



the Source

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me...

I remember my own baptism. I was somewhere around the age of 10, and my family went to First Baptist Church of Houston (*or as we often affectionately referred to it, Six Flags Over Jesus*). I was among dozens of others and patiently waited my turn, as we walked into the large baptismal pool, gave the affirmations, and held my nose as I was dunked backwards into the cleansing waters.

I remember my daughter AnnaMarie's baptism, though she doesn't. She was four months old on an Easter Sunday when she was brought before St. Luke's UMC in Jackson, Mississippi for baptism. Kristen and I gave our profession of faith, we promised to "nurture her in Christ's holy Church", and the church promised to include AnnaMarie in the Christian faith and life of the church. We may have moved churches since then, but we're holding you all to the promise that St. Luke's UMC made on your behalf before you knew us! Don't worry - you're living up to the promise quite well.

AnnaMarie's baptism had a couple of hiccups, including a difficult-to-light baptismal candle, and the pastor forgetting part of the liturgy and losing his place among his notes, saying "I forgot my part, would you answer the question written before you?". You can see all of this yourself if search *AnnaMarieBapt* on YouTube.

The ritual around the act itself wasn't perfect, and we giggle about the imperfections in our recollections. We can do that largely because the perfection lies in what God does in the baptism. It is the door by which we enter the church, and is a profound symbol of the work God undertakes to bring salvation to us. I look forward to when AnnaMarie participates in Confirmation and affirms that grace which God has so freely offered to her.

— Robin Levins, First Church member

A Family Affair

Baptism is a special time for Christians. You can be baptized at any age but infant baptism is the Methodist tradition. If you are baptized as a baby, your family and your church are promising to help you follow God. If you are older, you are declaring to the world that you have Jesus in your heart. Do you remember your baptism? If you were baptized as a baby, perhaps have seen photos. Perhaps you have not been baptized and are looking forward to a special day. Talk to your parents and grandparents about baptism in your family. Together, read Matthew 3:13-17. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, declaring to everyone that he was committed to following God.

We follow Jesus' example when we are baptized. We show others that we are committing to our faith and choosing to walk with Jesus. On the day of your baptism, your church family promises to help you learn about Jesus and follow him. Together, think of times you feel supported by your church family. Are you learning new Bible stories in Sunday School? Has someone helped you learn how to pray aloud? Do you sing praises to God in the children's choir?

Dear Lord, thank you for loving us unconditionally. Help us strive to follow your path and show your love to others in this new year. Amen.

— Tammy Parks, Elementary Coordinator

Consider the Source Matthew 3:13-17

Monday: Matthew 3:13-17

Note that the gospel writer is being very careful to show that Jesus doesn't need to be baptized to wash sins away, but that he's doing it "to fulfill all righteousness".

- What confirmation are we given that being baptized was the right thing for Jesus to do?
- Do you think God reacts in a similar way to our baptism, even if it's not audible to the whole world in the same way?

Tuesday: Matthew 28:16-20

The United Methodist Church recognizes baptism as a sacrament precisely because Jesus commanded it. We also hold that the water itself isn't magical, but God does actually do something in the act of baptism that's more than symbolism. There are plenty of rituals or acts by which God could have called us into the family of faith.

- Why do you think baptism in particular was chosen for this task?

There are three primary directives in the Great Commission, besides baptism: (1) make disciples of all nations; (2) teach obedience to the commands of Christ; and (3) remember Jesus is with us always.

- Baptism seems connected to all three of these directives. How?

Wednesday: Acts 16:25-34

From the beginning, the church has seen family as important in baptism, including the baptism of infants not yet ready to make the decision for themselves. One can certainly partake in baptism and join the church separate from an unbelieving family, but when possible we like incorporating family into this holy sacrament.

- In this story, who is described as becoming "a believer in God"?
- Who is being baptized?

Thursday: Galatians 3:25-29

Paul speaks of baptism in very communal terms. He's very clear that in being baptized, you are joining a faith community. God's chosen people are those that would accept Christ and follow Him, and through baptism one becomes "heirs according to the promise".

Our baptisms are always open and public, and typically include a response from the congregation.

- Why is the faith community an important part of baptism?

Friday: Colossians 2:9-12

I love the imagery used in this passage - the "whole fullness of deity" dwells in Jesus, and it is with Jesus that we are "buried with him in baptism". It reminds us that baptism is only the beginning. It is the death of one's old self, and rising from the waters, we too are raised from this death into new life.

- Take some time to reflect on your own baptism.
- If you've not yet been baptized, reflect on whether you are ready to take this next incredible step in your life.