

Children and the Sacrament of Baptism



Second Presbyterian Church

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INTRODUCTION

There are few occasions more joyful and special than the presentation of a child for baptism! It is a special occasion when families and friends gather as this special step is taken.

This booklet is designed to provide basic information concerning the Sacrament of Baptism, including answers to questions commonly raised. It is offered as a means of helping parents prepare for the Baptism of their child. The second half of the booklet contains the complete order of service currently in use in Second Presbyterian Church, Staunton.

This booklet was written by the Rev. Dr. Daniel S. Williams, and is based on insights from the Bible, the *Book of Confessions* and *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and a previous booklet on the subject produced by The First Presbyterian Church, Hollidaysburg, PA.

Daniel S. Williams

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THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as part of the Protestant family of faith, recognizes two Sacraments, instituted by God and commended by Jesus Christ to the church. These Sacraments are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. When celebrated within the life of a worshiping community, the Sacraments communicate the presence and power of Christ as the gospel is displayed visibly.

A Sacrament is both an outward "sign" and an inward "seal" of God's grace. Baptism, as a sign, shows forth God's gracious gift of Jesus Christ to the world, and presents that gift as an offer to be responded to in joy and faith. It proclaims that we have been included by God in covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. As such, the sign of Baptism signifies

- the faithfulness of God
- the washing away of sin
- rebirth (being "born again"; see John 3:3-8)
- putting on the fresh garment of Christ
- being sealed by the Holy Spirit
- adoption into the covenant family of the church
- resurrection and illumination in Christ.

We are "sealed" in baptism when the outward sign of water meets with the inward reality of new life through Jesus Christ, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Whenever Baptism is celebrated, it is a proclamation of God's faithfulness, a reminder that the promises of the gospel are constant and sure. Baptism is also a reminder to us that life in Christ is marked by repentance, faithfulness, and discipleship.

Through Baptism, we are given both an identity and a commission. Our identity is that we are marked as God's own people ("in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"). Our commission is one of informed ministry in God's world ("teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] has commanded." Matthew 28:19-20).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT BAPTISM

Who may have their child baptized?

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) requires that at least one, and preferably both, parents be professing Christians, and ordinarily active members of this congregation. The reason for this begins with the understanding that the child is being baptized on the basis of the expressed faith of his/her parent(s). Parents exercise great influence over their children, and have a special opportunity to pass their faith on to their children, especially through the example they set. There is indeed a great advantage in growing up in a home where Christ is honored daily!

When and where is Baptism administered?

Baptism is an act of the whole church, where the mutual responsibilities of the parents, the Session, and the congregation are celebrated and affirmed. By direction of the *Directory of Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Sacrament of Baptism is to be celebrated during a service of worship, where the Word of God is proclaimed. Since Baptism is not merely a private act, but involves the entire community of faith, private celebrations of the Sacrament cannot be held except in extreme emergencies. As in all Baptisms, approval in such circumstances is at the discretion of the Session.

What about “Godparents?”

As has been presented above, Baptism recognizes a partnership between the parents, Session, and congregation in bringing up children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4) For this reason, there is no provision made for Godparents within the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Be assured, however, that grandparents, other children, and/or special friends who may be present for the service may stand with you around the Baptismal font during the Baptism, if desired. All guests attending the service must remain for the entire worship service, lest their departure distract the congregation from the intent of the service.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Cont'd)

What should we do if our child cries during the worship service?

Understandably for parents, this will seem to be a very disruptive situation, should it occur. However, crying is a natural means by which an infant communicates with his/her parents. If this occurs during the worship service, it should be seen as an indication of the broad spectrum of people who are included by God in the community of faith. Young and old alike, *especially* infants, are invited to be part of the worshiping fellowship. (See Mark 10:13-16)

If efforts made do not seem to calm the child within a short period of time, parents may do one of two things:

1. Take the child to the rear of the sanctuary or out into the narthex, and settle the child there. (walking with him/her, etc.)
2. Take the child to the nursery until it is time for the baptism.

In any event, let it be stressed again: your child has a right to be in worship! The pastor and congregation rejoice in the hope and vitality represented by our children, even when their presence is a little more evident than ordinarily is the case.

What specifics should we know about concerning the worship service?

The Sacrament of Baptism will follow the morning's sermon, which will (in part) direct the congregation's attention to the importance of the act. At the appropriate time, the pastor will invite the families presenting children for baptism and an Elder who will assist in the service to come to the front of the church to gather around the Baptismal font.

It is not necessary for your child to be clothed in a special outfit or dress, but neither is this prohibited. It does not matter who holds the child; it should be recognized that both parents stand for their child and together profess their faith, the faith in which they desire their child to be nurtured.

For specifics about the service, including the vows you will be asked to take, please refer to the service order included in this booklet.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Cont'd)

What is implied in the Baptismal vows for parents?

It is recognized that the child is a gift from God, entrusted to the parents for its safekeeping and nurture. The vows taken by parents during the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism have the following implications:

1. Regular attendance at Church School and worship, in order to be equipped, inspired, and strengthened for the task of Christian parenting. Through such discipline parents will be able to answer the child's questions, guide her/his thinking, and nurture his/her soul with honesty and integrity in those matters relating to our faith.
2. A worship of Jesus Christ in the home. Each day parents need to integrate their faith into daily living, in the beginning by guiding the child in prayers such as grace before meals and bedtime blessings. As the child grows, parents should seek to cultivate a love for the Bible, by reading stories to the child and talking about our heavenly Father. The first five years can be critical times for sowing the seed of faith in hearts and minds hungering to discover more about their world!
3. An encouragement of the child's participation in Church School and worship. Of course, this works best when parents teach by their own example.

How do we arrange for our child's Baptism?

1. Parents interested in having their child baptized should contact the Church Office (540/885-8159) and inform the pastor of their desire.
2. Parents should review this and other material on Baptism provided by the pastor, and then schedule an appointment to meet with the pastor to review the meaning of the Sacrament and the procedure for its administration.
3. The *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) requires that the Session meet with parents presenting children for baptism. At this

meeting, the Session receives the formal request of the parents for administration of the Sacrament, and has the opportunity to ask questions pertaining to the parents' faith and understanding of the implications of the Sacrament for them. The Session then takes action to approve the baptism.

This meeting with the Session is ordinarily held in Fellowship Hall thirty minutes before the worship service in which the Baptism is to occur.

BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus Christ commanded the church to make disciples of all nations. As Matthew 28:19-20 teaches, the process of making disciples involves baptism and instruction. Baptism and confirmation are opposite ends of this disciple-making process.

Confirmation speaks of the time when a child owns the vows made on his or her behalf at baptism. A Confirmation Class is offered in the Church School program in alternate years for middle school students.

This special class is an opportunity to strengthen what should occur in the child's life up to that point. The entire Church School program is geared towards providing instruction in the Christian faith, to assist parents in nurturing their children to the point of professing the baptismal vows as their own. The Confirmation Class will be a much richer experience if participants have laid the basic foundation of the Christian faith in Church School.

For information about classes in the Church School, and having your child enrolled on the church's Cradle Roll, please contact the Director of Christian Education by calling the church office. (540/885-8159)

CONCLUSION

The Baptism of a child is both an exciting event and awesome responsibility. But, as has been mentioned in this booklet, the Sacrament of Baptism proclaims in a unique and powerful way the commitment God has made to God's people. The same loving presence of God which attends the celebration of the Sacrament is available for the asking as parents and child continue to discover the joys of life together on the road of faith.

We at Second Presbyterian Church, Staunton, consider it both a joy and a privilege to share with you in this important occasion!

THE ORDER OF SERVICE

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

PRESENTATION

The minister addresses the baptismal group and the congregation:

Minister: **Hear the words of Jesus:**

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Hear also these words from Holy Scripture:

There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.

Minister: Obeying the Word of our Lord Jesus, and confident of his promises, we baptize those whom God has called.

In Baptism, God claims us, and seals us to show that we belong to God. God frees us from sin and death, uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice. Let us remember with joy our own baptism, as we celebrate this sacrament.

An Elder presents the candidates for Baptism:

Elder: On behalf of the Session, I present <Name>, son/daughter of <Names>, to receive the Sacrament of Baptism.

The minister addresses the parent(s) of infants and younger children:

Minister: Do you desire that your child be baptized?

Parents: **I do.**

Minister: Relying on God's grace, do you promise to live the Christian faith and to teach that faith to your child?

Parents: **I do.**

The minister addresses the congregation:

Minister: Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture <Name>, by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging *him/her* to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church?

People: WE DO.

RENUNCIATION AND AFFIRMATION

The minister asks the following questions of the candidates making a confession of faith or the parent(s):

Minister: Through baptism we enter the covenant God has established. Within this covenant God gives us new life, guards us from evil, and nurtures us in love. In embracing that covenant, we choose whom we will serve, by turning from evil and turning to Jesus Christ. As God embraces you within the covenant, I ask you to reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we baptize.

Minister: Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

Parents: **I do.**

Minister: Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

Parents: **I do.**

Minister: Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word, and showing his love?

Parents: **I will.**

Minister: With the whole church, let us confess our faith, by saying the Apostles' Creed: [*Apostles' Creed*]

THANKSGIVING OVER THE WATER

The minister shall invite the congregation to join in the responsive Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Minister: We give you thanks, Eternal God, for you nourish and sustain all living things by the gift of water. In the beginning of time, your Spirit moved over the watery chaos, calling forth order and life.

In the time of Noah, you destroyed evil by the waters of the flood, giving righteousness a new beginning. You led Israel out of slavery, through the waters of the sea, into the freedom of the promised land.

In the waters of Jordan, Jesus was baptized by John and anointed with your Spirit. By the baptism of his own death and resurrection, Christ set us free from sin and death, and opened the way to eternal life.

We thank you, O God, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. From it we are raised to share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Send your Spirit to move over this water, that it may be a fountain of deliverance and rebirth. Wash away the sin of *the one* cleansed by it. Raise *him/her* to new life, and graft *him/her* into the body of Christ. Pour out your Holy Spirit

upon *him/her*, that they may have power to do your will, and continue forever in the risen life of Christ. To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, be all praise, honor, and glory, now and forever. Amen.

People: Amen.

THE ACT OF BAPTIZING

Calling each person by his or her Christian (given) name, the minister pours or sprinkles water visibly and generously on the person's head, while saying:

Minister: <Name>, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

THE BLESSING

The minister lays hands on the head of the person baptized while saying:

Minister: O Lord, uphold <Name> by your Holy Spirit. Give (*him/her*) the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

The minister walks among the congregation and announces the following:

Minister: <Name>, child of the covenant, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and marked as Christ's own forever.

WELCOME

A representative of the Session addresses the congregation:

Elder: <Name> has been received into the one holy and apostolic church through baptism. God has made (*him/her*) a member of the household of God, to share with us in the priesthood of Christ. Let us welcome the newly baptized:

People: **With joy and thanksgiving, we welcome you into Christ's church; to share with us in his ministry, for we are all one in Christ.**

Minister: The peace of Christ be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

The service order for Baptism is from:

The Book of Common Worship
The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Louisville, KY
Copyright 1993

During the Baptism service, some prayers used may be different than the ones listed in this booklet. This would be done for the sake of providing variety to the worship service.

BAPTISM INFORMATION FORM

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lewis and Frederick Sts.

P.O. Box 175

Staunton, VA 24401

Please fill this form out completely and accurately, as this information will become part of the permanent Church Register. Please return a copy to the Church Office as soon as possible.

1. Child's full name . . . _____

Date of Birth _____

Place of Birth _____

2. Father's full name . . _____

Church membership _____

Address of Church . _____

3. Mother's full name . _____

(Please include maiden name)

Church membership _____

Address of Church . _____

4. Requested date for Baptism _____