
BAPTISM

PREPARATION PACKET



Dear Friend,

You are about to take one of the most important steps in your life and we here at Bethel Church rejoice and celebrate with you. The materials enclosed in this packet will help you in preparation for this next step in your spiritual journey. I would encourage you to make full use of the information provided and jot down any questions you may wish to ask. This packet serves as a way for you to become acquainted with our theology about baptism and to provide some basic instructions about the baptism process.

Please carefully review "Guidelines for Baptism Testimony" and complete the "Application for Baptism" and return it to me prior to the Baptism Preparation Class if possible. Upon the completion of the Baptism Preparation Class, the believer desiring baptism will be interviewed by the Pastor and/or members of the Steward Board for their approval to be baptized. Finally, a service of baptism will be scheduled on the 3rd or 4th Sunday of the month, during the morning worship service at 10:30am. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Any please let me know if you have any questions.

In His Service,

Pastor Sidney Williams

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*Last revision October 2016.
All Scripture references are from The New International Version (NIV)*

WELCOME TO THE BAPTISM INFORMATION CLASS!

Your decision to find out more about baptism shows you are serious about following Jesus Christ. Baptism is one of the major highlights of the Christian life. Baptism is:

- A significant milestone on your spiritual journey
- A sign of your covenant relationship with Jesus Christ
- A step of obedience in the process of becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ
- A celebration of your new life in Christ

At the Baptism Information Class, we want to help you understand all that baptism means and rejoice with you about what God is doing in your life.

BAPTISM—WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

- Baptism is a one-time spiritual event indicating—in an outward, symbolic and public way
- It is symbolic of your identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
- It is saying publicly that you have forsaken your old way of living and that you embrace your new life in Christ.
“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- In summary, baptism is an act of obedience to Jesus Christ and is an outward, public sign and declaration of your intention to follow Him.
- Infant Baptism is a means of grace for the children of our Members in good standing, who intend to raise their children as African Methodist and have them Confirmed at the appropriate age. Otherwise we recommend a Dedication only.

WHAT DOES THE WORD “BAPTISM” MEAN?

1. Literally—the New Testament Greek word baptizo means “dip” or “immerse” something into water.
2. Figuratively—the primary meaning takes on a secondary meaning, namely “identify with.” At conversion when you are placed into the body of Christ and when His Holy Spirit comes to reside in your heart, then you begin to manifest Godly character qualities.

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...” (Galatians 5:22-23)

WHY SHOULD YOU BE BAPTIZED?

1. Because you want to follow the example of Jesus Christ

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” (Mark 1:9)

2. Because you want to obey Jesus’ command

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

3. Because privately you want to affirm that Jesus is your Savior and Lord.

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.” (1 John 2:3)

4. Because publicly you want to declare your allegiance to Jesus Christ to those inside the faith community and to those outside the faith community

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2:41)

“Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.” (Acts 18:8)

WHAT DOES BAPTISM SYMBOLIZE?

1. As you are lowered beneath the water and then raised up out of the water, you are identifying yourself with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Pouring and Sprinkling are also options – Read Ezek. 36:25)

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

(1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” (Romans 6:3-5)

2. You are personally declaring the death and burial of your old way of life—before conversion—and allegiance to your new life in Christ.

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

IS BAPTISM NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

- No, you cannot earn your salvation.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

- Baptism is not a condition for salvation; rather it is a consequence of salvation.
- The act of baptism does not grant you salvation nor does it assist you in holding onto or maintaining your salvation. Salvation is God’s realm and God’s responsibility. Only God’s grace, and your faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross and in His resurrection, brings you into the family of God.

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- Baptism—much like a wedding ring—is an outward symbol of a commitment you have already made in your heart.
 - Like Communion (the Lord’s Supper, Eucharist) baptism is a symbolic ritual—an act of obedience to Jesus Christ’s command.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Any person of any age who clearly understands and clearly has responded to the gospel message summarized below:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Note in the book of Acts that the issue is understanding and response...

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2:41)

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (Acts 8:12)

“They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.” (Acts 16:31-33)

“Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.” (Acts 18:8)

Infant Baptism is a means of grace for the children of our Members in good standing, who intend to raise their children as African Methodist and have them Confirmed at the appropriate age. Otherwise, we encourage the biblical practice of dedication based upon two clear examples in Scripture...

Hannah Dedicates Samuel

“So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, ‘Because I asked the LORD for him.’ When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, ‘After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always.’” (1 Samuel 1:20-22)

Jesus Presented in the Temple

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.” (Luke 2:21-22)

To arrange for an infant baptism or child dedication, contact the church office.

WHEN SHOULD YOU BE BAPTIZED?

There is no mandatory timeline, but typically in Scripture it was soon after a person’s conversion experience. Some were baptized immediately (Philippian jailer); others the same day (Cornelius, Lydia), or a few days later (Apostle Paul).

We strongly encourage followers of Jesus Christ to pursue baptism as soon as practically possible after placing their faith in Him—but only with clear understanding and instruction.

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked.

'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?' Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him." (Acts 8:26-38)

HOW ARE YOU TO BE BAPTIZED?

At Bethel Church, we baptized by immersion, pouring or sprinkling of water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1. Throughout the New Testament the word baptizo ("immerse") is used and is the general custom of most Protestant churches. However, the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel spoke, specifically, of the promised cleansing that was to come in the Messianic age. "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols" (Ezek. 36:25). Since this event was to coincide with the giving of the Holy Spirit (vv. 26-27) we are certain that it refers to the cleansing symbolized by baptism.

2. The act of immersion best describes the New Testament reference to Baptism.

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."
(1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” (Romans 6:3-5)

WHAT ABOUT BEING BAPTIZED TWICE?

The Bible speaks about being born twice but not about being baptized twice.

“In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again [or born from above].” (John 3:3)

- A person’s conversion and his or her baptism are closely linked in Scripture.

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

- At conversion, the follower of Jesus Christ is placed—at that moment, once and for all—into the body of Christ.

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

- If you were dedicated or christened as an infant and not Confirmed, then we recommend that you proceed with baptism by immersion, pouring or sprinkling.
- This simple act of obedience to Christ in no way devalues an infant christening or dedication. Instead, it builds upon the promise your parents and godparents made to nurture you spiritually until you came to your own personal faith, with full understanding of and response to the gospel message.

MAY FAMILY MEMBERS BE BAPTIZED TOGETHER?

Yes, we encourage it, provided that each member of the family has made a genuine profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

“When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.” (Acts 16:15)

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.” (Acts 16:31-33)

“(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.)” (1 Corinthians 1:16)

WILL BAPTISM CANDIDATES NEED TO SAY ANYTHING AT THEIR BAPTISM?

The real issue here is a verbal confession of your faith in Jesus Christ.

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:9-10)

“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.” (1 John 4:15)

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...” (1 Peter 3:15)

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- In all circumstances the baptizing pastor will ask you to give a public, affirmative, oral response to some simple, straightforward questions such as:

“Do you believe Jesus Christ was the Son of God? Do you believe He died and shed His blood for your sins—that He was buried and raised from the dead on the third day? And by God’s grace and power do you intend to obey God’s Word and honor Him in your life?”

At the end—to make it easy for you—the baptizing pastor will say, “If so, please answer, ‘I do.’”

- o *prior to the day of baptism—we will require a written testimony.*

IS BAPTISM A REQUIREMENT FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Bethel Church does not require baptism for church membership. However, we strongly encourage every follower of Jesus Christ to take this important step of obedience to Him.

HOW DO I SIGN UP FOR BAPTISM?

You may contact the church office.

WHY DO WE STILL PRACTICE INFANT BAPTISM?

Tradition:

The Methodist Church has always understood baptism as a sacrament which accomplishes several things, the first of which is the remission of sin, both original sin and actual sin—only original sin in the case of infants and young children, since they are incapable of actual sin; and both original and actual sin in the case of older persons.

Scripture/Reason:

In the Old Testament, if a man wanted to become a Jew, he had to believe in the God of Israel and be circumcised. In the New Testament, if one wants to become a Christian, one must believe in God and Jesus and be baptized. In the Old Testament, those born into Jewish households could be circumcised in anticipation of the Jewish faith in which they would be raised. Thus in the New Testament, those born in Christian households can be baptized in

anticipation of the Christian faith in which they will be raised. The pattern is the same: If one is an adult, one must have faith before receiving the rite of membership; if one is a child too young to have faith, one may be given the rite of membership in the knowledge that one will be raised in the faith.

Appendix I - Guidelines for Baptism Testimony:

We ask that you write a testimony to ensure you think through the process of becoming baptized. Your testimony is something that can be shared over and over again when opportunities arise. Always keep your testimony positive by focusing on good things the Lord has done for you rather than bad things others have done to you. Avoid specific negative references to individuals or churches so that you can keep the emphasis on God and His faithfulness!

- A. How was God using the circumstances in your life to draw you to Christ?
- B. When and where did you come to the decision to accept Christ as your personal Savior?
- C. Were there any key people involved in helping you make the decision to accept Christ?
- D. What are 2 or more changes in your life as a result of knowing Jesus Christ?

Sample Testimonies: Below are a few baptism testimonies. We trust this will help you in preparation of your own testimony.

Testimony of Cathy Weber: "As a young girl I accepted Christ as my personal Savior. Christ at that time was very evident in my life. But as I reached my teen years I began to fall away and pursued the things of the world. As the years went by I put God more and more on the back burner. Then my life started to take some difficult turns. My health deteriorated, and I lost my job and my health insurance. This put my husband and I in a devastating financial situation. Then the most tragic thing that I ever thought could happen happened. I lost my Dad, one of the most important people in my life, to a sudden and tragic accident. At the funeral, I heard a sermon about Christ and what it meant to have Christ as your personal Savior and how we need to put Christ in control of our lives. It was then I began to really realize just how much I really had turned away from God and that He was still patiently waiting for me to turn back to Him. On August 10th, 1992 I recommitted my life to Jesus. Over the past year God has opened my eyes and heart to a new way of life. He has blessed me with a loving, supportive husband who now also is a Christian. He gave us a beautiful little girl who came at the perfect time. He has also given me a supportive family and a new church with new friends. He is patiently teaching me how to put my worries and concerns in His hand, and I'm learning to trust Him with the results. But most of all I am blessed with knowing His promise and gift of eternal life with Him."

Testimony of Bob Blake: "I became a Christian a year and a half ago. I tried everything I knew for happiness and fulfillment, but never felt peace. I began searching for God because I knew He was the only reasonable option left. Since Christ has come into my heart I have had the peace and fulfillment I was looking for. I have a new definition of love and forgiveness and I want to spend the rest of my life serving Him."

Testimony of Janet Lamere: "I cannot give you the exact date and time in which I accepted Jesus in my heart, but I can tell you the difference it has made in my life. Accepting Jesus has placed everything into proper perspective. I see now that the good I did in the past was only to give praise to myself. I wanted people to think I was a good person, looking for praise from other people. Now I realize that was all for vanity. I want the glory to go to God who has opened my eyes to His greatness. Ephesians 2:8-9... "For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God - not of works, lest any man boast. I thank God for His goodness and perfect righteousness."

Appendix II - INSTRUCTIONS FOR BAPTISM CANDIDATES

1. Time of Baptism:

- A. During the 10:30AM morning worship service. The dates of scheduled baptisms are announced in the church bulletin or you can call the church office for information on the next baptism.
- B. Candidates should arrive at least 30 minutes before the scheduled service. We will have attendants to assist you.
- C. Come to the Pastor's office upon your arrival at the church.

2. Baptism Attire:

- A. Come in your regular church clothes, which you will change in the dressing room.
- B. You may prefer to wear socks for hygienic reasons and safety.
- C. A change of under-garments should be brought to replace wet clothing after baptism.
- D. Women: please wear a solid colored blouse and long slacks. Men: please wear a solid color shirt, preferably white or light in color, along with long slacks. Slacks should be of the washable type.

3. What to expect for Immersion Candidates:

The pastor will have you sit down on the seat in the baptism pool. The pastor will then put his arm behind your back and lean you backwards under the water, while saying, "(Your name), I now baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (If you want, you can hold your nose at this time). The pastor will then pull you back up. The congregation will normally applaud at this time. You can then walk out of the baptism pool and go back and change.

4. What to bring with you:

- A. A large bath towel.
- B. Necessary toiletries, etc.

Appendix III - GUIDELINES FOR INFANT BAPTISM

Parents are responsible for bringing their child to the Sacrament of Baptism as soon after birth as possible. Except in case of necessity, the church is the usual place of baptism.

In order that a child be baptized, it is necessary that...

- the parents consent, or at least one of them, or someone legally standing in their place,
- and that there is reasonable hope that the child will be brought up in the AME Church.

GODPARENTS: A person may only have one or two godparents; if two are chosen, they must be male and female.

In order for someone to be eligible as a godparent, these are the requirements...

- they be chosen by the parents,
- have the ability and the intention to fulfill the role,
- be at least 16 years of age, and...
- be a member of the AME Church and will be a good role model for the one being baptized,
- and be neither the father nor the mother of the child.
- A baptized person who belongs to another Christian community may be admitted only as a "Christian witness" (not a godparent) provided that there is at least one AME godparent who fulfills the above criteria. A non-baptized person cannot be a witness.

Baptismal Preparation

In order to respect your request for the baptism of your child, you are invited to follow closely the stages of preparation offered below...

- Contact the Church office and express your desire to have your child baptized.
- Introduce yourself to the Pastor if you do not already know them personally.
- Become an active member of Bethel. If you are members in good standing, then please consider becoming more involved in at least one ministry at Bethel and participate in Bible Study or Sunday School.
- While baptismal preparation varies from church to church, you will be invited to participate in some manner of faith formation prior to the baptism of your child. This may take the form of a meeting(s) with the pastor, pastoral assistant, or participation in a baptismal preparation session for parents.

It is extremely important to take your faith-life seriously because, before God, you have taken on an awesome responsibility for the salvation of another—your own child! Your commitment and openness to baptismal preparation will help develop the faith-life of your child as he/she matures.

NOTES:
