

What Is Baptism?

The Sign of Christian Allegiance

When I was young, my father, who worked at a Federal District Court, took me to see a Naturalization ceremony. The courtroom was filled with people from all around the world, ready to become US citizens. After classes and exams, they were ready for this momentous occasion. And with a few words of allegiance to the country, the judge proclaimed them US citizens. They cheered and cried and waved small flags. It was a joyous day for them!

When we become Christians, we join another kingdom, the kingdom of God! We become citizens of this new kingdom. Our “Naturalization ceremony,” however, comes in the form of Baptism. Baptism is the act where we proclaim our Christian Allegiance to the world. Baptism is the sign that we are “transferring” our citizenship from the world to God’s kingdom.

Every Christian is called to proclaim their allegiance through baptism. Our Master, Jesus Christ, called us to be baptized and to baptize all who want to follow him. Before he left his disciples, Jesus said, “As you go, make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 28:16-20).” If our Master commands us to do something, then as Christians, we obey.

We obey the command of baptism even if we do not understand all that it means. But of course it is better to understand than not understand. So, what is baptism? Why does the Christian sign of allegiance involve water anyway? And what is involved in baptism?

The ceremony of baptism involves a few things. First are the words of allegiance. Sometimes you will hear the person share his/her testimony. Sometimes he/she answers a few questions posed by the pastor, such as, “Do you claim Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?” Since baptism is a public profession of one’s faith, the person to be baptized often proclaims one’s faith with a few words.

Second, baptism involves water. Titus 3:5 states that God our Savior, “saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy

Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.” Baptism is a sign of washing, and the water is a sign of the Holy Spirit participating in making us new people. Baptism is also connected to birth. Just as water is involved in the birth of a baby, water reminds us in baptism that a person is being reborn!

As baptism reminds us of birth, it also reminds us of death. This is why sometimes Christians will immerse new Christians for baptism. We fall under the waters, like we are being buried underground. In this act, we associate ourselves with Christ who laid down his life for us. But just like Jesus, we rise from the waters into new life! This is why Romans 6 says,

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Baptism points both to our present new life and to our future resurrection when we will live in God's Kingdom eternally. Our hope, past, present, and future, is bound up in the sign of baptism.

If you would like to read more about baptism in the Bible, I suggest these passages!

John the Baptist baptizes Jesus: Matthew 3
Jesus commands us to baptize: Matthew 28:16-20
The first Christians are baptized: Acts 2:36-47
The Ethiopian is baptized: Acts 8:26-40
Paul is baptized: Acts 9:1-19
Cornelius is baptized: Acts 10

We are baptized in Christ's death: Romans 6
We are clothed in Christ: Galatians 3:26-29
We are washed by the Holy Spirit: Titus 3:3-8