

Baptism

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Welcome

We rejoice every time someone is baptized into God's family at SPUMC. Baptisms are particularly special moments for us as a church. We've had the joy of baptizing many infants, children and adults at the altar during worship. Three of those children are Maura, Jacob and Nathan. Jacob and Nathan are 7 year old twins who asked to be baptized along with their baby sister Maura. During the baptism Jacob and Nathan answered "YES!" loudly when we asked them if they loved Jesus and wanted to be baptized and then they smiled and wiggled as they requested "more water!"

It's moments like these that remind us what baptism is all about. In baptism we come before our church family to eagerly receive God's grace. Baptism is the moment when we become a part of God's family and God claims us as a child of the Kingdom. We come as infants, children, youth and adults. We come as parents who are covenanting to raise our children in the church and guide them in choosing to follow Jesus and we come as those who speak for ourselves who knowingly stand in need of grace. This booklet is designed to help answer some of your questions about baptism and give you some of the details about baptism at SPUMC. This booklet, paired with our one hour baptism class is meant to help prepare you for one of the most important days in your faith journey. We are excited that you are exploring baptism for yourself or your child and we welcome the opportunity to talk with you more. Don't hesitate to call, email or stop by if we can help in any way.

Grace and Peace,
Nicole, Ron and Erica

FAQs About Baptism

Matthew 3:13-17 – Jesus was baptized

Matthew 28:16-20 – Jesus said we should be baptized

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 – Initiation into one body of Christ

What Is Baptism?

Baptism is a sacrament. In a sacrament, God uses common elements -- in this case, water -- as means or vehicles of divine grace. Baptism is administered by the church as the Body of Christ. It is the act of God through the grace of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is the difference between infant baptism and believer's baptism?

In all forms of Christian baptism, God claims those being baptized, whatever their age or ability to profess their faith, with divine grace. Clearly an infant can do nothing to save himself or herself, but is totally dependent on God's grace, as we all are - whatever our age. Most traditions that practice or recognize as valid the baptism only of believers - those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ for themselves in some public way - practice baptism not as a means of grace by which God saves and claims us, but rather as a further act of public profession and/or an act of obedience to the command of Christ that his followers be baptized. That is why these "believer's baptism only" traditions generally refer to baptism as an ordinance - an act ordained or commanded by Christ - rather than a sacrament. The term sacrament means "an oath" and refers to God's covenant with us (first of all) and ours in response to God's gracious provision of salvation in Jesus Christ. United Methodists recognize the baptism of "believers only" traditions, provided those traditions baptize people in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as generally understood in historic Christianity. We offer baptism to people of all ages who have not previously received Christian baptism in any form. We do not re-baptize those who have already received Christian baptism in any form. Even when the people being baptized are believing adults and are ready to profess their faith, our first emphasis is upon the gracious action of God who establishes the covenant of baptism with us rather than upon the individual's decision.

May we have our baby dedicated instead of baptized?

No. The theological understandings of the two services are very different.

Dedication is a human act - something we pledge or give to God. Baptism is a divine act, a pledge and gift God gives to us. Baptism of infants includes the reaffirmation of the vows of the baptismal covenant by parents, sponsors, and the congregation; but chiefly it celebrates what God is doing and will do in the life of the infant.

Isn't it better to wait until they are older and let our children decide for themselves if they want to be baptized?

No. We no more wait for our children to decide about being in the family of God than we wait for them to decide if they would like to be a part of our human family. As parents, we make many decisions - in matters of health, safety, education, for example - for our children. Of course, they may later reject what we have done for them. But this possibility does not relieve us of the responsibility to do all that we can for them spiritually, as we do in other aspects of their lives.

How about christening?

Christening is not a separate ritual, but rather historically part of the ritual of baptism. The use of the term *christening* for the sacrament probably comes from two sources: *chrism* is the word for the anointing oil traditionally used in baptism as a sign of the sealing by the Holy Spirit; second, in the past, children were sometimes actually given their (Christian) names in baptism. In our current ritual, parents are not asked for the name of the child, but the pastor does baptize with that name and without using the family or surname. This meaning of *christening* is expressed, for example, in a ceremony for the naming of a ship. Unfortunately, the term *christening* has been used sometimes in our history as a way of diminishing the significance of infant baptism or of indicating that it is something different from and less than the baptism of an adult. This view is completely inconsistent with the Wesleyan understanding as expressed in *By Water and the Spirit*, the Services of the Baptismal Covenant in our hymnal and book of worship, and *The Book of Discipline*..

Is sprinkling the only way that United Methodists baptize?

No, our church has always offered to people being baptized and to the parents of infants the choice of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.

May I be baptized again if I feel the need?

No, baptism is an act of God, and God does it right the first time. Our side of the covenant relationship with God will need recommitment and reaffirmation, but God always remains faithful to the divine side.

How can I "remember [my] baptism and be thankful" when I was baptized as a baby?

What we are called to remember in reaffirmation is the gift of God's grace, not a particular event. Through appropriate remembrances and celebrations, our children can be enabled to "remember" their baptism as much as they "remember" their physical birthday.

May a person who has not been baptized participate in Holy Communion?

Yes, our church does not seek to close God's Table, although the historic and normal Christian order of the sacraments is baptism first - as birth into the family - and Communion following, as continuing nurture at the family table. Pastors and congregations reach out and encourage those who partake at the Table to share fully in the life of God's people, including coming to the font after appropriate preparation.

Should every baby be baptized?

No, the baptism of a baby assumes that the child will be nurtured and formed in the faith at home and at church.

How do we express our own decisions to be Christian disciples if we have already been baptized as infants?

In services of profession of faith and confirmation before the congregation, we respond to God's grace by repenting of our sins, declaring our faith in Jesus Christ, and becoming professing members of the church.

Does baptism mean that I am saved?

No, salvation is a lifelong process during which we must continue to respond to God's grace. Baptism offers the promise that the Holy Spirit will always be working in our lives, but salvation requires our acceptance of that grace, trust in Christ, and ongoing growth in holiness as long as we live.

Do I have to be baptized in order to be saved?

No, but baptism is a gift of God's grace to be received as part of the journey of salvation. To refuse to accept baptism is to reject one of the means of grace that God offers us.

Does baptism make me a member of the church?

Yes, baptism is the act of initiation and incorporation into the universal church of Jesus Christ, The United Methodist Church, and the local congregation, as our ritual makes very clear. Being a "full member" usually means simply that "I have joined the institution; I have paid my dues." To be a "professing member" is to make a statement of commitment and participation in a community of disciples. Being a "professing member" expresses continuing action both within the faith community and in the world. It is a statement about an individual's ongoing relationship and commitment to God and the church through Jesus Christ.

Adapted from Dr. Gayle C. Felton and Peggy Sewell prepared this Q & A for the General Board of Discipleship. It was updated in 2008 by Taylor Burton-Edwards, Director of Worship Resources with The General Board of Discipleship.

Baptismal Covenant Liturgy

Opening Words

Baptism is a moment in the Christian community when we recognize God's grace drawing us to be part of God's family. Baptism is an act of naming and knowing one's identity. Baptism is a bond of love. [Parents names] have come this morning to make promises of faith and to claim God's gift.

Questions to Parents & Sponsors

You are God's children. Do you profess now your faith in Christ and put your whole trust in God's grace?

We do.

God chooses [child's name] as a child of the kingdom.

Do you promise to raise her/him as God's beloved child, to remind her/him as long as s/he is in your care to Whom s/he belongs?

We do.

Do you promise to teach her/him to love God, through your words and your deeds?

We do.

Do you promise to raise her/him as part of a Christian community, to bring her/him to worship, to tell her/him the story of our loving God, and to encourage her/him to choose the way of faith?

We do.

Baptism & Blessing

The Holy Spirit work within you that being born of water and the Spirit, you may be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Congregational Response

Members of the household of God, I commend this child to your love and care. Do all in your power to increase her/his faith, confirm her/his hope, and perfect her/him in love.

We give thanks for all that God has already given you and we welcome you in Christian love. As members together with you in the Body of Christ and in this congregation of the United Methodist Church, we renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service, that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

The God of all grace, who has called us to eternal glory in Christ, establish you and strengthen you by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you may live in grace and peace.

Your Child's Faith Journey

Spiritual Parenting

Parents are the primary faith influencers in their child's life. Churches are the parent's greatest partner.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. **Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.***

A Faith Journey

Baptism is often the beginning of our faith journeys. Throughout this life long journey there are several milestones:

- Baptism** (infants and children)
- Growing in Faith** (3rd grade Bibles)
- Confirmation** (7th/8th grade)

It is important to take time and remember each faith milestone in your faith journey. To help you do this, we recommend a faith journey box. This box can be set aside to hold important items in your faith journey such as your baptism certificate, a board book baby Bible, a special Sunday School craft, pictures from your baptism, membership certificates from confirmation, a special gift from your sponsor or god parent.

Remembering is an important Christian act. We remember by not only reading the stories from the Bible, but by reenacting the stories (Christmas pageants reenact the birth of Jesus, communion reenacts the Last Supper) and by hearing them new each Sunday. Each time we remember, we gain new insights into the significance of God in our lives.

Read the Story of Jesus Being Baptized

Matthew 3:1-16, Mark 1:1-11, and John 1:1-32

Read these stories with your children or tell them in words they can understand. John, the one who baptized Jesus, is an interesting character. Your child will be intrigued that he ate locusts and honey and lived in the wilderness. The important focus in this story, though, is on the messages from God that claim Jesus as God's own.

As with any Bible story you want to experience with your child, draw pictures of it, make it out of play dough, or act it out!

Remember Your Child's Baptism and Your Own Baptism

Look at pictures and/or videos of your own and your child's baptisms and tell stories of each baptism day. You can put baptism pictures all in one small scrapbook together. Then you can read your baptism book even with very young children. It's also fun to gather memories of baptisms from other people who were there: grandparents, other family and friends, godparents or sponsors, and even the pastor if you can. This is the story of the day when God gave a beloved child the gift of grace and forgiveness for their whole lives! The family of faith was there to promise to love and support that child in their own faith journey and promised to help that child grow. What an important day to remember!

Celebrate

Each milestone recognizes a child's accomplishments on a life time faith journey. Faith milestones should be recognized, like academic milestones, with a great celebration. Therefore, we hold celebrations for each child's accomplishments along the journey. We hope that you also hold a celebration for your child. This can be a big party or a small intimate family dinner. Take time to recognize with your family that your child is growing in faith. Faith journeys can become stagnate without work. Growing in faith is a big accomplishment!

Live The Vows

- As baptized Christians, it is important that we take our baptism seriously and claim it as part of who we are each day. We can live into the vows we take at our own baptism or affirm in our confirmation and the vows we take at the baptisms of other Christians. Helping children live into these promises even when they are young helps form their identity as Christians.
- Get to know the people who are baptized in your congregation and their families. How can you “pray for them” and “surround them with love and forgiveness” as the Baptismal Covenant says if you don’t know them?
- Be involved in your congregation and in reaching out beyond the church walls. Once we are claimed by God, everything we do is in God’s name. So, giving back to the community of faith and doing God’s work in the world are important ways we show our gratitude for the goodness of God. Making this language part of your regular life will help your child understand that this is normal, but important.
- Reaffirm your baptismal vows with the congregation.
- Prepare for confirmation with your child. Help them know that when they reach an appropriate age, they will get to affirm their commitment to the promises you made for them at their baptism. They will get to tell the church community how important those promises are in their life.
- Ask other adults in the congregation to be active in their baptismal vows by being prayer partners or faith mentors with your child. Other adult influences in your child’s life can support their Christian formation.

When There is a Baptism in Worship

If claiming your baptism is a regular part of your family life, it will not be unusual or hard to remember and talk about baptism when there is a baptism at church. Talk with your child about how there will be a baptism in worship. Recall the time when they were baptized. If it is a story you tell often, they will have ownership of that learned memory. Follow along with the liturgy in the hymnal and help your child read the congregational responses with you. Try to speak to the family after worship. Say a prayer with your child for the newly baptized child and the family and think of ways your family can support that child.

Conclusion

Baptism is one of our two sacraments in the United Methodist Church. It is a sign of our identity as Christians and should be celebrated often, if not daily! It is hoped that this information will help you and your child live more fully as baptized Christians together.

Faith Routines By Age

Preschool Routine Focus: Bedtime

Each night follow a routine that creates faith practices.

Bath time

Bath time is a great time to tell Bible stories about water. Here are a few:

Creation: Genesis 1:6-13 and Genesis 2:4b-14

Noah's Ark: Genesis 6-9

Water into Blood: Exodus 7:14-25

Moses Parts the Sea: Exodus 14:1-30

Water from a Rock: Exodus 17:1-7

Jonah and the Whale: Jonah 1-4

Jesus' Baptism: Matthew 3:13-17

House on the Rock: Matthew 7: 24-27

Jesus Calms the Storm: Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus Walking on Water: Matthew 14:22-33

Wedding at Cana: John 2: 1-12

Jesus Heals the Blind Man: John 9:1-41

Jesus Calls the Disciples: Luke 5: 1-11

Story time

For babies, buy a Bible board book with a few of your favorite stories. These Bibles taste great and have wonderful pictures. For Preschoolers, use *My First Hands-On Bible* published by Group. This Bible has a lot of stories, great picture, follow up activities and questions, and prayers.

Prayer time

At the end of tuck in time, say a prayer. There is no one way to pray. It doesn't need to be "churchy." You can say the Lord's Prayer. Here is an open ended prayer to help you get started:

Dear God, Thank you for today. I am grateful that I got to (go outside for recess.) I hope tomorrow (Sara comes over to play.) Please God be with (my friend Sue who has trouble on her spelling tests.) Help me be a good girl/boy. Please help mom and dad be good and patient parents. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Praying With Preschoolers

Even as adults, Jesus' disciples asked for instructions on how to pray. How much more so do our young preschoolers need to see us model prayer and show them how to pray? Here's what you can do.

Teach thankfulness

First Thessalonians 5:18 reminds us to be thankful in all circumstances.

Teaching preschoolers to say thank you to God is a simple part of teaching them to pray. Ask children to tell you what they're thankful for, and encourage them to tell God, too.

Create prayer journals

Help preschoolers create a prayer journal in notebooks or stapled construction paper booklets. Preschoolers can draw pictures to represent their prayers, write simple words with help, or have you write their thoughts.

Include a page for giving thanks, one for requests for people in their lives, one for things they need help with, and a praise page where kids can record answers to prayer. Encourage children to review their prayer journals every week to instill the habit of prayer in their lives.

Pray aloud with children

Children learn through our modeling, and even the youngest preschooler can understand that prayer is simply talking to God. When children see you pray, they'll do the same. Pray with kids when your ministry begins. As kids get more comfortable, encourage them to pray along with you. Try these prayer sentences to start, and encourage preschoolers to fill in their prayers after you've set the example:

- Dear God, thank you for
- Dear God, please help ...
- Dear God, please help me to not ...
- Dear God, please show me how to
- Dear God, please help this person who ...
- Dear God, please forgive me for ...
- Dear God, I am sorry for ...
- Dear God, I want to help my parents by ...
- Dear God, thank you for making me good at ...
- Dear God, I can help at home by ...
- Dear God, I can share my ...
- Dear God, please help me to ...

The more you model prayer with your preschoolers and make it an integral part of your ministry, the more they'll see the power and importance of talking with God.

Elementary Routine Focus: Dinner Time

Follow a dinner time routine that creates faith practices.

3 or 4 Times a Week

Children in families that sit down to eat dinner together 3 or more times a week eat healthier, get better grades in school, are less stressed, and are less likely to use drugs. Parents are more likely to know what is going on in their children's lives and be aware of serious problems. With all the good coming from these family dinners we think their spiritual lives will be better too.

Prayer

Begin each meal with prayer. Here is one to help you get started:

Creator God, Thank you for this meal. Thank you for all the people who helped grow, deliver, and make this meal. Help this food nourish my body so that I can serve you in all that I do. Amen.

Talk Together

No TV, radio, phones, tablets, etc. This is time for you to ask your children how they are doing, what they like, what their friends are talking about, what their greatest challenges are, or what type of person they want to be when they grow up. Ask open ended questions and follow up questions such as what did you enjoy about school today, why is brother bear your favorite character in the book, or what do you think made the math test so hard. Don't stop there! Ask how they saw God working in their lives during the day. Share about your day and where you saw God working in your life.

A Baptism Celebration: Ages 4+ (after being baptized)

This tradition allows family members to celebrate their baptisms annually through a short liturgy. Though infants cannot make their own statements of faith, they are baptized into the community of faith as a reminder of God's covenant promises to us. God chooses us and claims us even before we are aware of God.

Materials

Small bottle of water

Cake

Picture of baptism/baptismal celebrations (optional)

How To

1. Begin by saying “for each of us the day of our baptism was a very special day. Though we are a part of own family sitting here, we are also a part of God’s family. Today we are going to remember this important part of our journey of faith.”
2. If family members were baptized as infants say, “Since we were babies when we baptized, we don’t remember it, but we know that even then, God had chosen us and made us a part of God’s family.”
3. Continue, “Water is an important symbol in the Bible. God created the water; Moses parted the Red Sea; Jesus was baptized with water. Baptism with water is a symbol of our new life with Jesus. When we were baptized we were baptized with water.”
4. Tell stories about the children’s baptisms or ask them to tell stories about their experiences (if they were old enough to remember). If you have pictures of that day, share them at this point.
5. Conclude the liturgy portion of the tradition by taking turns making the sign of the cross on one another’s palms with the water. Say, (Name), remember your baptism, and be thankful.” Everyone says, “Amen”.
6. Celebrate by having cake!

A Baptism Day Prayer for Families with Young Children

Loving God, thank you for your child, Name, who you love so much! Today we remember her/his baptism and we are grateful for your gifts of love and grace. God, continue to strengthen Name in your love through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Help her/him to keep growing in your love. We remember Name’s baptism and we are very thankful! We love you God and thank you for loving us. Amen.

Notes

- Consider using water that is somehow special to your family’s faith journey. For example, if the family has the opportunity to visit the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized, take home water from it or bring home the water from the day of your child’s baptism.
- The reason family members make the sign of the cross on each other’s hands rather than foreheads is to emphasize the difference between the actual moment of baptism and this remembrance of it.

Variations

Put rocks in a bowl of water, and ask each family member to reach in and draw out a rock to remember his or her baptism.

Celebrate one person’s baptism each year. Alternate who is celebrated from year to year.

Blessings

Blessing Your Child

Blessings are “the intentional act of speaking God’s favor and power into someone’s life, often accompanied by a symbolic gesture such as laying hands on the person.” Blessings are from God. When we give a blessing we become a way in which God flows through us to another. We believe in a priesthood of all believers, therefore, it is appropriate for spiritual leader, for you, to bless others. You are a channel of God’s blessings.

“People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.”

Mark 10:15-16

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Numbers 6:22-27

On Blessing Your Child

Blessings...

1. Exalt God as the source of all blessings
2. Have a forward view
3. Give your children a vision for what you desire for them
4. Speak words of affirmation
5. Express high value
6. Can be a means of comfort and reassurance
7. Can help heal breached relationships
8. Can help strengthen the bonds of affection between children and parents
9. Encourages parents in their roles as spiritual leaders

When giving a blessing...

1. Eye to eye contact
2. Touch: shoulder, back, head, hug
3. Write blessing on note card
4. Memorize the blessings: use same blessing for 2 weeks
5. Write your own blessings

Baby Blessings

“Now I am giving you to the Lord, and you will belong to the Lord your whole Life.”

(1 Samuel 1:28)

“May God be your God from the moment you are born.”

(Psalm 22:10)

“God saw you before you were born. Every day of your life was recorded in his book.”

(Psalm 139:16)

“The Lord called you before your birth; from within the womb he called you by name.”

(Isaiah 49:1)

“Christ will make his home in your heart as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong.”

(Ephesians 3:17)

“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished.”

(Philippians 1:6)

“May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.”

(2 Peter 1:2)

Blessings for Your Child's Faith Commitment

"May God bless you and make you a blessing to others."
(Genesis 12:2)

"May God bless you and surround you with his shield of love."
(Psalm 5:12)

"May God fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him."
(Romans 15:13)

"May the God of peace make you holy and keep you blameless."
(1 Thessalonians 5:23)

"May you overflow with grace and peace as you grow to know your Savior."
(2 Peter 1:2)

"May God who began a good work in you keep it growing until it's complete."
(Philippians 1:6)

"As Christ dwells in your heart by faith, may you be rooted and established in love."
(Ephesians 3:17)

"May God show you the way of life and fill your heart with joy in his presence."
(Psalm 16:11)

"As you hunger and thirst for righteousness, may God fill your desire."
(Matthew 5:6)

"May you know God's love that's bigger than knowledge."
(Ephesians 3:19)

Don't Be Shy!

If you have any questions, please contact us.

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