

# **Baptism**

## **Your Baby's Baptism**

*Selected Scriptures*

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# Your Baby's Baptism<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

One of the most significant events in the life of Christian parents is the presentation of their child for the sacrament of baptism. Today Alexia Tyler was presented for baptism.

While obedience to God's commands is always the key to blessing, an understanding of what transpires in the sacrament of baptism enhances this blessing.

Today I would like to increase our understanding of baptism from what is revealed to us in God's Word so that we might understand better the blessings God intends for us.

My comments today are taken from a booklet by Dr. Wilson Benton, retired pastor of Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO, and a past moderator of the PCA.

## Lesson

I would like to develop this lesson as follows:

1. Biblical perspective on the sacrament of infant baptism,
2. Personal involvement in the sacrament of infant baptism, and
3. Public administration of the sacrament of infant baptism.

### I. Biblical Perspective on the Sacrament of Infant Baptism

First, the biblical perspective on the sacrament of infant baptism.

God's promise to be the Savior of his people is called a *covenant*. A *covenant* is defined as "an agreement between two or more

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<sup>1</sup> This material is taken from W. Wilson Benton, *Your Baby's Baptism* (Atlanta, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 1991), 16 pages.

persons.”<sup>2</sup> This is the essence of what God says in Genesis 17:7, “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”

It was common in Biblical times (and still is today) to seal a covenant or agreement or promise with a sign. For example, a marriage agreement is sealed with the exchange of wedding rings. God sealed his promise to Noah that he would never again destroy the earth by flooding with the sign of a rainbow. God sealed his promise of salvation to Abraham with the sign of circumcision. Listen to what God says in Genesis 17:11, “You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.”

While there is only one covenant of salvation, it is fulfilled in two different administrations. In the old administration of the covenant of grace (corresponding to the Old Testament), *circumcision* was the sign of the covenant. In the new administration of the covenant of grace (corresponding to the New Testament), *baptism* is the sign of the covenant.

So, one might ask, “Since the covenant is the same, why has the sign changed?” Let me suggest some answers.

*First, circumcision was a bloody rite, a reminder that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).* Baptism, however, is a bloodless rite, a reminder that Jesus Christ’s blood has been shed for the forgiveness of sins.

*Second, circumcision, by its very nature, could only be administered to males.* Baptism, however, can be administered to males and females, since in Christ there is neither male nor female (cf. Galatians 3:28), and in this respect it is a “better” sign.

*And third, the fact that circumcision involves pain and baptism does not indicate the gracious way in which the sign is administered in the new administration of the covenant of grace.* Thus, the sign itself becomes a means of grace.

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<sup>2</sup> Catechism for Young Children, Q/A 22.

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Now, all Christians universally agree that the sign of the promise has changed from circumcision to baptism. However, all Christians do not universally agree that the sign should still be applied to infants of believers. Let me address this issue briefly.

There is no verse in the New Testament that says, “You shall baptize your covenant children.” However, the obvious *continuity* between the two administrations of the covenant of grace does speak to the issue. Consider the following.

*First, from the beginning, true religion has been a family affair.* God addressed his promise not merely to Abraham but to his whole family. The Bible is very clear about family solidarity, and ordinarily the faith of the father is the faith of the family. This is hard for us to comprehend in our individualistic age today. Listen again to what God says in Genesis 17:7, “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”

*Second, infants were included in the covenant family and received the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament.* All Israelite males from Isaac were circumcised on the eighth day. Now if such a basic sign was to be altered, God would have instructed his people, but the commandment to include children in the covenant family and to administer the sign of the promise to them has never been revoked. The fact that the Lord does not retract the command indicates that the principle and the practice should still stand. In fact, the burden of proof lies with those who would cancel what God has commanded (and never repealed) rather than with those who would continue what God has ordained.

*Third, since infants were included in the old administration of the covenant we would not expect to find them excluded from the new administration of the covenant.* That would make the new administration less generous than the old.

*Fourth, the promise of the covenant is clearly given in the new administration to the children in the covenant family.* Acts 2:39 says, “For the promise is for you and for your children. . . .” If

the child has received the promise, the child is also to receive the sign of the promise.

*Fifth, the record of the New Testament church contains several accounts of “household” baptisms (e.g. Acts 16:15; 16:33; 1 Corinthians 1:16).* Although it is not stated that children are present, it is not unreasonable to assume the presence of children in those households.

The practice of infant baptism historically has posed another question: “But what about faith? The baby being baptized certainly does not believe.”

That is true. No one can argue against that point. However, it should be noted that faith *is* present and exercised at the time of infant baptism. It is obviously not the faith of the child, but the faith of the parents. There is quite a bit of Biblical evidence to support the fact that children are often blessed by God on the basis of their parents’ faith in him. Look at some of the following examples.

Noah’s family was blessed by God on the basis of Noah’s faith in God (cf. Genesis 6:18; 1 Peter 3:20; esp. Hebrews 11:7).

Abraham exercised faith on behalf of his sons (Genesis 17:7-14).

Moses was blessed because of his parents’ faith in God (Exodus 2:1-10; Hebrews 11:23).

Jairus’ daughter was resurrected from the dead because of Jairus’ faith in Christ (Luke 8:40-56). The daughter certainly could not exercise faith and was the beneficiary of her father’s faith.

In each case, the child is blessed because of the parents’ faith. In infant baptism, parents exercise faith and claim the covenant promise—the promise of salvation—for their child. Therefore, the sign of that promise is rightly administered to the child.

## **II. Personal Involvement in the Sacrament of Infant Baptism**

Second, let’s note our personal involvement in the sacrament of infant baptism.

Since the Lord commands Christian parents to present their

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children to receive the sign of the covenant, we should understand what that means. There is great blessing for the parent, for the child and for the congregation. Let us examine each in turn.

### A. *Blessing for the Parents*

First, note the blessing for the parents.

*First, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the parents an act of praise and thanksgiving.*

There are several texts, which exhort us to express our praise “in the midst of the congregation” (cf. Psalm 22:22; 68:26; Hebrews 2:12). This sacrament provides the opportunity to do just that.

As parents present their child, they are saying publicly, “Lord, thank you for this life you have created and entrusted to us. Thank you for allowing us the privilege of serving as parents after your own divine example. And Lord, thank you for being the God of life, all life, and especially new life, new human life and new life in Christ.”

*Second, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the parents an act of confession.*

While parents truly thank the Lord for giving them a new baby to raise, they readily admit that they are unworthy and unqualified to be parents. The child is not merely a product of a biological process. The child is a gift of grace, and all grace, whatever the form, is undeserved.

And so the parents come confessing their need of divine assistance if they are to be godly parents. As parents present their child, they are saying, “Oh God, we are as helpless as this little baby. Grant us all the love, the wisdom, the strength, and all the necessary patience to be godly parents.”

*Third, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the parents an act of commitment.*

In a visible and physical manner, the parents signify action that is taking place in their hearts and minds. The sacrament of in-

fant baptism is an external symbol of an internal attitude.

The parents' attitude is the same as Hannah who said, "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord." (1 Samuel 1:27-28a).

Not only do the parents commit their child to the Lord, but they also commit themselves to the Lord. They take vows in which they pledge before God and the congregation to raise their child "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

*Fourth, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the parents an act of obedience.*

Old Testament parents did not ask the question, "Should we have our child circumcised or not?" They recognized their duty on the basis of such texts as Genesis 17:12, 13 where God says, "He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant."

Similarly believers in the New Testament did not ask, "Should we have our child baptized or not?" They recognized their duty.

Christian parents today are duty-bound to do the same.

Parents present their children for baptism, not that God may reward their faith by saving their child (for that would make their faith a work), not in order to certify their child's election, not in order to guarantee in some mystical or mechanical fashion their child's regeneration. Parents present their child in *obedience* to the command of God that the sign of the covenant be administered to the children of parents living in covenant relationship with God.

## *B. Blessing for the Child*

Second, there is blessing for the child.

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Sometimes the argument is advanced that the child is too young to understand what is transpiring and so receives no blessing from the service.

Let's thank God that understanding is not always a prerequisite for blessing. God blesses us, not because we understand, but because he is gracious.

However, there is blessing for the child even though the child is too young to understand what is transpiring.

*First, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the child a sign of need.*

While babies are sweet, lovable, cuddly little creatures, they are nonetheless sinful little creatures.

The sin that stains them is not sin that they have personally committed, but sin inherited from the parents. Every person born in the world (with the exception of Jesus) receives from his parents a sinful nature and becomes a member of the sinful human race.

Every baby, therefore, needs to be cleansed from sin. Since baptism is a sign of cleansing, it is applied to the baby to indicate that need. The need must then be acknowledged and recognized before the remedy will be applied.

What a blessing it is for that baby whose parents admit early that their child does need the cleansing blood of Christ and train him accordingly.

*Second, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the child a sign of promise.*

A child born to Christian parents is a member of God's covenant family and can claim the promise of salvation given to the parents.

On the day of Pentecost Peter said, "For the promise is for you and for your children" (Acts 2:39). Of course, the promises of God are many and varied, but the great promise (Peter used the singular) is that of salvation.

Baptism does not automatically convey salvation. It is not a magical formula. Just because a child is baptized does not mean that that child will automatically be saved (any more than circum-

cision meant that Old Testament children would automatically be saved). The Scripture clearly says that faith is always the condition for receiving salvation, but baptism is a sign of the right to claim that promise of salvation.

So in time, the parent encourages the child to do just that. The parent will say to the child, “Before you were old enough to know God, God knew you. Before you were old enough to love God, God loved you. Before you were old enough to respond to God, God made you a promise. And that promise is just this: If you receive Jesus Christ by faith, he will cleanse you from your sin. He not only has made this promise to you, but sealed it with the sign of your baptism. Just as water cleanses the body, so God will cleanse your heart from sin when you trust in Jesus.”

*Third, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the child a sign of favor.*

Christian parents should say to their children, “It is a sign of God’s grace and favor that he gave you to Christian parents and that you grew up in a home where you had the opportunity to learn the gospel—the good news of God’s love for you in Christ Jesus.”

Parents should expect their children to believe. Their hope lies in God and is rooted in his promises to them and to their child. God says in Isaiah 65:23: “They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them.”

But what if the child baptized in infancy does not believe, what then? When a child rejects Jesus Christ, parents must pray for that child, and that one day that child’s heart will change. Remember that such a child has not denied his baptism, for until he believes his baptism serves as a sign of the promise of salvation offered, which is a valid and genuine offer. After the child believes, his baptism then serves as a sign and seal not only of salvation offered, but of the salvation offered and received.

*Fourth, the sacrament of infant baptism is for the child a sign of welcome.*

It is the public, official welcome into the covenant family.

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Note that baptism does not *bring* a child into the covenant community; it recognizes the membership the child *already* holds.

### C. *Blessing for the Congregation*

And third, there is also blessing for the congregation.

The congregation is blessed as it fulfills its duty of oversight. Baptism touches the life of the local church at basically two points.

*First, at the point of responsibility.*

The practice of naming particular godparents for a child is rejected in the Presbyterian tradition. The reason is because *all adult church members* act as godparents for the children in the covenant community. All adults are spiritual guardians of all the children and share—to some degree—with the physical parents the awesome responsibility of raising the children in the training and instruction of the Lord. That is why all communicant members take a vow to assist the parents in the Christian nurture of their child. And as this responsibility is faithfully carried out, there is great blessing for the congregation.

*And second, at the point of remembrance.*

As the congregation witnesses the baptism of the child, they are reminded of the vows they have previously made. Church members need to ask themselves, “Have I been faithful as a steward for the gift of life that God has entrusted to me? Have I fulfilled my duties and obligations as a parent and as a spiritual guardian?” If the answer is *no*, confession of sin and prayer for grace to improve is in order. But if the answer is *yes*, gratitude for God’s enabling grace is appropriate. In this sense, it is a blessing to be reminded again of our duty as Christian parents.

## III. **Public Administration of the Sacrament of Infant Baptism**

Third, the public administration of the sacrament of infant baptism.

Because baptism is a sign and seal given by Christ to his Church, it can have no real significance apart from the life and worship of the church. Therefore, baptism should always, except in the case of highly unusual circumstances, be administered in the presence of the covenant family. If a welcome is to be extended and if the obligations are to be assumed, it necessarily has to be in the context of the covenant family.

Furthermore, the baptism should take place in the church to which the parents belong and not in a church 100 miles away. It is the local church that assumes covenant obligations, not the church 100 miles away.

In the actual administration of the sacrament, it is important that the pastor actually receives the child from the parents and, after the baptism, returns the child to the parents. This action symbolizes an important spiritual transaction. The pastor, as God's representative, receives the child, marks the child with the sign of the covenant in the act of baptism, and then gives the child back to the parents with the exhortation that they are to care for this covenant child.

Furthermore, it is also significant that the father, as head of the house, actually present the child to the pastor. It is equally significant that after the baptism the child is returned to the mother for it is she, under the authority of her husband, who will exercise principle oversight in the training of the young life.

## Conclusion

So, let us ask God to give us all a deeper understanding of this sacrament, a growing awareness of our own responsibility, and a prayerful desire to see the salvation of our children who have been baptized. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAYER:**

O God, thank you for the gift of children. Help us to understand our responsibilities as parents, children, and as a church family. Would you be pleased to glorify your name as you fulfill your covenant promise in the life of each baptized child.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.