

BAPTISM



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
of Evergreen evergreenumc.org



“There is one baptism, which is the outward sign our own Lord has been pleased to appoint of all that inward and spiritual grace which he is continually bestowing upon his church. It is likewise a precious means whereby this faith and hope are given to those that diligently seek him.”

John Wesley, Sermon 74: Of the Church

HOLY BAPTISM

Congratulations on your decision to have your child baptized. Baptism represents an important moment in the life of your child, your relationship with your child, and your child's and your relationship with God and the Church.

Together with other Protestant denominations, The United Methodist Church recognizes two sacraments - baptism and communion. A sacrament is a practice ordained by Jesus, with some physical symbol, which is a means of recognizing and experiencing God's grace for those who receive it in faith. Essentially, a sacrament is an "outward sign of an inward grace."

Since the early church, Christians have baptized infants and young children. The United Methodist Church stands within this long tradition of affirming that God's gift of grace is available to all persons, regardless of age, and that all persons are in need of grace. While many denominations practice "believers baptism," meaning people are baptized only when they can make a personal confession of faith, United Methodists continue to see the baptism of infants and young children as an important expression of our faith.

When you decide to baptize your child, you are acknowledging and celebrating their identity as a child of God, claimed and loved by God. Baptism is the beginning of a lifelong journey as a follower of Jesus. As your child grows, they will have many opportunities to reaffirm this commitment to Christ. Indeed, as children reach an age when

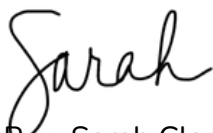
they can make decisions for themselves, The United Methodist Church invites them to become professing members of a local congregation by taking the vows of membership, which may include a reaffirmation of baptism.

Through this guide, you will learn more about the liturgy and theology of baptism for infants and young children. While very similar, this baptismal covenant is not used for persons who can answer for themselves. The *red italicized* print provides direction on how the sacrament will be conducted. The plain print is taken directly from the baptismal covenant published in *The United Methodist Hymnal* with responses given in **bold**.

Accompanying most sections of the liturgy is a commentary to help you better understand that aspect of the liturgy. There are also questions for reflection.

This is a special and blessed time in the life of your child and your family. As you read and reflect on the service, please feel free to reach out to me to share your questions and thoughts.

Grace, Peace, and All The Best Things,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah". The script is fluid and cursive, with the 'S' being particularly large and looping.

Rev. Sarah Clark, Pastor

pastorsarah@evergreenumc.org

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE

The pastor makes the following statement to the congregation:

Brothers and sisters in Christ:
through the Sacrament of Baptism
we are initiated into Christ's holy Church.
We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation
and given new birth through water and the Spirit.
All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

"All this is God's gift, offered to us without price," the pastor reads as the sacrament begins. The birth of your child is a gift from God. The love which sustains you and your child is a gift of God we receive in Jesus Christ. Throughout the trials and triumphs of parenting, God's grace keeps going. God's grace will surround your child as they grow up, giving them the desire and direction to join you and the whole church in becoming a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

First and foremost, baptism symbolizes God's commitment to your children and to you as parents. God has taken the first step toward us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God chooses us before we choose God; therefore baptism is primarily a celebration of God's dedication to love us, forgive us, and offer us grace.

In response to God's initiation, we make a commitment

to God in the sacrament of baptism. Vows are made on behalf of a child, and the congregation makes a vow to help raise your child in the faith. These pledges are an essential part of the sacrament but they are a response to the more important vow that God has made to our children and to us.

What is the divine gift that baptism symbolizes? It is the grace - unearned love - of God which is embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Throughout our lives we are surrounded by grace; but depending on where we are in our faith journey, we experience this grace in different ways.

Prevenient Grace: “Prevenient” means “to come before.” Prevenient grace is the grace God gives to every person before we know it, before we claim it, before we name it. One of the reasons we practice infant baptism - baptizing babies who don’t understand what is going on - is an expression of faith that God is already at work in their lives. Through this grace, God takes the initiative to invite us into a fulfilling and healing relationship with God.

Justifying Grace: When we put our trust in God to forgive us and we accept the reality that we are accepted by God, we experience “justifying grace.” We are justified not because of anything we’ve done, but by what God has done in God’s grace. It is a gift.

Sanctifying Grace: As we grow in our faith we become more like Christ. This too is a gift of the Spirit, maturing our faith and developing our actions and attitudes.

This process is lifelong and is called “sanctification” or “holiness.”

The baptism of an infant or small child most clearly symbolizes prevenient grace. Before children are aware of it, they are surrounded by this grace that prepares the way for their faith development. The waters of baptism and the vows that parents and the congregation make are a pledge to be channels of God’s prevenient grace to the child.

As your child grows up and comes to a point in life when they can independently choose to follow Jesus, we celebrate the ritual of confirmation. The Holy Spirit assures (“confirms”) the gift of justifying and sanctifying grace, and your child confirms a trust in God’s grace. The ritual of confirmation is a fulfillment of what began at baptism.

Baptism is a means of God’s grace throughout life when we remember those promises God has made to us and we have made to God. Parenting is an act of trust in God’s baptismal promises. And so, think of baptism not as a one-time ritual, but a life-long process of living in and responding to God’s grace.

PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES

A representative of the congregation presents the candidates:

I present *Name(s)* for baptism.

What is the difference between christening and baptism? A christening is the giving of a “Christian” name to a child, which is one part of the sacrament of baptism. But, as already mentioned, baptism is much more than a naming ceremony.

Representatives who present the child for baptism may be a parent and/or sponsor, who may be called a “godparent.” Being invited to be a child’s godparent is an honor and a responsibility. The United Methodist *Book of Worship* says that godparents should be chosen carefully because they will help nurture the person to be baptized into the Christian faith. While much has changed over time with the role of a godparent, the most important function remains the same: presence and nurture. A godparent is someone the baptized person can talk to, someone who cares and pays attention, someone who is willing to talk about anything, especially spiritual concerns.

RENUNCIATION OF SIN AND PROFESSION OF FAITH

The pastor addresses parents and/or other sponsors:

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,
reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin?

Questions for Reflection

What values, attitudes, practices, or behaviors in our society do you want to teach your child to live by? What values, attitudes, practices, or behaviors in our society do you want to teach your child to reject?

What “evil, injustice, or oppression” do you hope will be eliminated in your child’s lifetime?

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

Questions for Reflection

Envision your child 18 years from now. What kind of person would you like them to be? What character qualities would you like for them to exhibit?

Who is someone that you admire? What qualities of this person would you like to see your child learn and embody?

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?

Questions for Reflection

When is a time that you have put trust in God to care for you or someone you love? Where in your life as a parent do you need to put your trust in God?

How can the church support you as a parent?

What are different kinds of prejudice in our society?

What steps will you take, through your local church and your family, to teach your child to be “open to people of all ages, nations, and races”?

Will you nurture *these children* in Christ's holy Church,
that by your teaching and example they may be guided
to accept God's grace for themselves,
to profess their faith openly,
and to lead a Christian life?

Questions for Reflection

In what ways will you encourage your child to participate in a life of faith?

Are there particular groups, rituals, traditions, in the church that you are excited for your child to participate in?

Here are several different ways to teach your child about faith in your home. How might you incorporate one or more of these things into your life together?

- Praying before meals and at bedtime
- Reading Bible stories
- Celebrating Advent with an Advent wreath or Advent calendar
- Observing Lent by abstaining from something
- Collecting money for missions/tithing
- Serving together with the church community

The pastor addresses the congregation:

Do you, as Christ's body, the Church,
reaffirm both your rejection of sin
and your commitment to Christ?

Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life
and include these persons now before you in your care?

**With God's help, we will proclaim the good news and live
according to the example of Christ.**

**We will surround these persons
with a community of love and forgiveness,
that they may grow in their service to others.**

**We will pray for them,
that they may be true disciples
who walk in the way that leads to life.**

Why don't we practice private baptisms?

Baptism expresses our entrance into the Church. It signifies that we are a part of the body of Christ. In turn, the congregation makes a vow to raise the child by teaching and example. The congregation creates an environment of grace to nurture the child, and the Spirit uses the congregation as a channel of grace. Therefore, baptisms are to be performed as a part of a public act of worship. There are exceptions to this, for example, if a child is gravely ill. In those cases, the church is represented at the baptism and the baptism is celebrated at the next worship service.

The pastor addresses all:

Let us join together in professing the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.
Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy universal church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

The Apostles' Creed is recited to symbolize that the faith of the church is being passed on to a new generation. By the third century, the Apostles' Creed was commonly used as a statement of faith in the rite of baptism and has been widely used in baptisms ever since. This ancient summary of faith expresses the fundamental beliefs of all Christians regardless of denomination. By professing our faith in the form of questions and answers from the Apostles' Creed, we join with the Church universal across time and the world in an affirmation of faith in the Triune God, who was embodied in Jesus Christ, and who continues to work in the world.

Other creeds, such as the Nicene Creed or the Statement of Faith of the Korean Methodist Church may be used. These creeds are in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, numbers 883-889.

THANKSGIVING OVER THE WATER

The water may be poured into the font at this time, and the following prayer is offered:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Eternal God:

When nothing existed but chaos,
you swept across the dark waters
and brought forth light.

In the days of Noah
you saved those on the ark through water.
After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow.
When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt,
you led them to freedom through the sea.
Their children you brought through the Jordan
to the land which you promised.

Sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Tell of God's mercy each day.

In the fullness of time you sent Jesus,
nurtured in the water of a womb.
He was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit.
He called his disciples
to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection
and to make disciples of all nations.

**Declare Christ's work to the nations,
his glory among all the people.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit,
to bless this gift of water and those who receive it,
to wash away their sin
and clothe them in righteousness
throughout their lives,
that, dying and being raised with Christ,
they may share in his final victory.

**All praise to you, Eternal God,
through your Son Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit
lives and reigns forever.
Amen.**

Water is the central symbol of baptism. You may wonder, how much water is used? In The United Methodist Church, the waters of baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, which is lowering the person completely under water. All of these means have symbolic value and all are recognized modes of baptism.

The prayer of thanksgiving over the water recounts the biblical story of God's love for humanity. God is faithful throughout time to seek and save us. Even when our love fails, God's love remains steadfast.

Immediately after the administration of the water, the pastor places hands on the head of each candidate and invokes the work of the Holy Spirit. Persons nearby, including baptized members of the candidate's family, may join the pastor in this action. Others present may join by extending their hands toward the candidate. The pastor says to each:

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

If desired, one or more of the following acts may be added: anointing, presentation of new clothing, presentation of a baptismal candle, or presentation of a certificate of baptism. When all candidates have been baptized and have received the laying on of hands and/or other signs, the pastor invites the congregation to welcome them:

Now it is our joy to welcome
our new *sisters and brothers* in Christ.

**Through baptism
you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit
into God's new creation
and made to share in Christ's royal priesthood.
We are all one in Christ Jesus.
With joy and thanksgiving we welcome you
as *members* of the family of Christ.**

BAPTISM WITH LAYING ON OF HANDS

In all services of the baptismal covenant, water should be used generously as a living sign of the abundance of God's grace, cleansing, and life-giving power. Each candidate is baptized and receives the laying on of hands individually. The pastor uses the first name(s), but not the family name. As each candidate is baptized, the pastor says:

Name, I baptize you in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The Trinitarian formula (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is like the proper personal name for God. Since “god” is a generic term, the three-fold naming of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit identifies the specific god who marks us in baptism.

There is one God, not three. The Trinity reveals that at the core of God's being is a dynamic relationship of mutual love. As one ancient theologian put it, God is “the lover, the beloved, and the love that flows between them.”

The classic terms for God are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The masculine term “Father” can be a stumbling block for some. With legitimate concern, many have argued against using the term “Father” because it may support a patriarchal society or bring to mind negative

memories of earthly fathers, or give the false idea that God is male.

All language falls short of naming God. The United Methodist Church continues to baptize in the traditional Trinitarian formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because it is the language for God that scripture attributes to Jesus himself. "Father" is also an inherently relational term. Unlike the term "Creator," "Father" is personal and invites people into relationship with God. It is important to note that United Methodists also frequently use feminine imagery for God. To fail to use a variety of images for God is to fail to tell the whole story of who God is.

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit connects believers with the God of the Bible, the same God Jesus called "Father," the One who called Jesus "my Son, the beloved," the One whose Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus at his baptism - the One who we are baptized into and belong to as children of God.

COMMENDATION AND WELCOME

The pastor addresses the congregation:

Members of the household of God,
I commend *these persons* to your love and care.
Do all in your power to increase *their* faith,
confirm *their* hope, and perfect *them* 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, our service, and our witness,
that in everything God may be glorified
through Jesus Christ.**

The pastor addresses those baptized:

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

The service ends with a pledge from the congregation to be a channel of grace to your child. The baptism of your child is an occasion for the congregation to reaffirm their baptismal vows, which call every Christian to mission and ministry in the name of Jesus. The sacrament is a beautiful flow of God's pledge to the child and the parents and in turn the pledge of the congregation to be a conduit of God's pledge of grace so that when the child matures they will take their place in the congregation and be a channel of grace to others.

PREPARING FOR BAPTISM

When you are ready to schedule a baptism for your child (or for yourself), please reach out to Pastor Sarah to schedule a date for the baptism and a time to meet beforehand to discuss any questions you may have.

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