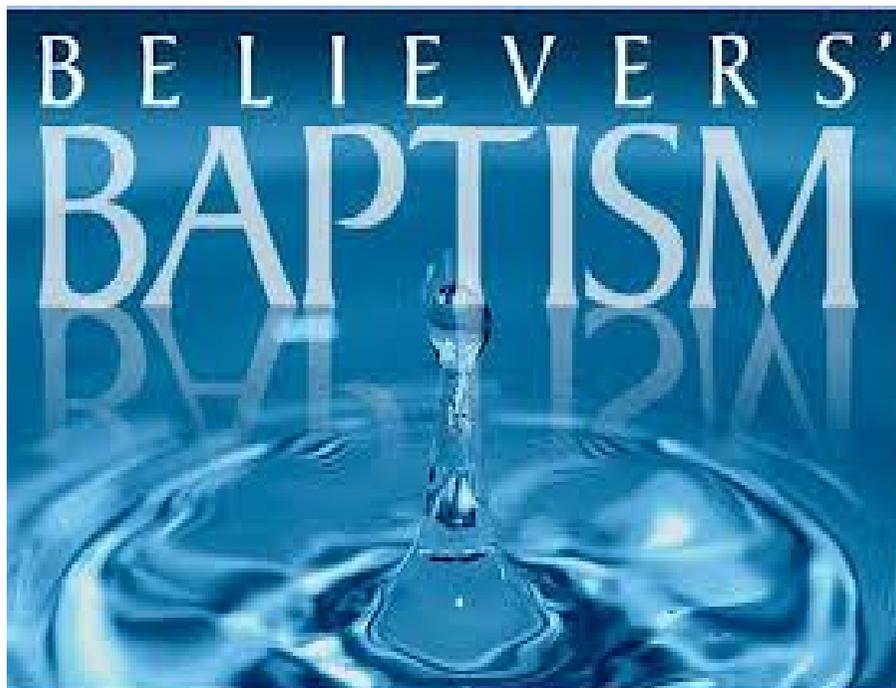


What is.....



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A: WHAT IS BAPTISM

1. It is BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

In the bible Baptism follows a decision: Jesus called people to repentance, and in response to this people were baptised. Jesus' disciples also baptised following a decision by the candidate. (Acts 2:38; Acts 10:39-48; 16:31-33; 18:7-8).

Biblical baptism therefore is clearly the result of a decision to obey Christ - something that infant baptism cannot represent

2. It was PUBLIC BAPTISM

John the Baptist baptised publicly in the desert regions. Crowds came to hear Him and it was in this public setting that baptisms took place. (Matthew 3:1-6) The reason for this we will look more closely at under the heading of 'Witness'.

Scripture also shows us that Christ's disciples similarly continued the action of public baptism. At Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41) there was clearly a public call and a public response. (see also other examples - Acts 8:12; 8:35ff; 10:44ff; 16:14-15; 16:33; 18:8;)

3. It was BAPTISM BY IMMERSION:

On a number occasions in scripture the site of baptism is made clear. John the Baptist baptised in the River (Matt 3:6) The Ethiopian Eunuch was baptised in a pond or river by the side of the road (Acts 8:36,37) Clearly places with plenty of water. To that we also note that the New Testament was written in down in the the Greek language. Now the Greek word used for baptism in scripture is 'baptidzo' and this means 'to soak' 'to immerse'. Here then we clearly have the method of baptism defined for us. The total immersion at baptism alludes to the total commitment; the all-or-nothing demand of the Gospel. We will also note its greater meaning under a later heading of 'Symbols'.

B: WHY BE BAPTISED

1. OBEDIENCE

The word 'Christian', by its very definition, means a follower of Jesus Christ. This means that a Christian is someone who wishes to carry out the teaching and will of Jesus Christ as they see it expressed in the Bible.

Jesus' last command to his followers was to involve themselves in the work of Baptism:-

"Go and make disciples of all nations, BAPTISING THEM in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them TO OBEY EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU." (Matt 28:19,20) See also Mk.16:15,16.)

This call to obedience was something that was also expressed by the early church as recorded in Acts. On the day of Pentecost, after Peter had preached the gospel, the bible tells us that the people were "*cut to the heart*" and asked what they should be their correct response. Peter's reply was, "*repent and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*"

(Acts 2:38).

So it is that at the most basic level Christians are baptised because it is Christ's wish that they should be.

This observance of baptism is also seen clearly in the life of the early church:-

Acts 8:26-40 (Ethiopian Eunuch)

Acts 9:1-19 (Baptism of Paul)

Acts 16:11-15 (Baptism of Lydia)

Acts 16:23-34 (The Philippian Jailer).

2. WITNESS

God never asks us to do anything purely for its own sake. There is always good reason for his commands, and so it is with baptism. At its most simple, all that a person who has accepted Christ is called to do by God can be summed up in two broad headings, Worship and Witness.

God's call to us be baptised is His call for us to enact publicly our future lives in His service as we WORSHIP Him and WITNESS concerning Him at the Service of Believer's Baptism. As a person begins their life with Christ the baptismal service is a place where obedience leads to the opportunity for both these areas of witness and worship being carried out. Here is set the seal in the Christian's life for the way that they are to live for the rest of their lives. Here at the baptismal service the candidate publicly nails their colours to the mast. They are declaring what God has done in their lives, and declaring their resolve to give their lives into the hands of Jesus Christ completely, and to worship Him and witness to him for the rest of their lives.

Christ's commission (Matt 28:16-20) makes it clear that it is through the witness of men and women that he will bring conviction leading to salvation into the hearts of people. Failure to witness then is not simply disobedience for its own sake. In our disobedience we then become a stumbling block to the gospel in other people's lives. *"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"* (Romans 10:14) That is why God wants us to start as we mean to carry on. That is partly why non-witness, which amounts to denial of Christ, is condemned so strongly by Christ (Matt. 10:32,33).

3. The Christian Life

Paul states in Romans 10:9,10. that confession of Jesus and witnessing to Him cannot be divorced from each other, it is all part of the one experience. In Paul's understanding, an option to witness is absurd as giving a baby an option on whether it wants to breathe. Breath signifies life, likewise the witness to Jesus Christ in our lives signifies/testifies to the reality of the Christian life in a believer. IN BAPTISM BELIEF AND ACTION ARE HELD TOGETHER AS PART OF THE SAME STATEMENT.

C: The Symbols

The witness of the symbols used at Baptism is powerful. At his/her baptism the candidate is using powerful visual language to declare the fundamental truths of the gospel and salvation they now have.

WATER: The symbol of the grave.

IMMERSION: The candidates symbolic death to their old life.

RISING: Symbol of the resurrection into new life with Jesus.

All these symbols also declare how our new life was made possible i.e. in the death and resurrection of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” (Romans 6:3-7)

IT IS NOT THE CANDIDATE WHO IS CENTRAL AT BAPTISM BUT CHRIST.

In this powerful way, at Baptism, the Holy Spirit confirms (seals) the candidate with assurance of their walk with Christ, convicts the unbeliever of their sin and need of Christ and gives opportunity for the witnessing Christians to reaffirm their faith and proclaim Jesus as Lord.

So it is that the whole congregation is effected and blessed by the witness of Believers Baptism.

IS GOD ASKING YOU TO BE BAPTISED ?

D: UNION WITH CHRIST

Our Baptism declares our union with Christ's death and resurrection (Col 2:11,12). This is confirmed again by Paul's words to the Galatian church in Galatians 3:26,27. "*All of you who were baptised into Christ were clothed with Christ*". Note that this statement is made in the light of faith (v 26) and not merely the ACT of baptism itself.

E: CLEANSING

Baptism is also a sign of our cleansing from sin. Our emersion in water signifies the washing from sin that took place when we first became disciples of Jesus Christ. God is not merely a forgiving God. He is in the removal business. Hallelujah! The ministry of Christ to the believer is one of renewal. This element of baptismal declaration is picked up in the following passages:-

Acts 22:16; Eph 5:25,26; Titus 3:5; Hebs. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:21;

F: INITIATION & DECLARATION OF ALLEGIANCE:

Baptism symbolises our entrance (our initiation) into the family of God, the church. "*...baptised by one Spirit into one body...*" (1 Cor 12:13) "*...through faith..all sons... baptised into Christ*". (Galatians 3:26,27)

To be a Christian is to be "in Christ". To be "in Christ" is to be in the body of Christ, the Church. The declaration of initiation is both the declaration of the candidates recognition of their position, and therefore responsibility to the church, and is also the church's recognition of its responsibility to the candidate. Because we are "*...baptised by one Spirit into one body...*" It is difficult to hold baptism and church membership as two separate and distinct commitments and decisions. The decision to be baptised is to also the decision to join with the church, God's family.

G: A DECLARATION OF THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE:

1 Cor. 12:13 says, "*..we are all given the one Spirit to drink*". The only way we can possibly live out our Christian lives with any success is if Christ lives in us. This he does through his Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist, predicting the coming and work of Jesus says of him "*He will baptise with the Holy Spirit*" (Mark 1:8)

Jesus' comment to Nicodemus, that he needed to be "*born of water AND the Spirit*" (John 3:3,5) infers an activity of the Holy Spirit at Baptism.

At the first Easter, Christ, aware of his impending departure, told his disciples that he would be sending them another comforter/counsellor to be with them (John 14:15). This "comforter" is the Holy Spirit, "*the Spirit of truth*" (John 4:16)

After Christ was raised from the dead, at Pentecost, the disciples all received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3). Then in the market place Peter preaches and calls to the troubled crowd to "*Repent,..be baptised.. and you will receive the Holy Spirit*" (v 38).

At Ephesus Paul met with certain Christians who were clearly lacking in their spiritual lives (Acts 19:1-7). Paul asks them if they had received the Holy Spirit at their baptism, to which they replied "*We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit*". Subsequently Paul lays hands upon the and they then receive the Holy Spirit.

It would seem if we consider the observations above that at baptism we should expect SOMETHING to be taking place with regard to God the Holy Spirit.

The good news is that we are not left alone. What we are called by God to do (Serve Him) we are also equipped by God to do by receiving His Holy Spirit into our lives.

What we are called by God to do we are also equipped by God to do.

This promising of God's equipping is made clear in Christ's promise of the Comforter (John 14:15ff). All obedience brings a fuller blessing of the Lord because obedience means service and service needs equipping.

We need to ask ourselves what exactly does the Holy Spirit want to do

with us at baptism. In one sense this cannot be answered.

The Spirit is like the wind, He blows where he will (John 3:8). Yet in scripture we do have underlying guidelines of what to expect (and expectancy is the key).

The Apostle Paul speaks of the varied gifts that a group of Christians possess which allow them to work together (1 Cor 12:12ff) Paul starts by saying, "*we were all baptised into the one Spirit*" and then goes on to list the gifts of the Spirit. The list is not exhaustive but what they do is to make the point that we need to actively seek the gifts that God has given us to enable us to serve one another that we may be built up together. In our service to God we can expect to receive His equipping as he pour out some of these spiritual gifts upon us. Gifts, not given to us to encourage us or particularly bless us, but gifts given that we can effectively and fruitfully serve Jesus as his disciples.



IS GOD ASKING YOU TO BE BAPTISED ?

If you would like to explore the possibility of being baptised, the Pastor (01279 442642 / thepastor@harlowbaptist.org) or one of the church leaders would be very happy to talk with you about what to do next.