

I need to know!

Baptism FAQ's

What is baptism?

- Baptism is the act of immersing a person in water as an outward sign of an inward turning to God as the sole-leader of one's life. It is a practice that has its roots in Jewish purification ceremonies. Baptism, as we know it today, can be traced back to the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3.1-12). Jesus, himself, was baptized by John and prescribed baptism for his followers (Matthew 3.13-17; 28.19-20). Though practiced in various forms today, immersion was fairly certainly the original practice, and was the most common form through the Middle-Ages.

Who should be baptized?

- We believe that the New Testament teaches that only those who have professed a faith in Jesus as the sole-leader of their life should be baptized. Jesus himself commanded his disciples that they should baptize those who chose to be his disciples (Matthew 28.19-20). In the book of Acts, we see that baptism was administered after people had heard about Jesus and chosen to accept his forgiveness and make him the sole-leader of their life (Acts 2.38-41; 8.26-40; 16.31-34).

What does baptism mean?

- According to Jesus, baptism was a sign that a person was choosing to identify with him (Matthew 28.19-20). Jesus commanded his followers to make others disciples, to lead people to a point of confessing Jesus' lordship over their life and the acceptance of his forgiveness of sin (See Romans 10.9-13). Jesus further instructed his disciples to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. More than just a formula, this three-fold name refers to the fullness of God, all that God is and will be, both in character and nature. By being baptized in 'this name,' one is visually identifying with all that God is and will be. In other words, the one being baptized is claiming to be part of what God is up to in the world. In the original context, baptism served as the first witness of a follower of Jesus, the first outward testimony to their friends and family that they were choosing to be a disciple of Jesus and thus making a break with their former way of life. The Apostle Paul develops this same thought in Romans 6. Here, Paul refers to baptism as a sign of dying to sin (one's old life and allegiances) and being raised to new life, a life of following Jesus (Romans 6.1-4).

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

- We do not believe that the Bible teaches that baptism is a necessary step to receive salvation. While multiple passages speak to the importance of baptism, specifically baptism as an expression of faith, we see that Jesus did not require baptism for salvation (Matthew 28.19-20; Acts 2.38-41; Acts 8.36-40; Acts 10.44-48). While on the cross, Jesus promised salvation to one who was being crucified with him (Luke 23.39-43). Rather, we believe that baptism is an outward sign of the inward decision to become a follower of Jesus. As such, this sign serves as one's first act of witness to the world regarding the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in one's life, specifically the forgiveness of sin and the granting of new life (2 Corinthians 5.16-21). The consistent practice in scripture was to baptize a person immediately upon their confession of faith (Acts 2.38-41). However, very early on, the Church required a waiting period for receiving baptism, in part to ensure the veracity of one's faith commitment.

What if I was baptized as an infant?

- Several Christian traditions engage in the practice of baptizing infants. The New Testament contains neither a prescription for nor prohibition against such a practice. Those Christian traditions that practice infant baptism do so as a sign of the forgiveness of Jesus brought about through his work on the cross and resurrection from the dead. To be baptized as an infant is to recognize the faith of one's parents and the regenerative work of God that is available to the infant through their family and the larger faith community of which their family is a part. However, most Christian traditions do not presume that such a baptism is the means which accomplishes forgiveness on behalf of the infant. Rather, the child must grow and become a part of the larger faith community. That is, they must come to a point at which they choose to identify both with Jesus as their sole-leader and with those who call themselves his followers, the church. At Union Center, we do not practice infant baptism, though we respect our fellow Christian brethren who do. We believe that baptism should be reserved for those who have expressed a faith commitment to Jesus. We agree with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, that a person must come to a point in their life that they choose to become a follower of Jesus. Further, we believe that the clearest testimony from Scripture teaches that baptism should only be administered to those who have made this decision as an outward testimony of God's forgiving and transforming work. Therefore, we encourage all people who have expressed a faith commitment to Jesus by asking for his forgiveness of sin and confessing him as the sole-leader of their life to be baptized.

Is baptism necessary for membership at Union Center?

- We do ask that all those who wish to become members of Union Center be baptized by immersion as followers of Jesus. It is our understanding that those who have chosen to follow Jesus will desire to obey him which includes following his command to be baptized. We ask that each person who desires to become a member express that they (1) have come to a point in their life where they have chosen to follow Jesus and accept his forgiveness of sin; (2) that they have attended Union Center for a period of time in order to understand our vision and mission; (3) that they agree to the Constitution, and By-laws of Union Center; and (4) that they live a life that strives for purity in keeping with the commands of Scripture. Those who find they are in agreement with these statements are encouraged to attend a Membership Class hosted by one of our Elders.