

Baptisms at St. John's Lutheran Church



What is Baptism in the Lutheran Church?

Baptism is one of two sacraments for Lutherans, the other being Holy Communion. Baptism is the entry rite into Christian faith. It is an act instituted by God, performed using water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whereby the baptized is united with Christ.

God, whose grace is for all, is the one who acts in Baptism. Lutherans baptize in response to Jesus directing his disciples to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). We believe that this Great Commission is the motivator for Christian Baptism, as distinct from the baptism of John the Baptist. Therefore candidates for Baptism are of all ages. Some are adults, and older children who have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, declare their faith, and desire Holy Baptism. Others are the young or infant children of active members of the congregation or those children for whom members of the congregation assume sponsorship.

The apostles received this command which did not end with them but has been a practice of Christians since the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) to the present. In the witness of the New Testament baptism is part of the church's mission. The Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters clarify the belief that all believers come into fellowship by baptism (Romans 6:1-9; 1 Corinthians 1:11-17; 10:1-12; 12:13). Thus the initiation rite of the church is being baptized in the triune name of God.

What are the Elements of Baptism: Water, Faith and Word

Lutherans believe that the water in baptism is simply water, but it is water enclosed in God's command and connected to God's Word. It is not the water but the Word of God which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word, the water is just water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit." (Luther's Small Catechism)



The Significance of Baptism with water:

The one who is baptized with water is a new creature, the old creature in us with sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and therefore daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in

righteousness and purity forever. Paul writes this in Romans 6:4 “We were buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too, are to walk in a new life.” (Luther’s Small Catechism) All Christians are to regard their baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time. Every day they should be found in faith and with it fruits, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new... “As we have once obtained forgiveness of sins in baptism, so forgiveness remains day by day as long as we live, that is, as long as we carry the old creature around our necks”. (Luther’s Large Catechism)

Infant and Adult Baptism

Since ancient times, the Christian Church has baptized both infants and adults. Our times require great seriousness about evangelization and readiness to welcome unbaptized adults to the reception of the faith and to Baptism into Christ. Our children also need this sign and means of grace and its continued power in their lives. In either case, Baptism is God’s gift of overwhelming grace. We baptize infants as if they were adults, addressing them with questions, words, and promises that their parents, sponsors, and congregation are to help them know and believe as they grow in years. We baptize adults as if they were infants, washing them and clothing them with God’s love in Christ.

Baptism is a Community Celebration

We believe that baptism is a community celebration. This applies to not only the immediate and extended natural family, but to the entire family of Christ. At St. John’s we take seriously the responsibility that the Christian community is charged with at a Baptism. The parents, sponsors and the whole family of God



take upon themselves the promise to make the Church and the world a place that will offer the newly Baptized the love and support needed to live a life of faith to grow to full Christian maturity. We corporately declare that “Through Baptism God has made [*the one who has been baptized (infant, child or adult)*] a member of the priesthood that we share in Christ Jesus, that we may proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world.” (Lutheran Book of Worship – Holy Baptism). For this reason, we celebrate baptism as part of our worship service and not as a special closed session for only family.

Preparation for Baptism

1. Because of our belief that baptism is the entry rite into the faith community and that carries with it responsibilities for not only parents and sponsors but for the congregation, parents of a child/infant to be baptized should be members of St.

- John's Lutheran Church. If you are not a member, please contact the Church Office (410-665-1234) to set up time to speak with the Pastors about membership.
2. Adults who want to be baptized should contact the Church Office (410-665-1234) to set up time for counseling in preparation for baptism.
 3. Parents of a child/infant to be baptized will be contacted by the church office to collect the information necessary for the Baptism register and to help you plan your child's Baptism.
 4. Selecting Sponsors/Godparents: Sponsors/Godparents play a very important role in your child's spiritual life. They will serve as role models in the faith – spiritual mentors. The child should be able to look to their sponsor/godparent as an example of how the church teaches us to live our faith in our daily life. They should not only support your child but also support you, the parents. The role of the sponsors/godparent is not just an honorific title, but one that has tremendous responsibility. As such the sponsors/godparents should be baptized Christians who practice their faith in their daily life. This should be kept in mind when choosing sponsors/godparents.
 5. If sponsors/godparents live in the local area, they are asked to attend a Baptism preparation Workshop along with the parents of the child who is to be baptized with the pastor who will be baptizing you or your child. Each workshop will last approximately 1 - 1½ hours. For sponsors who live a distance away, it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure the sponsors understand the importance of their role and the promise that they make.
 6. A copy of Luther's Small Catechism will be given to the parents so that they can use it as their child grows to help explain their baptism and also as a teaching tool to help you fulfill your baptismal promise as parents and sponsors/godparents, namely: "to teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. As they grow in years, you should place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith..."

Baptism Schedule

We celebrate baptism frequently and we try to make each baptism special by only having one baptism at a service. We will work with you to schedule the baptism and make this a special day for the one being baptized, you, your family, friends and the entire congregation of St. John's. Once one of the pastors has spoken to you we will schedule the baptism.

Photography:

As this is a worship service, photography and video should be kept at a minimum. No flash photography or spot lights are allowed during the service. However, we do encourage you to have someone take non-flash photographs of your child's baptism. This is a good teaching tool and a wonderful way of sharing your memory of your child's

baptism as they grow older. More importantly, we encourage you to tell them the story of their baptism and what it means in their faith development.

Baptismal Record and Certificate:

The Baptism will be recorded in the permanent records of St. John's from the information you provide. Please ensure the accuracy of the information, spelling of names etc. A certificate will be presented to you following the Baptism ceremony.