
The Sacrament of Holy Baptism



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This brief introduction to Holy Baptism is for all those considering baptism at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, either for themselves or for a family member. While this summary is by no means exhaustive, we hope it will answer questions and help you, your family, and the candidate's sponsors to prepare for this first step in the life journey of a Christian.

When Can One Be Baptized?

Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast. It is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil, on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saint's Day, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the first Sunday after The Epiphany). It is recommended that, as far as possible, baptisms be reserved for these holy days or occasions when a bishop is present. (*The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 298 and 312*).

Candidates for Baptism

Perhaps more important than the rubrics of the church in determining when one can be baptized is whether, by the grace of God, the candidate is receptive and ready for this most important rite to take place. True to its mission, the Church requires all candidates for Holy Baptism to confess their faith in Jesus Christ, evidence their commitment to Christ in daily living, and participate in the fellowship of their worshiping community. In the baptism of infants or small children, parents and sponsors make these pledges on their behalf; moreover, the Church asks that parents and sponsors will continue to raise children in the Christian faith and life. The prerequisites for Holy Baptism are therefore as follows:

- For an adolescent or adult, his or her expressed desire to be baptized.
- For a pre-adolescent child, his or her expressed desire, along with the consent of the parent(s) or guardian(s).
- For an infant, the expressed desire of the parent(s) or guardian(s) and assurance of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Preparation for Baptism

Prior to a scheduled Baptism, members of the clergy of St. Luke's meet with parents and godparents to discuss the theology and implications of this sacrament

Christian Baptism

Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond that God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble. (*Book of Common Prayer p.298*).

Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and resurrection. In this sacrament, God adopts us as God's children and incorporates us into Christ's Body and the Church. In Baptism we enter into the new covenant between God and God's people, and thus we are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of Matthew records that the risen Lord, when sending his disciples into the world, commanded them to baptize (Matt. 28:18-20). We read of the universal practice of baptism in letters of the New Testament, The Acts of the Apostles, and the writings of the church fathers. These writers recognized that Baptism is essential for the life of the Church, though it is not absolutely essential to salvation. We are baptized into the holy catholic Church and not into any one denomination of that Church. This bond that God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble and therefore we are baptized only one time.

The Meaning of Baptism

Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection

In baptism Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ; their sins are buried, the “old Adam” is crucified with Christ, and the power of sin is broken. Our proclivity to sin is buried with him as we are raised to new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Conversion, Pardoning, and Cleansing

The New Testament underlines the ethical implications of baptism by representing it as an absolution which washes the body with pure water, a cleansing of the heart of all sin, and an act of justification (*Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11*) Those baptized are pardoned, cleansed and sanctified by Christ and receive a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Gift of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism. This is the same Spirit who revealed Jesus as the Son and who empowered and united the disciples at Pentecost. As they are anointed, marked with a seal, God bestows upon newly baptized persons the promise of the Holy Spirit and inherits them as sons and daughters of God.



Jesus was
baptized
by John
in the
Jordan.

Incorporation into the Body of Christ

Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. We are one people, called to confess and serve one Lord. In recognizing baptismal unity in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, we witness together to the healing and reconciling love of God.

The Sign of the Kingdom

Baptism introduces the reality of a new life given in the midst of the present world. It offers participation in the community of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the Kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come.

Baptism and Faith

Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift. Although human hands perform the outward and visible signs in Baptism, God alone gives the inward and spiritual grace that those signs represent. That grace is a gift from God, and we must take care not to diminish the gift by making grace contingent on some work of our own, including a work of faith. At the same time, our commitment to the work of God's creation is necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ. Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but also to life-long growth in Christ.

Godparents

If the Candidate for Baptism is a child or young adult, parents invite sponsors, also called “godparents,” to take part in the service of Holy Baptism. These persons, between one and four in number and at least one of whom must be baptized, are responsible for seeing that the candidate is nurtured in the Christian faith and life, so they should be carefully chosen with this charge in mind. In extending the invitation to sponsors, parents should bear in mind not only the personal qualities of the individual but also the person's readiness to serve as spiritual mentor and guide to the person throughout his or her life. The Book of Common Prayer goes on to say that *sponsors of adults and older children present their candidates and thereby signify their endorsement of the candidates and their intention to support them by prayer and example in their Christian life. Sponsors of infants, commonly called godparents, present their candidates, make promises in their own names, and also take vows on behalf of their candidates.*

A Lifelong Journey

While baptism is something that happens only once in a one's life, it begins a process that takes a lifetime to accomplish. The shape of the life we promise to follow is outlined in the words of the Baptismal Covenant. The promises we make here are deeply serious and require much consideration and prayer. Alone, we may none of us live into them. Together as a community, however, and with God's grace, such a life is possible. Thus, all of the faithful join together to affirm in one voice, “We will with God's help!”

For more information, contact the clergy of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, (814) 942-1372.
