

Baptism at Covenant Christian Community Church

Baptism is an ancient practice through which someone identifies with Jesus and with his church. Almost every branch of the Christian church practises some form of water baptism.

In its earliest practice, it was modelled after a Jewish ritual cleansing bath (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikveh). It was a symbol of having our lives purified through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And it was a symbol of dying to the way we lived before following Jesus and entering into his resurrection life. (This resurrection image is why baptism, in its most literal form, includes being fully immersed under the water and coming back up again!)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

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. (Romans 6:4)

A Short History of Baptism

In the early church baptism was the initiation rite for all who decided to follow the way of Jesus. They couldn't imagine being a part of God's people (the church) *without* being baptized. But the children in Jesus-following families couldn't choose baptism so eventually, adults began to choose baptism for their children. It allowed adults to feel confident that their kids were "safe" as a part of the church. Our earliest clear indication of infants being baptized show up in the second century of the church. Records at that time show it had become common, although some church leaders discouraged it. There is no clear indication of infants being baptized in the first century of the church.

Over time, the ritual and tradition of baptism allowed people to feel that everything was okay with them and God even if they never actually chose to follow Jesus and even if their life wasn't committed to the way of Jesus. As long as they'd been baptized everything was good! This kind of struggle has existed in all kinds of churches since the earliest days of the church.

In the mid-1500s, religious and technological events led to the Bible being widely available for people to read in their own languages. The changes that began in the church, as a result, continue to this day. One development that came through reading the Bible was the observation that baptism was introduced in the early church as an act of obedience and response to accepting Jesus as the lord and saviour of one's life. It was something the earliest Christians chose to do, not something done to them. In response to this realization, many who were committed to following Jesus chose to be "re-baptized" to show that their faith wasn't just something they inherited from their parents. It was something that they chose in response to God's love and grace.

Despite violent opposition against them (mostly related to political power), these re-baptizers believed that following the way of Jesus was the most important thing in their lives. Since Jesus modelled baptism (Matthew 3:13-17) and Jesus taught that those who would be his followers should be baptized (Matthew 28:19), re-baptism became central to the life of this reformation community of Jesus' followers.

Our Practice of Baptism

Today, Covenant is among the spiritual descendants of those who had this commitment to following the way of Jesus. And, with them, baptism is a central way that we invite people to identify that their relationship with God is not just something they've inherited. Following Jesus is a commitment they have made for themselves and they are choosing to participate in the symbol Jesus chose – baptism – to demonstrate that commitment.

In today's world, long removed from the mid-1500s, those who commit to following Jesus come from all kinds of backgrounds. There are those who have been baptized as infants and it meant very little to them in their connection with God. There are others who have been baptized as infants and their connection with the church of their childhood has been extremely important to them on their faith journey. There are some who were baptized at an older age, but did it to go along with the crowd or without being fully committed to Jesus. Others have come to follow Jesus, but haven't thought about baptism before.

We don't believe that baptism is necessary for God to do his work in our lives. Baptism (or re-baptism) doesn't negate the work God has already done in your life. And it certainly doesn't reject the significance of other events in our lives. And there's no magic in baptism for people who get baptized just because they think they're supposed to. But we believe that something special can happen in our lives at baptism when we enter into it as a symbol of our choice to follow Jesus as our lord and saviour and to live his way in the world.

A Couple of Different Baptism Things We Do...

At Covenant Church, we follow a couple of traditions that might be new to you even if you have seen immersion baptisms before. These are *traditions* and not something that we find in Jesus' teachings or early church history, but they are significant to us.

The first is that we baptize people forward (from a kneeling position), putting them under the water face first. (Yes...you can absolutely plug your nose!) This symbolizes that baptism is something we are choosing to enter into. It's not a passive submission.

The second is that we immerse people three times. This is to represent the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the baptism.

This combination of factors is somewhat unique even among churches that practice immersion baptism, but hopefully, an awareness of what these traditions represent can help make baptism at Covenant even more special.

Perhaps the most important thing we should say is that we invite all who trust in the salvation Jesus offers and commit to living with him as their lord to be baptized! From the earliest days of church history, it has been *the* way for people to identify with Jesus and to demonstrate that identity to others. We'd love to help you take that next step in your connection with him.

If this information about baptism interests you, you may have several other questions. We've tried to answer them in the FAQ below.

Baptism at Covenant - Frequently Asked Questions

What do I need to do to be baptized at Covenant Church?

Because baptism is about identifying with the salvation that comes from Jesus and living with Jesus as our lord, we simply want to identify that this is true for you. This primarily comes through a conversation with someone in leadership at Covenant (a pastor or a deacon). Something helpful to think through for this conversation (and maybe to write down) is a three-stage story:

- What was my life like before my awareness of and commitment to Jesus?
- What factors led me to trust in Jesus and commit to following his way?
- How has my life been changing – what’s been different for me – in light of committing to the way of Jesus?

What happens when I’m baptized?

As mentioned in the main document about baptism, our tradition is to have the individual kneel in the water and then be immersed forward three times.

Before it got to that, the person being baptized would enter the water wearing a bathing suit (or something else they are comfortable getting wet) and a t-shirt and they would share their commitment to following Jesus. The person doing the baptizing (most often a pastor, but it can be someone else) would then immerse the person three times. Most often this would happen at the church during a Sunday morning gathering.

Do I have to say anything when I’m baptized?

Apart from saying, “Yes” to a simple question, you are not required to say anything. We will ask you, “Have you personally placed your trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and are you committed to following his way of living?” We do, however, *encourage* people to share a testimony of their faith so that those who are witnessing your baptism can better celebrate with you. The questions above, (What was your life like before Jesus? What led you to trust in Jesus? How is your life changing in light of Jesus?) can be a great format for sharing your story. You may want to include a favourite scripture passage as well. If you were more comfortable with your story being recorded and played as a video instead of speaking in front of the congregation, that could be arranged.

Where do I get baptized?

We have a tank specially made for baptisms hidden under our platform at the church. There’s even a heater for the water we put in it! But you wouldn’t need to get baptized there. Covenant has had baptisms in Penetang Bay. And we’ve had baptisms in swimming pools. Baptisms are meant to be public and involve the church community, but beyond that the location is secondary. We’d be glad to talk about a location that would be significant for you.