

REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM

MARK 1:1–11

Jesus shared our baptism in order that we might share his baptism, just as he shared our life and death. Because Jesus has waded into these waters, all the spiritual blessings of his baptism now spill over into our lives. Therefore, when we are baptized into Christ's body, we receive the same anointing of the Holy Spirit. When we arise from the waters, we hear the same heavenly voice claiming us as beloved children of God.

Imagine a pastor holding an infant, fuzzy head dripping with water. Parents and family look on teary-eyed. Church members crane their necks for a better view. The pastor says these words, adapted from the French baptismal liturgy:


“For you, little one, the Spirit of God moved over the waters at creation, and the Lord God made covenants with his people. It was for you that the Word of God became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. For you, child, Jesus Christ suffered death crying out at the end, ‘It is finished!’ For you Christ triumphed over death, rose in newness of life, and ascended to rule over all. All of this was done for you, little one, though you do not know any of this yet. But we will continue to tell you this good news until it becomes your own.”¹

The pastor, child, family, and congregation are united in a faith practice that, while happening at a particular time and place, also continues to unfold for each of them over their lifetimes, as the good news becomes their own.

Baptism is an unusual “practice of Jesus” for this series to consider, in that, while Jesus was baptized and called his followers to baptize others (Matthew 28:18–20), he doesn't seem to have baptized anyone himself (see John 4:2). He lived his adult life and ministry as one who had been baptized, showing us how baptism is a sign of the reign of God. Those who now are baptized into Christ are stamped with the seal of God's grace. We are children of a new creation, citizens of a heavenly realm. Illumined by the Spirit present in our baptism, we can see glimpses of God's promise already transforming our present reality into God's good future.

1. Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Variations on the French Reformed Church Baptismal Liturgy,” www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/variations_on_the_french_reformed_church_baptismal_liturgy1.pdf.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE



Christians believe baptism to be, like communion, a symbolic act. In practice, it's simply pouring water over someone's head and saying some words. But for Christians, it means so much more. It symbolizes the real power and presence of Christ bestowed on the person. In this symbolic act we assume new identities as people of God, members of communities, ready for service to the world. It marks us forever.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR BAPTISM?

- ➔ When and where did it take place?
- ➔ How old were you?
- ➔ Did you wear anything particular?
- ➔ Were you immersed in water, or was water poured or sprinkled on your head?
- ➔ Who else was there?
- ➔ What have you been told or what do you remember about your baptism?

- ➔ If you have not yet been baptized, or if you don't know any details, what do you imagine or hope about your baptism day?

Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
—1 Corinthians 12:12–13

Thanks be to God!

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

The Gospel of Mark begins with baptism. Mark, the earliest of the four Gospels, opens, not with the story of Jesus' birth, but with the baptism of the adult Jesus in the Jordan River by his cousin, the prophet John (Mark 1:1–11). The other Gospels highlight the baptism of Jesus as well, describing it as the first event of his adult life and the beginning of his ministry.

The church's practice of baptism is primarily patterned after these accounts of John the Baptizer, who came to prepare the way for Christ the Lord, the Messiah. John called people out to the wilderness to be baptized as a sign of repentance, washing away their sin in preparation to welcome God's new realm of righteousness, justice, and peace.

JESUS' BAPTISM

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

—Mark 1:4–11

Christians use the word trinity to describe three ways we understand who God is and how God works. The baptism of Jesus paints a picture of the triune God in action: God the Father speaking words of love; Jesus, claimed as God's beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit given in the form of a dove. When we baptize followers of Jesus today, we do so in the name of all three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

While traditional language of baptism uses the term *Father* for God, other ways to describe the three-in-one nature of God, who is without gender, are also used, for example: "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer," or "Who was, and is, and is to come."

How did Jesus remember his baptism? He exemplified the dynamic, loving relationship that flows from God. He lived as a beloved child of God and shared the gifts of the Spirit, entrusting his life to God's faithful care and devoting his gifts to the service of others. Finally, Jesus himself—in his life, death, and resurrection—was a sign of the realm of God, proclaiming that "the kingdom of God has come near."

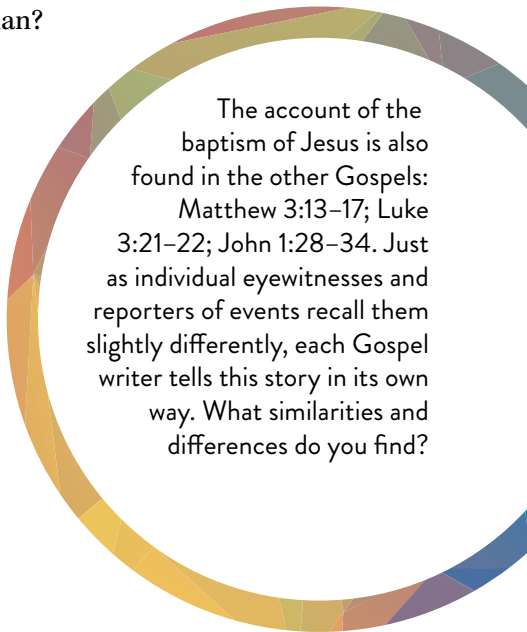
—Mark 1:15

Imagine yourself there as Jesus gets baptized.

- Where are you? Among the crowd on the banks of the Jordan? In the water with Jesus and John?
- What do you see? What do you hear?

Those witnessing the baptism of Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” In our baptism, we are also called and claimed as beloved children of God.

- What does it mean to you to be called God’s child?
- What does it mean to you to be beloved by God, and for God to be “well pleased” with you?



The account of the baptism of Jesus is also found in the other Gospels: Matthew 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:28–34. Just as individual eyewitnesses and reporters of events recall them slightly differently, each Gospel writer tells this story in its own way. What similarities and differences do you find?

BAPTISM IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Just as the Gospel of Mark begins with baptism, the Gospel of Matthew ends with the command from Jesus to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them” (Matthew 28:19). In the book of Acts, we read several accounts of new believers being baptized, some alone as individuals, some with their entire households, and others in great crowds.

Following are accounts of baptism found in the book of Acts. How would these believers describe their baptism day in a journal or a letter to a friend?

Acts 2:37–47—Pentecost	
Acts 8—Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch	
Acts 9—Saul/Paul	
Acts 10—Cornelius	
Acts 16—Lydia and the jailer	
Acts 18–19—Corinthians	



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

As followers of Jesus, how do we remember our baptism? We have recalled or imagined the event, and have considered how early converts might describe the day of their baptism. But remembering our baptism is more than recalling the events of that one day. It's about claiming the promise of a life in Christ, remembering every day that we are baptized.

“I AM BAPTIZED!”

The German pastor and church reformer Martin Luther is said to have written in chalk on his desk “I am baptized!” He would look at it and recite it when he got overwhelmed or anxious. The present tense is what mattered, not that his baptism took place once in the past, but that it informed and infused every bit of his life in the present and the future.

➔ What circumstances in your life cloud the reality that you are beloved by God? When do you need a reminder, not that you *were* baptized, but that you *are*?

➔ What could serve as a reminder that you belong to God? Where might you display it?

➔ If you have not yet been baptized, think in advance about how you might recall it afterward.

CLOTHED WITH CHRIST

In the early days of the Christian church, those being baptized would engage in a period of instruction about the faith, and the new life to which they were being called. Their baptism was then followed by putting on new clothes after their baptism. Today, infants being baptized might wear a special gown, perhaps one handed down within their family. Various biblical passages use the image of clothing as a metaphor for a new life as a follower of Jesus.



Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

—Colossians 3:9–11

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

—Colossians 3:12–17

Several other passages describe the new life:







- Galatians 3:26–29
- Ephesians 4:17–32
- Romans 13:14

➔ What do these verses tell you about living as a baptized child of God?

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

REMEMBERING DURING WORSHIP

There are many ways to remember our baptism in Christian life. Consider these moments that take place during worship. Words spoken during these parts of worship might recall baptism specifically, or they might take place at the font. Water from the font might be incorporated. What are some ways baptized persons could remember their baptism during the following?

I can remember I am baptized during	by . . .
 <i>Confession and pardon</i>	
 <i>The Lord's Supper</i>	
 <i>Welcoming a new member</i>	
<i>Baptism of a member</i>	
 <i>Confirmation</i>	
 <i>Ordination/Installation</i>	
 <i>Commissioning</i>	
<i>Marriage</i>	
<i>Funeral</i>	

Beyond worship, we are invited to remember our baptism as we move through our day in every arena. Try these breath prayers to remember your baptism. Breathe in slowly while praying the first phrase. Breathe out slowly while praying the second.




Write your own breath prayer:

FOLLOWING JESUS

We have remembered our baptism as both an event and a status to be recalled and lived into throughout our lives. We explored how, in his baptism, Jesus was claimed as a beloved child of God. So too, we rejoice in the new life we receive as beloved children of God, and can bear witness to the reign of God, seeking to live as children of that new creation every day.

In our next session, we will explore how baptism helps us cross all divides that might seem like barriers between the future reign of God and our reality today.



If you can, before you move to the next session, watch this YouTube video about baptism at bit.ly/FMBaptismSacrament, 7:35.

➤ What resonates with you?

May all who pass through these waters be delivered from death to life, from bondage to freedom, from sin to righteousness. Bind them to the household of faith and guard them from all evil. Strengthen them to serve you with joy until the day you make all things new. Amen.
—*Book of Common Worship*, p. 427