

# MIRACLES | The Miracle of Baptism

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## Introduction

In our series called *Miracles* we're looking at the many miracles Jesus performed and hearing stories from individuals in our Grace Chapel family where the Divine intervened in impossible situations and turned them into miracles.

**Our hope is that through these miracle stories, God will build and stretch your faith.**

**Personal**—Soon after I'd given my life to Christ, I went back to Pittsburgh, where I grew up, and visited some old friends to share with them what God was doing in my life. I'll never forget one of the first responses I got, as I'm sharing about how God delivered me from years of addiction: "You're not one of those "born-again" Christians are you?" I just looked at my friend and said, "As a matter of fact, that's exactly what I am."

What we're going to talk about today is something Christ commanded every single believer to do—something He modeled for us as the **outward** symbol of the **inner** reality of being born again. Today we're talking about the miracle of baptism.

**SUBSTANCE  
SIGNIFICANCE  
SACRAMENT**

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## Substance

Throughout the history of the church, there have been multiple perspectives on what baptism is and why it matters.

1. There are those who would say that baptism is necessary for salvation and for the forgiveness of sin.

### **Acts 2:38**

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

### **1 Peter 3:21**

... and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . .

2. On the other hand, there are those—and we at Grace Chapel are counted among them—who say that we're saved by faith alone. The weight of Scripture backs up this viewpoint, and here are just a couple of examples.

## **Ephesians 2:8–9**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

## **Romans 10:9**

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

There is a danger with this second position, however, and that’s that we can focus so much on making the point that baptism doesn’t save you that **we unintentionally undermine and devalue the significance and importance of what baptism actually is.**

**Scripture shows that the sacrament of baptism  
is an extremely profound, crucial act of obedience  
that has tremendous significance and meaning  
for every single follower of Jesus.**

When you reach an age where you have an understanding of what Christ has done for you—how He rescued you from sin and offered you salvation by faith—and you’ve received that salvation, it’s time to get baptized, because **baptism is an act of obedience to Christ.**

## **Matthew 28:19**

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 . . .

The origin of the word *baptism* is the Greek word ***baptizo***, which means **to be fully immersed or to cleanse by submerging**. So we understand baptism to submersion in a body of water.

**Personal**—Our church plant in Washington met in an Elks lodge. You had to walk past two bars to get to the kids ministry area, and the sanctuary was a dance floor. We had our first baptism service in 2012, and we used a horse trough as a baptismal. Thirteen people were getting baptized, and one of the guys was 6’3” and 250 lbs. I was a little worried about him fitting in the trough, but it turned out to be the least of my concerns. When I went to baptize him, as he was about to go underwater, he got this panicked look on his face, and all of a sudden his arm went out and his legs kicked up. I was trying to push him under the water, and he was trying to grab on to the side of the tub to stay above water, sort of like a cat trying to avoid getting wet. Water was splashing everywhere, and in horror I realized what this must look like to the audience. I looked up and saw the entire front row of people with a look of shock on their faces, shielding children’s eyes. Finally we got him out of the tub, and later on his wife said, slightly panicked, “*He didn’t go all the way under! It didn’t count!*” I reassured her, “No, it counted! Check out 1 Samuel 16:7, which says, ‘Man judges by the outward appearance but God knows the heart.’ God knows his heart.”

I decided from that day forward, whenever someone wants to get baptized, my first question is not, “Have you trusted in Christ alone for salvation?” but, “Are you afraid of water?”

Jesus was baptized by immersion, every recorded baptism in Scripture was by immersion, and the word baptize literally means to go under water.

**Why does that matter? What’s the big deal about immersion?**

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## Significance

### Romans 6:3–5

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

- “**All of us who were baptized**” refers to every single follower of Christ.
- “**Buried with him**” and “**baptism into death**” tells us that the physical act of going underwater in baptism represents our connection with Christ in His death.
- The word **united** means to be grafted in, to be intimately and significantly connected to Jesus. The act of baptism—the submersion and then raising up again—symbolizes how we are spiritually connected to Jesus in both His death and resurrection!

### United with Him in a Death like His

### Colossians 3:3

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

- What this is saying is that the old you—the you with sinful desires, lusts of the flesh, and selfish ambitions—is totally and completely gone!

### Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- Pray this never becomes familiar and mundane to us! This verse says the determining factor in your relationship with the Author of Life is no longer your past but Christ's past.
- The old you has died and **the Father delights in you and sees you as having all the beauty, the greatness, and the glory of His own Son!** You're united with His past and free from condemnation for what you've done.

### United with Him in a Resurrection like His

### Romans 6:5

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

- Paul is saying that the minute you place your trust in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes into your life. This transcendent, life-transforming, world-renewing power, the power that rose Christ from the dead, the power that is going to regenerate the entire universe, enters into your life and begins to work and will continue to work in your life in the ultimate renewal of all creation!

**Question**—Do you realize how astounding this is?

So many of us, when we come to Christ we come with the tiniest ambitions, though they may seem huge to us. We want a little bit of direction, or some help with a few problems, or a little reorientation. But pretty soon we realize Christ wants to do a whole lot more than that!

**If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and, in parts, very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less.**

—C.S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

Baptism is the moment when we drive a stake in the ground say, *My old life has been crucified and buried with Christ, and I have been raised to new life with Christ! I've been reborn. I've been made new. I've got my eyes set. The foundation has been laid. My aim in life is Christ and Christ alone.*

## **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

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## **The Sacrament**

### **Matthew 3:16–17**

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

- After years of silence in Nazareth, Jesus appeared and wanted to be baptized by his cousin John, who was baptizing people into a baptism of repentance from sin.
- But John objected to baptizing Jesus because Jesus had no sin, and John knew it. In fact, when Jesus showed up, John said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*
- So why was Jesus baptized? Many reasons, but the primary one was to honor the sacrament of baptism, the moment when one publicly states that henceforth things are going to be radically different and there’s no going back to the way things were before.
- So what was different? What was changing for Jesus? **Jesus’s baptism marked the beginning of His ministry.**
- When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened up, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and **His Father in Heaven spoke precious words over His life.** This is an undeniable picture of the **Trinity**: the Spirit descended, the Father spoke, and the Son received.

**In the sacrament of baptism,  
you are baptized into the Trinity.  
You are immersed into eternal relationship  
with the everlasting, self-giving, other-affirming community of the Trinity.**

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity. New York: Macmillan, 1960. Print.

### **Matthew 3:17**

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

- What the Father spoke in that moment is radically important.
- Before Jesus worked a single miracle, before He changed the trajectory of human history, before He achieved the mission the Father had for Him, **He first received the Father’s pleasure over Him.**

**In His baptism,  
Jesus modeled something incredibly significant—  
Before you do anything significant *for* God,  
you must first receive the pleasure *of* God.**

**Application**—Before you try to accomplish great things in the name of God, you have to know God’s pleasure over your life. Otherwise, all of your activity for God is just an attempt to earn from God what is already yours in Jesus Christ. If you don’t hear the words that were spoken over Jesus spoken over your own life by your Father in heaven, you’re striving and making efforts for God based not on grace, but on guilt. You’re trying to prove that somehow you’re worthy of His love based on all that you do for Him.

**This is the invitation of the sacrament of baptism:** When you go under that water, your old life is washed away, buried, and gone for good, and when you come up out of that water to newness of life, you get to hear your Father speak over your life what your heart has always longed to hear—

*“You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”*

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## **Conclusion**

Baptism is an outward symbol of an inner reality—a celebration of your death and resurrection in Jesus Christ!

### **Galatians 2:20**

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

### **Ephesians 2:6**

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus . . .

### **Colossians 2:12**

. . . having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

### **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

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## Discussion Questions

1. What is the substance of baptism? If salvation is by faith alone, why does baptism matter?
2. Why is understanding baptism as immersion in water important?
3. Discuss how we are united with Jesus in a death like His and in a resurrection like His. How does baptism symbolize this?
4. Why is the picture of the Trinity in Jesus's baptism significant for us? Why was it significant for Jesus?
5. Discuss: Before you do anything significant *for* God, you must first receive the pleasure *of* God.

# NOTES