



kindergarten - 2nd grade

BAPTISM

Jesus' ministry on earth was bookended with the practice of baptism—first with his own baptism in the River Jordan (Matthew 9:13-17), and then with his final instructions to the disciples to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, emphasis added). For nearly 2,000 years, followers of Jesus have practiced the ritual of baptism, and over that time, churches have developed different ways of performing and understanding baptism (“immersion” vs. “sprinkling”; “believer” vs. “infant”; and so on). Yet all agree that baptism marks an important entry point into the life of faith and the community of believers. Here are a few ways to think about what baptism

represents:

Baptism as Promise.

There are many important promises made during a baptism—the parents' promise to raise their child in a Christian environment, the congregation's promise to nurture both child and family in love, the promise of the individual (if he or she is old enough) to follow God as a faithful member of the church. Of all the promises made, the one that is most important is God's—through Jesus, we are adopted as God's children, forgiven of our sins, and sealed in God's grace. This is a promise, and we can trust that God will fulfill what God has promised to do.

Baptism as Grace.

The Greek word for grace is *charis*, which means “gift.”

God's love and forgiveness are things we cannot earn, they are freely given to us by our Creator. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, argued for the existence of “prevenient” grace—grace that “comes before” our profession of faith. God's grace doesn't simply start at that moment when we confess our faith in Christ and pledge our lives to Him. Rather, our profession of faith is actually a response to God's goodness. In baptizing children, we affirm that God's love for them began “before the foundations of the world were laid” (Eph 1:9), and we believe that God will continue to work in their lives to help them understand and respond to that love as they grow.

Baptism as Identity.

When Jesus was baptized, scriptures say that the heavens opened and a dove descended upon Him, and a voice declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased!” We often

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forget the importance of that declaration. Everything that Jesus did—whether teaching the crowds or healing the sick or even dying on a cross—came from that identity. We all tend to draw our identity from something—from our gifts and abilities, from our achievements or possessions, from others' opinions of us. When we baptize a child (or an adult), we claim a new identity for them, one that is grounded in God's love instead of our performance. Moreover, we include them in a community of people who bear the same identity and are seeking to live out God's love within the world. Like Christ, we belong to God and are beloved in His sight. When children grow up seeing themselves in the light of God's love, great things are possible!