

The Sacrament of Baptism
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Anytime we have the privilege of baptizing someone, whoever it is, whatever their age, it is a joy and a celebration. It is also a time of remembering and commitment—remembering who we are and to whom we belong, and renewing our commitment to the God who loves and calls us. That is true for both the person being baptized, or, in the case of an infant, for the child’s parents, and for us as a congregation. Every baptism is an opportunity for us to reaffirm our baptismal vows, as Steve makes his vows for the first time this morning.

As one of our two sacraments, baptism proclaims the faith of the church. It is a visual sign of our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. In Baptism, we die to what separates us from God as we go under the water and we come out from the water raised to new life in Christ. It points us back to the grace of God expressed in Jesus who died and was raised for us, and it points us forward to that same Christ who will fulfill God’s purposes in God’s promised kingdom.

The water of Baptism symbolizes the water of creation, of the flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt, and as such, it links us to the goodness of God’s creation and to the grace of God’s covenants with Noah and Israel. Prophets of Israel, amidst the failure of their own generation to honor God’s covenant, called for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5:24) They envisioned a fresh expression of God’s grace and of creation’s goodness—a new covenant accompanied by the sprinkling of cleansing water. In his ministry, Jesus offered the gift of living water. So, Baptism is the sign and seal of God’s grace and covenant in Christ.

Just as circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with Israel, so Baptism is the sign and seal of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with the Church. As an identifying mark, Baptism signifies

- the faithfulness of God,
- the washing away of sin,
- rebirth,
- being sealed by the Holy Spirit,
- adoption into the covenant family of the Church, and

- resurrection with Christ

God's faithfulness signified in Baptism is constant and sure, even when our human faithfulness to God is not. Because God's faithfulness needs no renewal, baptism is received only once. But, because human faithfulness to God needs repeated renewal, we reaffirm our baptismal vows and our commitment to Christ at numerous stages of life. In doing so we acknowledge the grace of God continually at work in us and the call to respond to that grace through repentance, faithfulness and discipleship.

All of that meaning packed into a little water not because we randomly made it up, but because Jesus himself was baptized and taught us the meaning of his actions, then commanded us to go and do likewise.