



Baptism Packet

Welcome to Baptism

First things first: we're excited that you've taken this step to 'go public' with your faith! And we're tremendously honored that you would choose to celebrate your commitment to following Jesus and his way of living by connecting with the Medina East Campus of Grace Church. It's our commitment to help guide you through this process by informing you of the biblical foundations, unique practices and practical considerations of being baptized at Grace.

Above everything else, baptism is a command of Jesus that correlates with his agenda of discipleship. Matthew 28:19 actually links the two together, further highlighting the close relationships between the two:

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....'

Jesus asserts that the act of baptism is the natural 'next step' of someone who has made a commitment to **follow Jesus**, which is really the essence of the idea of discipleship in the first place. Discipleship itself is basically a student or learner determining to reproduce the life of the teacher in him/herself by intently studying and adopting that teacher's patterns of living.

Baptism symbolizes the intentionality of the disciple or learner—the follower 'dies' to the old ways of choosing to live life and 'rises' to a new and vibrant way of living, which is none other than the way taught and demonstrated by the teacher. And it's not only significant for you, it becomes a public confession to others that you've devoted yourself to transformation, dropping the patterns of the old life and increasingly adopting the patterns of the new.

If you've made the commitment to follow Jesus in this way, baptism is your first act! As one Bible scholar has commented, baptism is to the new life in Christ as the first post-birth breaths are to a newborn. There's lots of growing that still needs to happen to reach maturity but your breathing the new air!

So as you 'go public' and engage in baptism, know that we are celebrating the reality of Jesus' work in you—and the wonderful work that he is going to continually do as you walk through the journey of life with him.

Meaning and Significance

Preliminary Considerations

Before touching base on the meaning of baptism in the New Testament as demonstrated by Jesus himself (Matt. 3.13-17; Mark 1.9-11; Luke 3.21-22) and explained in various ways by both Paul (Rom. 6.1-11) and Peter (1 Pet. 3.21-22), there are some helpful Old Testament portraits that are worthwhile to briefly explore. Much of the teaching of the New Testament (NT) is better grasped when some of the main themes of the Old Testament (OT) are recognized, largely because the NT writers frequently leveraged OT concepts to explain the significance of the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus for their readers (and, by extension, for us!). So, in this regard, the purpose is straightforward: recognize the main themes of the OT stories so we can be 'on the lookout' for how these purposes find fulfillment in baptism. As we are often found saying at the Medina East Campus, if the OT is an arrow pointing to Jesus, then it's helpful to be led by the arrow so we can find our destination!

The Flood

Overall, the baptismal idea of being plunged in **water** has echoes in the Flood Narrative of Genesis 6-8. In this story, we find that the good world God created in the first chapters of Genesis has already been tragically fractured by the disobedience of the first humans, Adam and Eve. Beyond this, the beginning of Chapter 6 tells us that sin was making matters increasingly worse:

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart **was only evil continually** (v. 5)*

God intentionally unfolds a plan to wipe out the presence of wickedness in the world by destroying the ones who carry that wickedness through a worldwide flood. **But God also determines to spare Noah and his family—to “start over” not by creating something entirely different but by bringing Noah through the waters of death and into a different *kind* of life.**

In a sense, the whole story of Noah and the flood is one of a death of the old state of sin-filled brokenness and the emergence of a new, living relationship with God.

The Exodus

The Exodus Story (told in the Book of Exodus) begins with the people of Israel subjected to the hard labor of slavery in the land of Egypt. Although they share a common bond in that they are the descendants of Abraham, the Bible strongly infers that they were not a legitimate people until God himself liberated them from harsh subjugation.

God frees the people of Israel by taking them out of the land of their slavery (Egypt) and intends to bring them into an inheritance as his people—this inheritance being the land of Canaan, or what we know today as Palestine. The pivotal event where God secures the victory in this process is the crossing of the Red Sea. Here, in strangely familiar territory to those who know the story of Noah and the flood, **God brings the people through the water as a means to acknowledge that their former way of life (slavery) has passed away and that they have been birthed to a new life (inheritance).**

Interestingly, although Israel becomes a nation as a result of the Red Sea process (“new birth”), **they must still learn the habits of their new status as God’s people while they wander in the wilderness before actually reaching the Promised Land (“maturity”).** In effect, they relinquish the old, take on the new and learn to perpetually follow the leading of the Holy Spirit (disciplined by God himself!) as they progress toward the goal of their inheritance.

We would not be too far off to claim that the exodus is likely the controlling image used by NT authors as they explain why baptism is so important. Others contribute to the themes: the aforementioned Flood account and even quite possibly Genesis 1, where the Spirit of God is “hovering over the waters” prior to God taking what is “formless and void” and giving it light and life (1.1-2, 26-31). We could even add the “Red Sea replay” of Israel’s crossing the Jordan River to this images list (Josh. 3).

The common theme in all these *water* narratives is simply this: God takes people from a state of brokenness, sin and death and transforms both their situation *and* their condition to one of wholeness, vibrancy and life.

Baptism According to the New Testament

Working Definitions

While we have the backdrop of the Old Testament in view, there is our own cultural backdrop that must be exposed before we take to the Bible for the significance of baptism for the Christ-follower. Along with this, there was a 1st century understanding of baptism that also stands behind the early church's adoption of this practice as a response to the command of Jesus. Here are several points to consider:

- "Baptism is a ceremonial immersion in water, or application of water, as an initiatory rite or sacrament of the Christian church." –*Dictionary.com*
- "Baptism is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which one is admitted as a full member of the Christian Church and, in view of some, as a member of the particular Church in which the baptism is administered." –*Wikipedia*
- "In the New Testament, baptism is the immediate public expression of one's conversion to Christ and is spoken of as the point at which one becomes united to Christ." –*Robert Mohrlang*
- Baptism is my outward expression of being in Christ." –*Anonymous*

Scriptural Basis

All of what we have already touched upon should help guide us as we offer three (3) key New Testament texts that explain the significance of baptism.

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28.18-20)*

*...[A]ll of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.... We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. **For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be*

brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6.3-8, 11)

...God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Pet. 3.20b-22)

Meaning and Significance

So what are a few of the important things to point out from these verses, aside from the elements we already see because of our brief Old Testament survey on "death to the old and resurrection to the new" concepts? We might offer them in this way:

- **An Act of Expression: Baptism is an "outward expression of inward truth."**
 - Just as Christ was crucified and buried in death, so we symbolize our own death to sin as we are immersed in the water. Likewise, as Christ was raised from the dead, so we demonstrate the reality of our own new birth by being brought out of the water. (Romans 6.3-4)
 - "Christian baptism, then, signifies both the death of our old life in sin and the experience of new life in Christ that replaces it." –Robert Mohrlang
- **An Act of Identification: Baptism is a way to identify oneself with God and his community.**
 - The reality of 'union with Christ' is significant, in that a faith-based relationship with Jesus makes what can be said about him true in us. As it is in a marriage, all the assets of two people who have "become one" and are unified are now shared, and they are treated so by others as they have interactions with them. According to Romans 6.5 ("if we are *united* with him...") the reality of this union is the basis for God reckoning both

death to sin and resurrection to life to us through what Jesus did.

- “In many ways, baptism is like a wedding ring: an outward symbol of an inward commitment [and unity].” –Tony Livigni
- **An Act of Obedience: Baptism is commanded by Jesus and is the launching of a process of imitation of him.**
 - In Matthew 28.18-19, Jesus commands his followers to make disciples and implies that the “initiation” into this process of discipleship is baptism itself. Thus, baptism and disciple-making go hand-in-hand—baptism is the acknowledgment that a person has been birthed into a new life because of Jesus own resurrection but he/she still requires him to lead him/her into adopting the patterns of attitude and behavior conducive to their heavenly inheritance!
 - “[The] incorporation of the believer into the Messiah [symbolized in baptism] is the context within which we can understand [the] exhortation to *imitate* him...not a matter of a surface-level ‘imitation,’ with people simply attempting to copy Jesus and so make themselves better people. It is a matter...of them allowing [the] shared and transformed [mind of Christ] to work out into actual patterns of thought and then behavior.” – N.T. Wright
- **An Act of Cleansing: Baptism is an acknowledgement of a fundamental and radical “paradigm shift” in the mind**
 - According to 1 Peter 3.20b-22, baptism has little to do with the cleansing of the body but focuses on the cleansing of the *conscience*. This essentially means that the waters of baptism become the physical marker of the spiritual reality that the mind is cleansed because of Jesus’ sacrifice and that his followers are now able think in a way that honors God and directs action. It is an indication of the fundamental “paradigm shift” that accompanies belief in Jesus Christ.
 - “Bluntly stated, to serve God well, we must think straight, as crooked thinking — intentional or not — always favors evil. By contrast, to take the “information” of Scripture into a mind thinking straight, under the

direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, is to place our feet solidly on the high road of spiritual formation under God.” –Dallas Willard

Each of these four (4) points drawn from the baptism passages could be explored in greater detail, but as we consider once more our own decisions to be baptized, the drawing together of all elements offered thus far, both Old Testament and New, lead us directly and inevitably to Jesus. It is through his death and resurrection that his followers, by way of faith in him, participate in the real exodus, the real flood, the real creation, etc.:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1.13-14)

Baptism, then, is the conscious decision of obedience that flows from making the story of Jesus our own story—“I have been crucified with Christ...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2.20)! It is a bold demonstration of commitment to both live and give away the gospel; a tangible declaration of your radical sin, God’s radical grace and a radical love for the world!

[You were] buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col. 2.12)

The Practice of Baptism

Immersion

Grace Church practices baptism by 'immersion.' It is a way of saying that the whole person is plunged into the water (symbolizing the death of the old self) and brought back out again (representing the commitment to living a new life). This method is in contrast to other forms of baptizing that have been accepted in some Christian circles historically.

Why, specifically, do we think it's important to baptize by full immersion? In other words, is there anything significant about doing it this way as opposed to sprinkling or partial submersion? Here are a few points we consider more than just arbitrary as we think about the actual practice of baptism itself:

- The word 'baptize' in the original language of the New Testament (Greek) is *baptizo*, which literally means "to fully immerse or dip something completely under water."
- Jesus himself was baptized by John in the Jordan River this way (Matt. 3:16)
- The examples of baptism in the Bible were by immersion in a body of water
- The post-New Testament church prescribed immersion and only introduced the practice of "sprinkling" as an alternative in limited conditions

...[B]aptize this way...in living [running] water. But if you have no living [running] water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head. – Didache 7

The concept of sprinkling has some biblical resonances with the practice of the cleansing or purifying priests for their sacred duties in the Old Testament (Num. 8:7). There is also some indication that sprinkling of blood in certain circumstances pronounced lepers as healed—or "cleansed" to use the language of Scripture (Lev. 14:7). However, the concept of 'cleansing' seems to be a secondary metaphor for baptism, with the primary idea of dying and rising being at the forefront of passages that teach intentionally on the significance of baptism (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:12).

Triune Baptism

Simply put “Triune Baptism” means that a person is immersed or “dunked” three times (usually forward) in the name of the Father (1x), the Son (2x), and the Holy Spirit (3x) to give clear emphasis to the trinity and their work the candidates’ behalf. This manner of baptism is often called “Trinitarian,” in that it is done in each of the names of the persons of the Trinity. The other common type of baptism involves being immersed once (usually backward) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. While there is no real difference concerning heart change or commitment, there are a few specific reasons for *Grace Church – Medina East Campus* electing to perform its baptisms in a Trinitarian manner.

Your baptism is valid because it was the outward expression of your belief in and identification with Jesus Christ, as well as your commitment to his cause. Nothing can take away from that joyful moment. At Grace, we ask all who believe in Jesus to publicly proclaim it through triune baptism. For a new believer this is not an issue. For a baptized believer in Christ, who comes to Grace from another church family, it is a different matter. We do not question your baptism that expresses your salvation. However, our present charter states that those who wish to become members of Grace Church must be baptized by triune baptism. Should you choose to be baptized at Grace, it would not be part of a salvation ceremony, but a membership ceremony. I have been baptized four times – once as a baby (for dedication), once at the age of 12 (for salvation), in the Jordan River for celebration, and at Grace Church (as a requirement for all staff and membership.)

The ‘Baptizer’

Though it is common nowadays for a licensed minister or pastor to be the ‘qualified’ individual for baptism, the practice of the churches in the New Testament period varied. As we can see in the example of Philip and Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, a standard practice of the early church was to have the individual who led a person to Christ baptize them.

And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Thus, while it is completely acceptable for someone in pastoral leadership to baptize you, it is completely acceptable (and actually encouraged) to have the person who led

you to make the commitment to follow Jesus do the physical immersion. Should you want or need to have someone in leadership do your baptism, you're encouraged to have your Life Group Leader participate in this way or one of our campus pastors would also be elated to assist.

Check out the section in this packet labeled *Commonly Asked Questions* for further direction, or feel free to arrange a conversation with someone on our leadership team.

Practical Logistics

Here is a brief outline of what you'll need to prepare yourself for baptism:

- Access the *Baptism* resource page on our website – <http://medinaeast.graceohio.org/baptism>. Here, you'll find the following to get you ready to go:
 - Watch the 11-minute *Baptism Educational Video* to help grasp a deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of baptism in the Bible.
 - Download the *Baptism Packet* (this document) if you have not done so already or if you'd like another copy.
 - Read the following two (2) instruction guides:
 - *Crafting the 'One-Minute Version' of Your Story*
 - *How to Send Your Video to the Medina East Team*
- Prepare and film the 'One Minute Version' of your story using the recommendations provided in *Crafting the 'One Minute' Version of Your Story*
- Send us your story in one (1) or two (2) ways:
 - iPhone, iPad, Android or tablet users can text their video to mec.baptism@graceohio.org. Please include your name in the body of the text.
 - PC or Mac computer users can upload their videos by clicking the *Upload the 'One Minute Version' of Your Story* link at <http://medinaeast.graceohio.org/baptism> and follow the instructions.

Here is a brief outline of what you can expect during the day of baptism:

- **Gathering:** Be ready to convene in the MEC Library 30 minutes before your assigned service begins for final instructions and direction. There you will also fill out the *Application for Baptism*. A copy of this document can be found at the end of this packet, so if you'd like to fill it out beforehand and bring it with

you to the service, you may elect to do so. We will have copies of this application on arrival.

We'll answer any last-minute questions you have, pray together and prepare our hearts for the service.

- **Clothing:** Prior to this pre-convene, you should already be wearing your 'baptism clothes.' It is recommended that you consider the following with regards to attire:
 - Wear darker pieces of clothing that are not thin or see-through.
 - Bring a towel and take it with you when you are called up to be baptized.
 - Bring a weather-appropriate change of clothing for the conclusion of the service.

- **Service Flow:**
 - A pastor, Life Group Leader who is overseeing the flow of the service will open with a greeting and a high-level overview of the importance/significance of making a commitment to be baptized.
 - As you are called up for baptism, the previously filmed version of your salvation story will be playing. You'll step into the tank while the story is playing and get prepared to be baptized
 - The leader or the individual you want to baptize you will address you and those who are gathered with "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and immerse you head first three times.
 - When you are done, you'll be escorted to an area of the auditorium where you can stay in the service for the remaining people to be baptized. You'll then be dismissed to head to the restrooms to change clothes.

- **Who to Invite:** In a nutshell, baptism is an outward sign of an inward change or work that has been performed by the Holy Spirit when you believed in Jesus and

resolved to follow him. So it's not only a token of the interaction of God's grace and your faith, it is also a marker or emblem for the purposes of others knowing the decision you made. Because of this, you're encouraged to invite anyone you know, love or care about. Other Christ-followers, your Life Group and immediate family are good starting points, but you may want to strongly consider friends who don't follow Jesus and relationships in your life where the gospel has yet to take root.

Essentially, it's an opportunity to celebrate with other believers and demonstrate your commitment with those who are still investigating Jesus—even those who really want nothing to do with Jesus! It's not necessary to make the 'ask' controversial or divisive—if someone says 'no,' that's completely okay. But certainly don't allow your perception of how they might respond be the deciding factor.

So know you you'd like to invite and pray through who God might want you to invite!

Sharing Your Story

Use the space provided below to write a succinct account of your conversion experience. Think 1-3 paragraphs. This will provide a helpful outline as you film your personal story encountering God's grace and commitment to follow Jesus. You can even read your story as you film it, should you so desire.

Commonly Asked Questions

1. Does it matter how many times someone is dunked?

- The Bible does not give much insight into the procedure of baptism. Some churches baptize by single immersion (one dunk). Grace Church practices triune immersion (three dunks).
- Ultimately, the Bible isn't clear how many times a person should be dunked. Therefore, the important thing is not how many times a person is immersed, but that they are being immersed in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit in obedience to Matt. 28:19-20.

Why does Grace Church practice triune immersion? During the Byzantine period (330-1453 AD), some Christians rejected the doctrine of the Trinity (the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Because of this, they would be baptized in the name of Jesus, but not the Holy Spirit.

The reaction of the Church was to have people immersed three times: once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son, and once in the name of the Holy Spirit, thus symbolizing agreement with the doctrine of the Trinity.

2. Does it matter if you get dunked forward or backward?

- Those who baptize "backward" do so to represent the posture of a dead person, or buried facing upward.
- Those who baptize forward do so because Romans 6 mentions being baptized into the likeness of Christ. This is coupled with John 19:30, which indicates that Jesus, "bowed his head (*forward*) and gave up His spirit" at the crucifixion.

3. What about infant baptism (Paedobaptism)?

- Biblically, baptism follows our faith in Christ and repentance of sin and thus is always an informed and conscious decision. It is because of this that Grace Church does not perform infant baptism. However, we do perform baby dedication services as a way for parents to commit to raise their children in a God-honoring way.

4. If I have been baptized in the past, how do I know if my baptism is genuine?

- Your baptism is genuine if you did it as a conscious choice as a sincere believer and follower of Jesus.

5. If I've been baptized in the past, should I be baptized again at Grace Church?

- At Grace Church, we practice triune immersion as a requirement of membership for those who have not yet been baptized. However, our bylaws indicate that if a person has already been baptized via single immersion (one dunk) into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Grace Church will consider that baptism as valid in terms of consideration for membership.

6. Does it matter if you sprinkle or immerse?

- Biblically, baptism is always done by way of immersion.
- The Greek word for “baptize” (*baptizo*) means “to immerse completely” or “to plunge under.”

7. Who can baptize me?

- The Bible does not say that a pastor or leader must baptize you. The pattern of the New Testament is that the person who leads another to Christ does the baptizing.
- At Grace, it is common for children to be baptized by believing fathers who have already been baptized. Life Group Leaders baptize people in their groups as well.

8. What should I expect during a baptism service?

- We ask that you bring a towel, shorts, and a dark colored t-shirt.
- The Pastor leading the service will call you to the baptism pool. The person baptizing you will ask that you to briefly share what God has done and is doing in your life and why you want to be baptized.

Many people are afraid to be baptized because it requires them to be in front of a group of people. In the early church, people were baptized naked! If you are feeling anxiety about baptism, be comforted.

- After you share, the person baptizing you will dunk you three times forward, pausing in between each dunk.
- Finally, the person baptizing you will pray for you at the end.

9. Should I invite friends and family to my baptism?

- Absolutely! Baptism is an outward expression to the world that you want to be identified with Christ.



REQUEST FOR BAPTISM

We are excited that you have decided to pursue baptism here at Grace Church, Medina East Campus! Please complete this form and submit to the church office so we can be aware of your desire. Thank you for expressing interest in Baptism.

Name _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please select your baptism preference:

1. During Grace Church service *(choose one)*

- Saturday during the 5:15pm service
- Saturday during the 7:00pm service
- Sunday during the 9:15am service
- Sunday during the 11:00am service

2. Life Group (LG)

- I desire to be baptized in my LG.
LG leader name _____

I watched the Baptism Educational film on
The Medina East website on:

_____.
date

I discussed Baptism with my LG Leader
on: _____.

date

I wish to be baptized on _____
date

by: Pastor _____

LG Leader _____

Other (Name) _____

Some Questions for You

1. Briefly describe the circumstances through which you became a “follower of Christ”:

2. How has God been working in your life recently?

3. Why do you desire to be baptized?

The undersigned acknowledges that this testimony is the property of Grace Church and may be printed and distributed to the Grace Church family.

Name

Date

Return this form:

- at the Welcome Center or church office
- to your LG Leader
- via email to the church office at medinaeast@graceohio.org

If you have any questions, please call the church office at 330-239-2600 or email medineast@graceohio.org. We will contact you with next steps once we receive this form.