

Believer Baptism at Fair Haven Church

Change your life.
Turn to God and be baptized, each of you,
in the name of Jesus Christ,
so your sins are forgiven.
Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

-Peter, Acts 2:38

Look, here is water.
Why shouldn't I be baptized?

-Ethiopian Man, Acts 8:36b

"You will be his witness to all men
of what you have seen and heard.
And now what are you waiting for?
Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away,
calling on his name."

-Ananias, Acts 22:16

What an amazing time for us to engage in conversation, prayer, and celebration as you consider what God has done in your life and how you can respond in faith through baptism! We've put together this class and material to walk you through the basics of believer baptism here at Fair Haven Ministries as you take the next steps in your faith journey. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask. We are happy to walk with you on this journey. Along the way, if you feel you would benefit from a longer term mentoring relationship, please let any staff person know and we will connect with a guide to walk with you in the journey.

Jesus and John the Baptist

Let's begin where the New Testament begins with John the Baptist:

While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called "the Baptizer," was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: "Change your life. God's kingdom is here..." People poured out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordanian countryside to hear and see him in action. There at the Jordan River those who came to confess their sins were baptized into a changed life. [Matthew 3:1-2, 5-6]

When John was baptizing in the river Jordan, he was calling people to return to God. He challenged them to recognize their sins, admit to them, and turn their lives over to God. Then, Jesus himself came to John to be baptized.

The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God's Spirit – it looked like a dove – descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life." [Matthew 3:16-17]

In this way, Jesus modeled baptism for his followers and God honored this baptism with his verbal affirmation and the descent of his Spirit.

Our Connection to God

God seeks each of us out. He pursues you and I with a love that never ends and is never exasperated. Since the very first sins of Adam and Eve, we human beings have been severed, cut off from that intimate connection that God desires to have with his children. He calls us, longing for us to answer.¹ He invites us, hoping we will answer the invitation.² He promises to bring us the desires of our hearts if only we would turn to him and give our hearts and lives to him.³

And we desire to be connected to God because it is for this relationship with him that we were created. We were designed to be in relationship with the great God of the universe. When we realize that, acknowledge our need for him, and seek him out, we find that he has been there the whole time, waiting for us to return.⁴

Jesus says it powerfully in Luke 11:9-10 [NIV]:

Ask and it will be given to you;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives;
he who seeks finds;
and to him who knocks,
the door will be opened.

Our whole lives, Jesus stands at the door, waiting for us to knock. When that happens, when we return to him in faith, receiving Jesus and believing in his name,⁵ we turn our allegiance over to him. We die to any former ways of living and we rise to a new life in Jesus.⁶ Baptism is the picture Scripture gives of this amazing transformation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Basics of Baptism

After completing his own mission and before returning to heaven, Jesus gives this Great Commission to his disciples:

¹ Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Peter 1:3-4

² Revelation 3:20-22

³ Psalm 37:3-6

⁴ Prodigal Son

⁵ John 1:12

⁶ Romans 6:1-14; Ephesians 4:17-32; Colossians 3:1-17

God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age. [Matthew 28:18-20]

**Baptism as an important step of obedience
in the journey of faith.**

Jesus doesn't just promote, recommend, or encourage baptism – he commands it. When we receive the sacrament of baptism, then, we are responding through an act of obedience to Jesus as he commands and his commission to disciples. It marks a distinctive movement in our journey of faith.

**Baptism is instituted by Christ,
under his authority, and into his name.**

It is not a religious act developed by humans, but a sacrament commanded by Jesus as a sign of faith in him. It is a seal of the transition into a new relationship to God and the commitment to live according to the laws of the Kingdom of God.

**Baptism is a means by which believers identify themselves
with Jesus and by which the world identifies believers.**

Through baptism, we are “marked” with the identifying stamp of the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are designated as his. This is for our benefit so that we know to whom we belong. It is a way of saying that we are taking a stand to align ourselves with Jesus as Lord and seek to participate in the Kingdom of God. When we take this stand, we acknowledge to the world our identification with Jesus.

**Baptism is an indicator and a reminder of the
cleansing power of Jesus' forgiveness.**

Although water baptism is a symbol, Scripture also teaches that it is a sacred action that allows God to bring cleansing, healing, and awareness of forgiveness to your life.⁷

⁷ 1 Peter 3:20

Baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and transformation into a new way of life.⁸

Baptism is rich in symbolism, a picture of a total, complete cleansing and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus as well as a picture of his death, burial, and resurrection to new life. As such, it acknowledges that we have died to our old self and are rising to a new self and new life in Him.⁹ Going under water represents dying to a former life as Christ died for our sins. Coming out of the water illustrates rising to a new life in Christ just as Jesus rose to a new life in victory over death. We then commit to the death of our old life as we seek to put on the new life that Christ offers.¹⁰ It is an outward sign of an inner transformation.

Baptism, Faith, and Salvation

It is clear through many passages that believer baptism is a sign and comes as a result of a faith commitment or decision to follow Christ (cf. Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:47-48). Baptism itself was never intended as a means of salvation. Instead, it is a sign of the salvation God gives through the grace of his saving work in Jesus Christ, which individual believe and receive through faith. Baptism, then, is a sign and seal of the grace of God and the individual's response of personal faith in His grace. We see this in the book of Acts in the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch. This man had just made a pilgrimage from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and was reading the words of the prophet Isaiah as he returned. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, to which he responded, "How can I without some help?" So Philip joined.

The eunuch said, "Tell me, who is the prophet talking about: himself or some other?" Philip grabbed his chance. Using this passage as his text, he preached Jesus to him. As they continued down the road, they came to a stream of water. The eunuch said, "Here's water. Why can't I be baptized?" He ordered the chariot to stop. They both went down to the water, and Philip baptized him on the spot. [Acts 8:34-38]

There are many other similar examples of baptism in response to decisions for Christ in the book of Acts: Acts 8:9-40; Acts 9:18; Acts 10:23-48; Acts 16:11-34. These stories are like many stories that the Scriptures tell of individuals who turn back to God and turn their lives over to him.

⁸ Romans 6:1-11

⁹ Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

- Each person comes to a realization of his or her own sin and the separation that comes from a life lived apart from Him.
- They give up on trying to earn salvation in an other way than through the grace of Jesus.
- They come to understand that Jesus' death on the cross is the bridge that God provides over the separation that comes from our sins, and that only in Christ is this gap traversed.
- They take a step of faith upon those truths and turn their lives to Jesus.

If you have come to this point in your spiritual journey, then you are ready to be baptized. Jesus tells us that all of heaven rejoices when just one of God's children turns back to him,¹¹ and so we want to celebrate with you as you acknowledge these truths publicly. Just as a bride and groom tell of their love for one another through the symbol of rings, your baptism is an opportunity to go public with your faith and have public celebration and acknowledgment to the world of your union with Christ.¹² Baptism is an opportunity to show the miracle of transformation that God has worked in your heart and life through the sacrament of Baptism that he has ordained for you.

Lastly, it is important to understand that baptism is not a way to earn forgiveness. Christ alone offers forgiveness by his grace through your faith in him. Belief in His death and resurrection and commitment to his Lordship is the only way to receive the salvation that Christ offers. Baptism is a sign and seal of that inward commitment of the heart.

Important Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Do you believe in Jesus as your Savior from sin, and have you received Him as Savior into your life?
2. Do you put your faith and trust in Jesus and in him alone for forgiveness of your sins?
3. Have you, or are you prepared to submit your life to Jesus as Lord?

If yours answers to these questions are "yes," then just as Ananias encouraged Paul, we encourage you to be baptized.

If the answer is "no," then we encourage you to receive Jesus and believe in his name, to trust in his desire to be reconnected to you through the forgiveness of your sins, and to submit yourself to his Lordship over your life.

¹¹ Luke 15:7, 10, 32

¹² Matthew 10:32

If you are not ready to receive Christ and believe in his name, then it's not time for you to be baptized. It is better to wait and be sure so that baptism is a full and profound representation of a transformation to life in Christ for you.

Preparation for Baptism Sunday

When you have answered "yes" to the three important questions above, we invite you to join with others in being baptized in public worship at Fair Haven Church. There are several important things to think through as you prepare for this time of celebration:

- **Pray for the powerful experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in and through your baptism.** A prepared heart will open you to the presence of God.
- **Share and make a record of your story of faith at this important time.** At Fair Haven, it is our practice to have you write out your faith story or make a short video (3-5 minutes) that offers you the opportunity to share your story with others and thank God and the appropriate people at the time of your baptism. Here are some questions you might consider as you share your story.
 - When and how did you make the commitment to follow Christ?
 - What was your life like before you began seeking Christ?
 - How has your life changed since you put your faith in Christ?
 - Why do you want to be baptized at this point in your spiritual journey?
 - Who was instrumental in your decision to follow Christ? Is there anyone you would like to thank?
 - What do you want God to do in your life now?
- **Get ready to get wet.** We encourage full immersion believers in order to mirror the practice of the early church, to represent the full cleansing that comes through salvation in Christ, and to represent your identification and participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. If you don't want to be immersed, we also offer the options of sprinkling and pouring. If you are being immersed, note the following details:
 - Bring a towel, a bag that can withstand wet clothes, and a change of clothes for after the immersion.
 - Wear clothes you are comfortable being immersed in (preferable a gray or colored shirt). Use light clothes that do not absorb as much. We sometimes use white robes afterwards to wear over your clothes.

- **You may wish to plan a celebration luncheon, picnic, or special time with family and friends.** During outdoor services of the church, we will often have a picnic or BBQ afterward. If you wish to have a celebration at church, rooms are available and can be reserved through Pastor Tom.
- **You will be asked to respond to simple questions when you are baptized such as “Who is your Lord and Savior?” and “Do you give yourself, body and soul, in life and in death to Jesus Christ?”** Each pastor may have a different way of asking these questions and will prep you ahead of time.

After the Baptism:

- One of the most important follow-ups to baptism is to share your experience, the transforming work of Christ in your life, and your commitment to live that out. Sharing you're the story of your transformation in Jesus with someone who doesn't have a faith relationship with Jesus is a great way to stand up for this new union with Christ as well as to offer it to someone else through your witness.¹³
- We have developed a guide to help you in the basics of following Jesus as a disciple. This is a process lead by a spiritual guide. If you know of a Christian you respect that can lead this process, we can equip them. If not, let us know and we will provide a mentor for you.
- We encourage you to join a small group. Small groups living out the Christian life together are one of the most powerful ways to experience Christian growth, accountability and support. For more information, contact Pastor Tom.
- Take the next step at Fair Haven by becoming a Partner. Partnership information can be found on the church website.



**Baptism is a transitional time in your life.
God has provided Jesus Christ as a bridge to a new life with him.
We invite you to take this important step in your spiritual journey.**

**If you have any further questions, need more clarification, or would
just like to process your spiritual journey more, please contact
us at info@fhmin.org.**

¹³ 1 Peter 3:15-22