
What is baptism?

Baptism is one of two sacraments which Jesus gave to his Church. In each sacrament important gospel truths are declared by word and by action.

What truths are declared?

First, the water we use in baptism points to our need of forgiveness and cleansing. In baptism parents acknowledge that they have received the forgiveness of sins and are admitting that their child is a sinner and needs to be forgiven also.

BUT the water of baptism does not wash away sin; it does not make the child a Christian. Rather it points to our need of forgiveness and to Jesus Christ through whom alone sin can be forgiven. A child is baptised in faith that God will, in His own time, forgive his sins. In this case, baptism looks forward to the time when the child will profess their own faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, the water which is poured or sprinkled is a picture of the Holy Spirit whom God sends to all those whose sins are forgiven. This is what the Bible calls the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

What must I do?

The requirements for having a child baptised are clearly set down by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

"Baptism shall be administered to those who make a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to their infant children. It shall be administered in all cases by a minister and, as far as possible, it shall be administered publicly. Sacramental discipline is the responsibility of the Kirk Session." Code 39.1,2.

A basic requirement in requesting baptism for a child therefore is that **at least one of the parents professes a personal faith in Jesus Christ, is a communicant member and is attending church regularly.** They will then be required to answer the following two questions which will be explained further by the minister when he calls.

The First Question

"Do you confess your faith in God as your heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit as your Sanctifier?"

What does it mean?

It means that, in the presence of God and His Church, you are declaring your personal faith in God as the One who loves you and has adopted you into his family; you are affirming that Jesus Christ is your Saviour and the Lord of your life, and that your chief desire in life is to love and obey him; and you are declaring that each day you are living the Christian life by the help of the Holy Spirit, longing to be more like Christ in word, thought and deed. That is, you are declaring publicly that you are a Christian, forgiven through the precious blood of Jesus Christ and born again of the Holy Spirit.

The Second Question.

"Do you promise, in dependence on divine grace, to teach him/her the truths and duties of the Christian faith; and by prayer, teaching and example to bring him/her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and in the ways of the Church of God?"

Why is this question asked?

Since baptism does not make the child a Christian, the parent/s are affirming that

they will use all the God-given means to seek the conversion of their child. Since such truths are clearly set forward in the fellowship of the Church, the parent/s will endeavour, from the earliest days, to accompany their child to worship, and, within the home, will make bible reading and prayer as much part of the child's upbringing as the food he must eat.

What does the word credible mean?

Simply that it is not enough just to answer 'yes' to these questions. If a person honestly means what he/she says, then the Bible encourages us to expect to see in that person's life a degree of love, loyalty and obedience to God, and an interest in the life and work of the Church, including regular attendance at public worship and prayer.

What if I cannot take these vows?

You should seriously consider your own eternal welfare. Today is the day of salvation and you should repent of your sin and put your whole trust in Jesus Christ alone to save you. You should never say you are a Christian just to have your child baptised, as it is an extremely serious

thing to tell lies before God.

But what about my child?

Your child cannot be made healthier, happier, richer, better or wiser by having water put on his head. That is sheer superstition. The best thing you can do for your child is to become a Christian yourself.

Should you wish to discuss these matters any further, the minister will be glad to call with you at your convenience.

Tel 028 9182 8361

For further reading:

What Christian parents should know by John Sartelle
Signs and Seals of the Covenant by C G Kirby
Mode and Subjects of Baptism by Charles Hodge

*Information issued by the kirk session of
Greenwell Street Presbyterian Church
Newtownards
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*What
parents
need to
know about
Covenant
Baptism*