

Baptism in Water

All those who humble themselves before God and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church."¹

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is a sacrament. Included in this rite is the immersion of the believer in water by one duly authorized, following evidence of the desire of the believer to become incorporated in the body of Christ. (Sprinkling or pouring of water does not constitute baptism.) There is a twofold rite involved: that of immersion in water and that of the laying on of hands for the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

"Therefore leaving [not leaving--I. V.] the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Hebrews 6:1, 2).

Baptism then, as a principle of the doctrine and gospel of the Christ, is a rule of action designed by our Creator for the specific purpose of producing certain good results in the lives of his created that will bring them into oneness with him.

Baptism symbolizes the entrance of the believer into the communion of Christ's death and resurrection. It is a dramatic, virile experience in the process of regeneration through a spiritual union with Christ. When one is baptized he becomes the recipient of all of the benefits of Christ's death upon the cross and his resurrection. It is a prerequisite to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the receiving of the Holy Ghost as an abiding comforter.²

BAPTISM IS A COVENANT

The fundamental function of the ceremony of baptism in water is to mark the making of a covenant. A valid covenant requires that there be two parties to the agreement. In the act of taking "upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end," those who are baptized are committing themselves to Christ by way of a definite pledge.

The Scriptures do not stress the fact of the covenant so much as they emphasize the effects of making that covenant. Nevertheless, the fact of covenant relationship is clearly indicated. At the edge of the waters of Mormon, Alma told his followers, "As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, . . . what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour his Spirit more abundantly upon you?"³ The concept of making a covenant is inherent

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| | ritualistic declaration, "I baptize you . . .@ |
| 6. The Intermediary | An elder or priest |
| 7. The Recipient | Instructed and eligible candidate |

WHAT IS ACCOMPLISHED BY BAPTISM IN WATER

In view of the fact that the person is making a specific and public commitment to carry the name and ways of Christ, he becomes eligible by his baptism for the following:

1. *A rebirth.* "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁶ "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."⁷
2. *A remission of sin.* This is perhaps the feature of baptism which is given the greatest emphasis in the Scriptures. The following passages are typical:

- a. Mark 1:3
- b. Acts 2:38
- c. Acts 22:16
- d. Genesis 6:62
- e. Matthew 5:4
- f. II Nephi 13:24
- g. Doctrine and Covenants 32:2

In a word, remission of sin means that our sins are forgiven in much the same sense that a debt is forgiven or canceled. This is possible, of course, through the atonement of Christ, upon whom the Lord has laid the "iniquity of us all."⁸ But it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the remission of sin is granted only on condition of repentance of the sinner. Should an unrepentant person be baptized, therefore, the ordinance is not effective. His sins are not washed away. He has been buried in water in a literal sense, but he has not been born again. It is the grossest of errors to assume that the very act of immersion in water is of itself sufficient to confer the favor and forgiveness of God upon the one immersed.

3. *Membership in the church.* In a sense, the church on earth is naught but an association of those who are closely knit by virtue of having all made the same covenant relationship with God. The church is thus the "body of Christ," composed of members all of whom have assumed the name of Christ. It is therefore a major force in the carrying out of the work of God among men. By virtue of its organized activities the spiritual growth of its members is promoted, and the message of Christ and his kingdom is carried to others not yet in covenant relationship with God. Because this is true, it is difficult to see how one could effectively carry the name of Christ and serve him without joining forces with others dedicated to the same cause.

Even so, there is from time to time some person who wishes to be baptized by one of the ministers of the church but does not want to become a member of the church. It is true that the best-known Scriptures of the New Testament which refer to baptism do not specifically mention church membership. But Paul wrote, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body. Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."⁹

4. *Qualification for birth of the Spirit.* (This subject is treated in detail in the following chapter.)

QUALIFICATIONS FOR BAPTISM

An examination of Doctrine and Covenants 17:7 reveals the following significant requirements that must be met before one is fully ready for baptism in water:

1. *Humility before God.* Nephi points out¹⁰ that Christ humbled himself before God by submitting to this sacrament even though he had not the need that we do for baptism. It was after this submission that the Lord sent his Spirit upon Christ.

2. *The desire to be baptized.* It might at first seem obvious that no one would be baptized unless he really wanted to be. But this is not necessarily so. Some persons have been baptized simply to quiet the nagging of an overzealous husband or wife. Sometimes children have undergone baptism because of the strong desire of the parents. Every person, including our own children, has the right to make up his mind for himself; the ordinance cannot be the rich experience it was intended to be unless the person submitting to it does so because of his own free will.

An extreme example of coercion into baptism is given in the episode of the baptism of "Father" in the play, *Life with Father*. Mother was much concerned over the welfare of Father's soul. This was, to be sure, a legitimate concern. But she did not understand the principles by which baptism is effective. She seemed to believe that all would be well with Father in the hereafter if he simply submitted to the ceremony of baptism. She nagged at him until finally, to find peace, he made an appointment for an afternoon ceremony at the church. Father came to the church in the spirit of rebellion, and after submitting to a ceremony which obviously meant nothing to him, he turned and said to Mother in tones of disgust, "I hope you're satisfied!" Obviously this baptism meant nothing in the life of Father.

It is not sufficient for the person to express a desire to be baptized. He must desire it for its own sake, not for some ulterior motive. Occasionally some young man has been baptized because it would help his cause in winning a church girl he wished to marry. While some such persons are later converted, many more are never won.

The church long ago established the principle that in some instances the consent of other persons concerned should also be obtained: "It is not right to persuade a woman to be baptized contrary to the will of her husband. . . . All children are bound by law to obey their parents; and to influence them to embrace any religious faith, or be baptized, or leave their parents without their consent, is unlawful and unjust."¹¹ Note that this passage is not a revelation, but an expression of the belief of the church of that day. The statement regarding the baptism of the wife reflects the inferior social status of the wife of that day. Certainly, while we would say today that there might be times when it is unwise to try to persuade a wife or a husband against the desires of the marriage partner, it is nevertheless the responsibility of that wife or husband to decide whether she or he will respond to the clear call of God.

3. *A broken heart and a contrite spirit.* These are one with the requirement of humility before God. They suggest the requirement of surrender of self to God. Well has it been said that man is not a wayward child who needs to be educated into righteousness; he is a rebel who needs to lay down his arms. Humility, sorrow, and contrition suggest a recognition of past mistakes and a genuine desire to make restitution for those mistakes.

4. *A witness of repentance from Sin.* In order for such witness to be borne, the person must do more than feel sorry for his sins. He must demonstrate by his attitudes and conduct that he is indeed making some effort to live after the pattern of Christ, and to make restitution for previous wrongs. Otherwise he is not really ready for baptism. This is because one of the purposes of baptism is the remission of sin. But as the Scriptures abundantly testify, no man can be forgiven his sins save on condition of repentance.

5. *Willingness to assume the name of Jesus Christ.* There must be no reservation. He must say as Paul, "I am not ashamed."¹²

6. *A determination to serve Christ aways.* These two together mean that we become known by the name and ways of Christ, and that we promise to do our best to carry the name of Christ with dignity and honor.

7. *Reception of the Spirit unto the remission of sin.* This sounds almost like putting the cart before the horse. We are accustomed to thinking that reception of the Spirit follows baptism in water. This is true in a sense but not entirely true, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapter. The fact is that a certain measure of the Spirit may be granted prior to baptism. Recall the analogy of the marriage covenant: The process of two lives joining in one has already begun before the actual wedding ceremony. So it is in baptism in water; by beginning to fulfill all or a major part of the requirements listed above, the person begins gradually to establish a relationship with God. Under these conditions it does not seem consistent that God would withhold his Spirit entirely. Nor is remission of sin denied one who truly repents in all humility and contrition. In short, the establishment of a covenant relationship between God and man is a process which is marked legally and officially by the act of baptism in water, though that process may already be well underway before the official ceremony is carried out.

8. *Attainment of the age of accountability.* Infant baptism is not acceptable in the church. It is contrary to the teachings of the Lord, who spoke of children as being of the kingdom of God. Since the person baptized must evidence the fruits of repentance before baptism, it is natural to expect him to have reached the age when he can distinguish between right and wrong, being able to make choices in this light. The accepted earliest age for baptism in the church is eight years. This is a firm stand and no baptism which is performed even one day before the eighth birthday is recognized as valid. It should be realized, however, that the attainment of the eighth year does not automatically qualify one for baptism. Unless all the other qualifying factors are present, the person should not be baptized.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

There are certain ethical requirements involved which affect the decision to perform a baptism. It is understood within the church that none should be baptized without the express consent of the administrative officer of his home congregation or district. We can understand this when we consider our mobile civilization of today whereby it is easy for us to travel hundreds of miles from our home areas, and the condition set forth by the Lord that candidates for baptism shall "truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins."¹³ When a person asks for baptism while away from his regular place of abode, the minister does well to clear through those administratively responsible. It may prevent baptism of an unworthy person. It will alert the ministers who will be serving the new member so they may provide adequate ministry.

Another ethical requirement lies in requiring that the baptism be an open service~that is, not secret. Although this may be prompted by the fifth requirement of willingness to assume the name of Jesus Christ, there is more to it than that. The whole church is involved when a person becomes a member of the body. It is involved in a social way, it assumes a responsibility to nurture, it accepts the person as a voting member, and other similar ways.

IS BAPTISM ESSENTIAL?

Our teaching on the subject of baptism sometimes makes improper emphasis. Some seem to think that the ceremony itself is the all-important thing; or some try to persuade people to be baptized on the basis

that they ought to join the church.

For the sake of emphasis, let us review the chief elements of baptism in water. It is the clear teaching of the Scriptures that baptism is an essential ordinance as a qualification for membership in the kingdom of God. But this is not because the ceremony itself is effective for salvation or for citizenship in the kingdom. Baptism is essential only because the things it symbolizes are essential. That is,

Surrender to God is essential.

The making of a covenant to serve Christ is essential.

Rebirth is essential.

Remission of sin is essential.

Fellowship with the Saints in church membership is essential.

No man can please God who does not surrender to him. Nor can that man qualify for the richer measures of the Spirit of God save he is willing to commit himself in a specific pledge or covenant to serve Christ. No man can mature spiritually until he is spiritually begotten, or reborn. No man can participate effectively in the cause of the kingdom on earth save he associates himself with others laboring in the same cause. This latter point also means that care should be exercised when baptizing people who are geographically isolated from other church members so proper church contacts may be established. The ministry of the nonresident pastor, church periodicals, and direct mailing should be provided. But most important of all is the sense of union with others, the sense of sharing with others the work of God. This union can be achieved in measure even by those who are physically separated from organized centers of the church. Indeed, the efforts of consecrated but isolated members have been a strong force in bringing the church into more and more communities.

DOES BAPTISM ASSURE SALVATION?

As we have seen in the foregoing, baptism is essential because the things it symbolizes are essential. It is a "saving" ordinance¹⁴ in the sense that salvation is impossible without these same things. But note again that unless these things occur, the mere fact of immersion in water is of no effect.

Just as the wedding ceremony is not the culmination but only the beginning of the marriage relationship, so is proper baptism the beginning, not the climax, of our covenant relationship with God. It is the initiatory rite, the gate through which we set out upon the straight and narrow path which leads to life everlasting. We must yet demonstrate that we do indeed live up to the terms of this covenant; we must yet "go on unto perfection"; we must yet "endure to the end." Unless we do so, our baptism will eventually become ineffective; the covenant is no longer binding upon God because we ourselves have grossly violated and thereby broken that covenant.

"The gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water: and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire, and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this straight and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way, ye should receive.

"And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this straight and narrow path, I would ask, if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far, save it were by the word of Christ, with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and

a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life."¹⁵

THE BAPTISMAL SERVICE

Careful consideration should be given to the setting of the service of baptism. It should be a place that contributes to the beauty and solemnity of the occasion. Baptism by immersion requires that there be enough water of sufficient depth for full immersion, but this is not the only matter to be considered.

Many baptisms are performed out-of-doors. Sometimes this is preferred. Often it is a necessity when there is no baptistry in the church building. There are some advantages to a natural setting. The assembly may be reminded of the river Jordan where our Lord was baptized. The beauty of nature, its many-shaded greens, its flowers, the warmth of the sun, all lend help toward worship of God at this most important time in the life of all concerned. But nature is not always compatible. The weather can be inclement, the waters may be contaminated, or the setting may be spoiled by the proximity of persons whose whole way of life is incompatible with the solemn occasion.

It is important then, that the area be scouted out ahead of time in order to assure privacy and to provide for comfort. If it is possible, the use of the waters should be arranged for, so that there are no other persons using it at the same time. Even a fisherman across the lake may prove to be a distraction.

Someone should go into the water to find the proper place for immersion. When the right depth is found, a stick should be driven into the bottom as a marker. If such is not possible, a float of some kind tied to a weighted string or rope will mark the spot well. While finding the proper spot in the water, the bottom should be checked for unevenness, rocks, hidden debris, etc.

The surroundings should be scouted, too, so there will be no danger from wild-life, cattle, horses. Provision should be made to care for the candidates and the minister as they change their clothing, and, if the weather is cold, there should be a means of keeping warm. Ideally this could be done at a nearby house. If such is not available, tents or tarpaulins can be arranged for protection. These should be situated so there will be no distraction from the solemnity of the service, however.

Many churches have a baptistry. This has come out of the necessity for providing control over the setting. In this manner the temperature of room and water can be controlled.

When a baptistry is used, it should be tastefully decorated so it will not be a dreary setting, but it should not be so overly decorated that attention is focused away from the ceremony.

A properly designed baptistry does not have dangerous steps or projections upon which persons may be injured. Some-times there are faucets and pipes upon which the candidate's head may strike while being immersed. If these cannot be changed, the officiating minister should be extremely careful as he handles the candidate.

Proper clothing is important. Although there is no prescribed clothing for a baptismal service, it seems that casual or sportswear is out of place here, just as in all worship services. Usually the officiating minister wears a white shirt, white tie, white trousers, and white sox. He should wear white canvas shoes to insure secure footing. Ministers who officiate in the service but are not required to be in the water should dress conservatively, as for all worship services. The candidates for baptism usually wear white, including canvas shoes. Some congregations provide a white wrap-around baptismal robe for the women and girls. By keeping several assorted sizes, they are suitable for all ages, helping to eliminate clothing consciousness.

While white clothing is preferable, it is not imperative. Neat, clean work clothes or house dresses may be worn if there are no others available.

All candidates should be told to wear appropriate undergarments. Wet clothing clings to the body and sometimes becomes translucent. This can be embarrassing without proper underclothing.

It is well for the minister and the candidate to have time for counsel before the service begins. At this time the mechanics of the service should be discussed, demonstrating the method of handling the candidate in the water so there is little fumbling or unnecessary last-minute instructions. If this can be done the day before the service in the home of the candidate, it is to be preferred. There will be no time limit and everyone can be more relaxed.

The grip used should be reassuring and should give the minister complete control. One of the best grips is having the candidate stand in front of the minister, hands overlapped in front of his stomach, palms toward his body. The minister grasps the overlapped hands from below, holding them together. In this manner the minister has complete control; the candidate cannot jerk his hands loose, and there is no pain to the knuckles due to great pressure.

A modification of the above grip has the candidate interlace his fingers. It has all of the advantages of the above except that there is danger of hurting sensitive knuckles, especially on arthritics, due to the squeezing.

It is not recommended that the candidate be allowed to hold a handkerchief over his nose or mouth due to the mistaken belief that it will eliminate aspiration of water. It does not accomplish this, but gives a false sense of security while at the same time it detracts from the service by implying fear and lack of confidence. The minister should explain that it is not necessary to take a deep breath just before immersion, that the simple process of stopping the breathing is best since there is neither the danger of aspiration of water at the time of immersion, nor of being too buoyant for ease of immersion.

The officiating minister enters the water first. If he is in a stream, he should consider the current, move to the proper place, and see that the candidate faces downstream. This will help prevent aspiration of water and displacement of clothing. The flow of water will aid in raising the candidate to his feet also. The minister should face the congregation and the candidate should be between the minister and the congregation.

Raising his right hand to God, the minister makes the declaration.¹⁶ There is no deviation allowed from the wording of this declaration. The candidate is held with the left hand by the accepted grip; or, if the situation is such that he must be held by the right hand, the grip may be assumed immediately following the declaration.

One caution here; do not hurry. Be alert to the candidate's response to the situation; be certain to have firm footing; move with certainty. In this way there is less probability of errors or accidents.

The candidate should be put at ease by the minister's manner. If there is necessity to speak to him, do so with a soft voice and without tenseness or hurry. A handful of water against the back of the neck helps him to become used to the water temperature and may help prevent aspiration of water. After immersion, the candidate should be raised quickly. It would be helpful to have a towel or individual washcloth available to wipe the face.

The minister assists the candidate out of the water. If there are curtains at the font, they may be closed while he leaves the water. An assistant should have a robe or towel ready to wrap around him as soon as he comes out of the water.

The order of worship should be planned carefully, making use of all of the elements of worship possible. The length of service is determined by circumstances, but it should never be so brief as to imply haste, or so lengthy that it becomes uncomfortable. This is a sacred ceremony: a sacrament of the church.

Learn to use the hymnal in selecting appropriate hymns. A hymn may be read as a poem with great effect. The hymns which are to be sung should be selected with the words and tune in mind. Those tunes

which indicate praise and adoration should come first, then meditation, then consecration, joy or promise. See *O Worship the King*, for assistance.

OPENING OF SERVICE A *Call to worship*, not necessarily Scripture, should bring the congregation to attention. The candidates should sit in a special place during the service. At such a momentous occasion it seems fitting that close relatives should be allowed to sit with them. The congregation should recognize the solemnity of the occasion by appropriate solemn behavior. Children should sit with their parents or with an adult supervisor in order to curb their natural playfulness. The *hymn* selected may be a congregational one or, if desired, may be sung by a choral group. Special requests for hymns should be considered, but tactfully omitted if they are not appropriate for this service.

If an *invocation* is used, see that it is truly such, but if it is to be an *opening prayer*, announce it as such and not as an invocation. This should not be lengthy or emotional.

THE CHARGE AND COVENANT The charge is a twofold statement of moderate length for the purpose of emphasizing the covenant, spiritual significance, and solemnity of the occasion. In it there is a charge to the candidate in which the rights, privileges, duties, and responsibilities are stated. In it, also, is a charge to the congregation where the responsibilities, duties, and expectations of the congregation are stated.

It is permissible to close this part of the service with a baptismal covenant. Such a covenant might be solicited by the minister giving the charge or the minister who is leading the service. It should be simply a question such as, "Do you this day desire to take upon you the name of Jesus Christ, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given?" Although this is not required, there are some who feel it gives the candidate a chance to make a public confession of faith at this very solemn moment.

THE BAPTISM As the names of the candidates are read the candidates move to the place appointed. Although a hymn might be sung as they take their place, this may be a time of meditation for all. There is much to be said about worshipful silence. As the minister and the candidate take their place the minister should speak clearly, chin up, so all may hear.

If there are a large number of candidates, a break about midway, using a fitting hymn, is appropriate. It is best not to use a verse of a hymn between each baptism because (1) it breaks up the continuity of the hymn, (2) it may put undue emphasis upon the words of a certain verse with reference to a certain candidate. For example: The second verse of Hymn 239 begins, "Through their childhood's onward way to their bright baptismal day, Thou has been their constant Guide..." or the third verse of hymn 238 which begins, "Fearless of the world's despising." In each situation there can be occasion when this may point to conditions which have been in the candidate's life which need no such emphasis. Taken in their total contextual relationship, these verses are fine, but taken alone, they might lose their effectiveness.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE SERVICE A concluding hymn of joy and dedication is appropriate here. This would best be done by the congregation, but under the right circumstance, a choral number could be very effective.

The benediction, if pronounced, should not be a prayer. If a closing prayer is desired, it should be so stated. There is a place for both in worship services.

A printed order of worship is helpful when it is possible to furnish one. It helps make the service move smoothly. If it is used, it is not necessary to list in the body of the order of worship the names of individuals who officiate. An appropriate spot may be used to list the names of the candidates and officiating ministers.

Follow-up ministry is of vital importance. This is a time when information for the statistical report may be solicited. It is wise to keep in mind, however, that the officiating minister is the one who is responsible for seeing that this report is filed and he should not assume anyone else has done so. During the period following the baptism in water, meetings with the candidate may be held in which the confirmation service is discussed, and any other matters which may be for the edification of the individual who is becoming a new member of the church. This is an excellent time to assist him to file his financial statement.

This is the beginning of the home ministry program and it should never cease. It may have begun with the first cottage meeting or the discussion of his desire to be baptized, but this is the first meeting after the ceremony of baptism is begun. Through the rest of his life, the new member should have the joy of ministry in his home on a regular basis.

Related Scripture Readings:

Mosiah 9:39-41

D. and C. 17:7

II Nephi 13:6-32

John 3:1-8

Rom. 6:1-13

Mark 1:3

Acts 2:31

Acts 22:16

Gen. 6:61-63, 67-71

Matt. 5:4

D. and C. 32:2

Mark 16:14, 15

I Pet. 3:21

Acts 16:30-33

Matt. 3:41-45

John 3:23-27; 4:1-4

All Bible references are to the Inspired Version

Special Readings:

Priesthood Journal, Vol.5, No.4, Oct., 1939

Priesthood Manual, Chapter 9

1. D and C 17:7

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2. Gal. 3:27; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38; 22:16; John 14:1-26; Eph. 19:1-6
 3. Mosiah 9:39, 41
 4. Edwards, F. H., Fundamentals, 1951 edition, p. 134
 5. D. and C. 17
 6. John 3:3
 7. Rom. 6:4
 8. Isaiah 53:6
 9. I Cor. 12:3, 27
 10. II Nephi 13:7-9
 11. D. and C. 111:4
 12. Rom. 1:16
 13. D. and C. 17:7d
 14. Mark 16:14, 15; I Peter 3:21; Acts 16:30-33
 15. II Nephi 13:24-30
 16. D. and C. 17:21