

HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD UNDERSTAND BAPTISM AND COMMUNION?

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS FROM KIDS' HARBOR, COLLEGE CHURCH

FIRST, DOES YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL?

SCRIPTURE: SEE REFERENCES BELOW *

Who is God? God is King of everything (Psalm 47:7)! He is eternal (Psalm 90:2) which means he has always been and will never end. He never changes (Malachi 3:6), is all powerful (Matthew 19:26), and is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9). He is holy (Leviticus 19:2) and just (Deuteronomy 32:4.) He is love (1 John 4:8). He knows everything (Psalm 139:1-4) and is everywhere (Jeremiah 23:24). He is Creator (Genesis 1:1)!

The Bible tells us that God created everything. Everything was good, and God and people had a perfect relationship (Genesis 1:26-31).

But that was broken when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Sin entered the world. What is sin? Sin is disobeying God's laws. Sin is anything we think, say, or do, that breaks God's law and makes him sad. Sin is forsaking (or turning away from; leaving) God and worshiping something other than Him alone (Romans 3:23; Jeremiah 2:13).

The punishment for sin is separation from God and death. We all sin, and we all are separated from God because he is holy. Because of our sinful hearts, we don't deserve life with God now or in heaven (Romans 6:23).

But there is good news: salvation! Salvation comes from the word "save". We can be saved from our sin! God loved us so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus, to save us. The only way Jesus could save us was to die in our place and take the punishment we deserve (John 3:16).

If we believe this, we must confess our sin and repent. To confess means to tell. To repent means to be sorry. It means to stop disobeying God and stop worshiping other things more than Him. If we repent of our sin and believe that Jesus died for us and rose again from the dead, God forgives us. We can be saved (1 John 1:9)!

This gift of salvation is free. Doing good things will not save us. There is nothing we can do to be saved except believe in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9).

When we are saved, God changes our hearts! He gives us the Holy Spirit to help us obey. Now we want to live for Jesus (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

One day we will go to live with him, and we will be made like him. He will live with us forever in a new creation, and we will worship him always with joy. We will be with all of God's people and there will be no more sadness, pain, or death (John 6:40; Revelation 7:15-17).

What we have just learned is called the "gospel". Gospel means the "good news." This is the best news ever!

WHY ARE BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER IMPORTANT?

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 28:19-20; ACTS 2:38-39; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

The Bible commands two ordinances, or special actions, for the church. These are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. College Church offers two alternative tracks:

INFANT DEDICATION ► PROFESSION OF FAITH ► BELIEVER'S BAPTISM ► LORD'S SUPPER (COMMUNION)

Or

INFANT BAPTISM ► PROFESSION OF FAITH ► CONFIRMATION ► LORD'S SUPPER (COMMUNION)

Infants are either dedicated or baptized. Once a profession of faith has been made, a child may prepare for believer's baptism (if dedicated as an infant) or confirmation (if baptized as an infant). Believer's baptism and confirmation give those coming to personal faith the opportunity to express their faith publicly so that the whole church can celebrate God's saving grace in the child's life. After these steps and upon evidence of heart change and spiritual fruit, a child is ready to participate in the Lord's Supper.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN INFANT DEDICATION?

SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 1

Read 1 Samuel 1 with your child, focusing especially on verses 27-28. Explain that Hannah knew that her son, Samuel, was a gift from God and belonged to God. Hannah chose to bring Samuel to God's house so that he would grow up knowing he belonged to God.

The Bible teaches that each child is created by God (Psalm 139:13-15) as a gift from Him (Psalm 127:3). Parents have been commanded to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

At College Church, when a baby is born, often parents will bring the baby to the church to be dedicated to the Lord—just like Hannah did with Samuel. They are doing something on the *outside*—bringing their baby on stage in front of everyone-- that means something on the *inside*—that their child is a gift from God. They are saying, "God, this child is a gift. This child belongs to you. Bless my child. We will teach this child about you so that someday this child will know you, love you, and follow you." Then the whole church stands up and promises to help the parents teach their child about God. That is called "infant dedication".

Infant dedication does not save the child. The parents expect and hope that their child will repent and believe the gospel when they are old enough to understand. Jesus Christ alone can save the child. When the child is saved and has made a "profession of faith", or announced their faith in the gospel, he or she may be ready to be baptized as a believer.

Parents interested in infant dedication for their child can contact the church office to receive a form and schedule a meeting with a pastor.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN BELIEVER'S BAPTISM?

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 28:16-20; ACTS 2:38-39; ROMANS 6:4

Read and talk about the Bible passages. Point out that baptism is a command in the Bible and a symbol of being united with Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, believers were baptized after they repented of their sins and started following Jesus.

What did Jesus want his followers to do? To go and make disciples—which means to tell people about Jesus so they can follow him. Then he wanted them to baptize the people who followed him and teach them how to obey him. Jesus commanded baptism of

those who followed him. Baptizing them didn't make them followers of Jesus, though; it was an *outside* thing that showed that they were following Jesus on the *inside*.

So what is baptism? We use water when we baptize. People being baptized at College Church go down into water in a tub on the stage. When believers are baptized, they are claiming God's promises. When you are baptized as a believer, it shows that you have believed in Jesus and become like Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. When you go under the water, it shows that you are dead to sin. When you come out of the water, it shows that you are made alive in Christ. Your sins have been forgiven and washed away. The same power that brought Jesus back to life is now given to you by the Holy Spirit to make you more like Jesus.

Here is a helpful acronym to help children understand the meaning and purpose of baptism:

B ELONG TO JESUS

A SYMBOL AND A COMMAND

P ROMISE REMINDER

T ELLS OTHERS

I N THE BIBLE

S AVED BY FAITH ALONE

M ADE ALIVE

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN MY CHILD IS READY FOR BAPTISM?

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 10:9-10; GALATIANS 5:22-24

Before your child is considered ready for baptism, they must profess faith in Jesus Christ, repent of sin, and demonstrate the work of the Holy Spirit by bearing spiritual fruit.

It is also necessary to have confidence in their readiness to sincerely declare themselves to be a follower of Jesus Christ before the congregation.

If you feel they are ready, contact the church office to start the process. Help your child write out his/her testimony to share with the pastor who will do the baptism. You may be sent a form for them to fill out, including questions such as these:

Tell us a little about yourself.

Tell us how you came to know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

Explain why you want to be baptized.

The church will help you with scheduling a meeting with a pastor where your child will have the opportunity to share about their faith. You as the parent are encouraged to be present in that meeting but to let the child speak of their own faith and ask their own questions. If anyone in that meeting determines that the child is not yet ready to be baptized, the child needs to wait and is encouraged to keep asking questions and growing in understanding of Jesus and his work on the cross. If the child is ready, a date for baptism will be set and instructions given.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN INFANT BAPTISM?

SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 12:1-3; 17:1-8; ACTS 2

Explain how God made a great covenant (or promise) with Abraham (even changing his name to mark it) and to Abraham's children, grandchildren, and everyone after him—not because of anything Abraham had done, but because of God's great plan to save his people one day through Jesus Christ. God's promise to his people said that he would be their God and they would be his people. The sign and seal of this covenant was physical circumcision for all males. After Pentecost, the sign and seal of God's promises to his people became baptism.

When infants are baptized, their believing parents are claiming God's promises (or *covenants*) for them in advance. Baptism doesn't save a child, but it recognizes that God promises that He will forgive all who come to him by faith in Jesus Christ and give them eternal life. Baptism is God's sign of the cleansing and renewal that only comes by faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism marks out (or sets apart) an infant as part of the visible covenant community.

The parents' prayer for their baby is that he or she will believe this promise, keeping the covenant, when he or she is old enough to understand and come to faith. The parents' responsibility is to raise the child in a godly home where reading the Bible, prayer, and involvement in a Bible-believing church are important. The church, as the covenant community, is responsible for coming alongside the family in the spiritual development of the child. Yet the work of salvation is done by Jesus Christ alone.

Parents interested in infant baptism for their child can contact the church office to receive a form and schedule a meeting with a pastor.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN CONFIRMATION, AND HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS READY?

When a child who has been baptized as an infant comes to saving faith, it is important to recognize and celebrate this gift of salvation by presenting the child before the church family. This is called confirmation. As the child publicly declares his or her faith, the church celebrates God's saving work and welcomes the child into the redeemed family of God.

Before your child is considered ready for confirmation, they must profess faith in Jesus Christ, repent of sin, and demonstrate the work of the Holy Spirit by bearing spiritual fruit.

It is also necessary to have confidence in their readiness to sincerely declare themselves to be a follower of Jesus Christ before the congregation.

If you feel they are ready, contact the church office to start the process. Help your child write out his/her testimony to share with the pastor who will do the confirmation. You may be sent a form for them to fill out, including questions such as these:

Tell us a little about yourself.

Tell us how you came to know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

Explain why you want to be confirmed.

The church will help you with scheduling a meeting with a pastor where your child will have the opportunity to share about their faith. You as the parent are encouraged to be present in that meeting but to let the child speak of their own faith and ask their own questions. If anyone in that meeting determines that the child is not yet ready to be confirmed, the child needs to wait and is encouraged to keep asking questions and growing in understanding of Jesus and his work on the cross.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN COMMUNION (OR THE LORD'S SUPPER), AND HOW DO I KNOW WHEN MY CHILD IS READY?

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 22:14-20; EXODUS 12; ROMANS 10:9-10; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-28

Read the passage in Luke within the context of the larger story of the events surrounding it leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection. Explain that Communion is also called the Lord's Supper and it was first done on the night Jesus was betrayed. That night, he enjoyed a special meal, called the Passover, with his followers. The meal was celebrating God's rescue of their ancestors many years earlier, and it was the last meal they shared together before Jesus died on the cross. Read Exodus 12 to understand the Passover.

After the meal, Jesus did something special that is repeated by believers in Christian churches everywhere. Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and gave it to his disciples. He then said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Next, he shared with them a cup of wine and said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). Jesus was declaring himself to be the fulfillment of Passover—God's sparing his people from death because a spotless lamb died in their place.

When Christians take Communion, they are remembering Jesus' death on the cross so that sinners could be saved. They give thanks and think about what Jesus did for them. They also are connected to other Christians and Jesus himself since we are all part of the family of God. It also is a message without words that tells others about the Lord's death until he returns (1 Corinthians 11:23-28). It is a spiritual meal that strengthens us in our relationship with Jesus while we wait for him to return, just like physical food strengthens us for each day. Communion doesn't actually save us from sin. Only confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in our hearts that God raised him from the dead saves us from sin.

Taking Communion in our church means receiving a tiny cup of juice and cracker and following the pastor's instructions. All eat the cracker together and then drink the juice together. Communion is not actually Jesus' body and blood. It is a symbol of Jesus' body and blood to remind us of his death.

Anyone is welcome to participate in communion if they:

- Know they have been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ
- Have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ
- Are living a life not marked by unrepentant sin
- Are not under church discipline
- Are active in a Bible-believing church

This includes children.

There is a danger, though, in rushing a child's readiness for communion. It is important that a child is old enough to understand the spiritual significance of it and its connection to baptism as a mark of faith. You can help determine this by:

- Asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom and discernment
- Asking your child to explain the meaning of communion
- Asking your child to explain the reason for communion
- Coaching your child through the logistics of taking communion
- Praying with your child before Communion Sundays.

Consider waiting to invite your children to participate in communion until after they have been baptized. The ordinances are meant to go together--baptism and then communion—as corporate acts given to the church by Christ to mark off those who belong to him.

WHAT'S NEXT (AFTER BAPTISM AND INITIATING PARTICIPATION IN THE LORD'S SUPPER)?

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 6:8-11; GALATIANS 5:22-25; JOHN 10:28; REVELATION 21:1-7

Encourage your child with God's promise that if they are saved, they have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us live as children of God and exhibit fruit of our faith. We will grow more like Jesus through His work and through disciplines such as the following:

- Reading the Bible
- Prayer
- Being part of a Bible-believing church
- Serving
- Obeying his word
- Participating in the Lord's Supper

Help your child to grow in these areas and in an ongoing repentance of sin and acknowledgement of the forgiveness made available through Jesus's work on the cross.

Reassure your child that if their faith is real, nothing can take it away. Someday they will live forever in heaven with Jesus!

Remember that our staff is here to equip you and your family to follow Christ, so please reach out with questions or ideas of how we can help.

RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN RELATED TO THE GOSPEL, CHURCH LIFE, BAPTISM, AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

[The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross](#) by Carl Laferton

[Love Gave](#) by Quina Aragon

[Wow! The Good News in Four Words](#) by Dandi Daley Mackall

[God...Should I Be Baptized?](#) by Laurie Donahue

[God Made Me For Worship](#) by Jared Kennedy

[Read it, See it, Say it, Sing it!](#) by Hunter Beless

[Any Time, Any Place, Any Prayer](#) by Laura Wifler

[The Awesome Super Fantastic Forever Party](#) by Joni Eareckson Tada

[The New City Catechism for Kids](#)

**All Scripture quotes are from the ESV.*