition

Just what is baptism? In short, baptism is the way that we believe people come into the covenant community of God- that is, the Church. Jesus commanded his disciples to go out and baptize people everywhere they took His Jesus. In the Reformed tradition, of which Chapel Hill and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church are a part, that makes baptism one of the two sacraments ordained by Jesus (the other being the Lord's Supper- Communion). Sacraments are holy signs and seals of God's Covenant of Grace. In this manner, baptism is:

- ♦ A sign of God's forgiveness and redemption.
- ♦ A seal that marks us as His adopted children.
- ♦ A celebration of God's grace.

The EPC Book of Order says this about baptism:

"By the act of baptism, a person becomes a part of the visible Church, for it is a sign and a seal of the Covenant of Grace for believers and their children. As a sign, it proclaims God's forgiveness and our redemption in Jesus Christ. As a seal, God marks us as adopted children of our heavenly Father. It indicates our engrafting into Christ, our rebirth, the remission of sins, and our ability by the power of the Spirit to walk in newness of life. This sacrament is to be continued by God's people until the end of the world."

Baptism and the Bible

So where did this sacrament come from? If baptism is a sign and seal of God's Covenant of Grace, which came in fullness in the person of Jesus Christ, we look to the Old Testament for the history of God's covenant with His people before Jesus came. Looking all the way back to Genesis, we remember that God saved Abraham through God's grace and his faith.

As a result, God stepped down and created a holy covenant with Abraham - the covenant of salvation. As a mark of this covenant, God gave a sign or symbol to be passed on to future generations. That sign? Circumcision.

So how did we move from circumcision to baptism? Jesus Christ! He fulfilled the Law laid down in the Old Testament.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17-18)

Just as animal sacrifices were replaced by the ultimate Sacrificial Lamb in Jesus, the Lord's Supper took the place of Passover. Similarly, baptism takes the place of circumcision as the sign of salvation. Consider the following three questions:

	Old Testament	New Testament
What was the sign of a person who believed in the God of Abraham and trusted in Him?	He was circumcised	He was baptized
What was the outward event that represented the clean heart?	Circumcision	Baptism
What was the sign that marked a person's entrance into the community of believers?	Circumcision	Baptism

The Apostle Paul confirms this in Colossians 2:11-12, *"...in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands...having been buried with Him in baptism."*

Baptism and the Community of Faith

So who should be baptized? In Genesis 17, God instructs Abraham to apply the sign of salvation he received to children born into his house. In fact, throughout the Bible, we see example after example of God's grace and judgment being worked out through families:

- ◆ Noah - Genesis 6
- ◆ Abraham - Genesis 17:7
- ◆ Solomon - 1 Kings 11:11-12
- ◆ Jewish Official - Matt 9:18-19, 23-26
- ◆ Father of the epileptic boy - Matt 17:14-18
- ◆ Widow who lost her son - Luke 7:11-17
- ◆ Zacchaeus - Luke 19:9
- ◆ Pentecost - Acts 2:39

In the examples listed above, the faith of the parents set apart their families for God and brought them into the community of faith. In our tradition, where we believe that salvation comes from God and not ourselves, and where we believe that baptism is the sign of salvation and how we enter the community of faith, it is only natural that we would include our children in the community of faith. And just as Abraham made a covenant with God, parents are making a covenant in baptizing their children and marking them as "set apart" before God.

At Chapel Hill, we call adults who are committed to our community "members," and we require that at least one parent of a child being baptized be a member of our church. When we baptize adults, it is typically in conjunction with our membership class. When we baptize children, we commit as a church family to provide every opportunity for these children to grow in their faith, and they can confirm their membership as teens in our annual Confirmation class.

Baptism and Parents

This covenant -- or promise -- made to God and before your church family should not be entered into lightly. You are making a commitment to establish a home that is centered on Christ Jesus...that you will raise your children as God directed. Baptism is not a social ceremony, nor is it the "ultimate fire insurance!"

Remember, baptism is an outward sign of salvation...it does not replace God's gift of grace that we are saved by faith. And this personal faith is to be lived out each and every day in your home.

Setting your home as a covenant home means you commit to prioritize the spiritual growth of your children along with all the other aspects valued today (education, sports, music, etc.) Pray with your children. Read the Bible together. Let your children see your own faith through prayer, study and service.

Before entering into this covenant with God, read the vows you will publicly make:

Do you acknowledge (name of child's) need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?

Do you claim God's covenant promises and benefits for (child's name) and by faith do you look to the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of your child as you do your own?

Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and do you promise by relying on God's power and grace through the Holy Spirit to live an exemplary life before your child?

Do you commit yourself to pray with and for your child, to teach your child the Scriptures and the great articles of our faith in Jesus Christ?

Do you promise to use every means provided by God, including faithful participation in the life of the Church, to bring your child up in the loving discipline of the Lord?

Baptism at Chapel Hill

If you desire to baptize your child at Chapel Hill, it is as easy as 1,2,3:

- 1) One parent is required to be a member of Chapel Hill. To find out more about becoming a member, please contact Tina Picard at tpicard@chapelhillpc.org or sign up for Chapel Hill 101 at chapelhillpc.org/connect
- 2) Complete the online Baptism Request Form found on our website at: chapelhillpc.org/connect
- 3) We offer water baptism during worship services that can be scheduled by contacting Sharalynda Campbell at scampbell@chapelhillpc.org.

That's it! We will make sure you have seats near the front on the Sunday you schedule and encourage you to invite your family and friends to stand with you as you make this commitment to raise your child before God.

¹ Constitution: Volume 1, The Book of Order, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Page 139. S3-2.

Brochure was created using excerpts and summarizing the Booklet, "What Christian Parents Should Know About Infant Baptism," by John P. Sartelle.



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