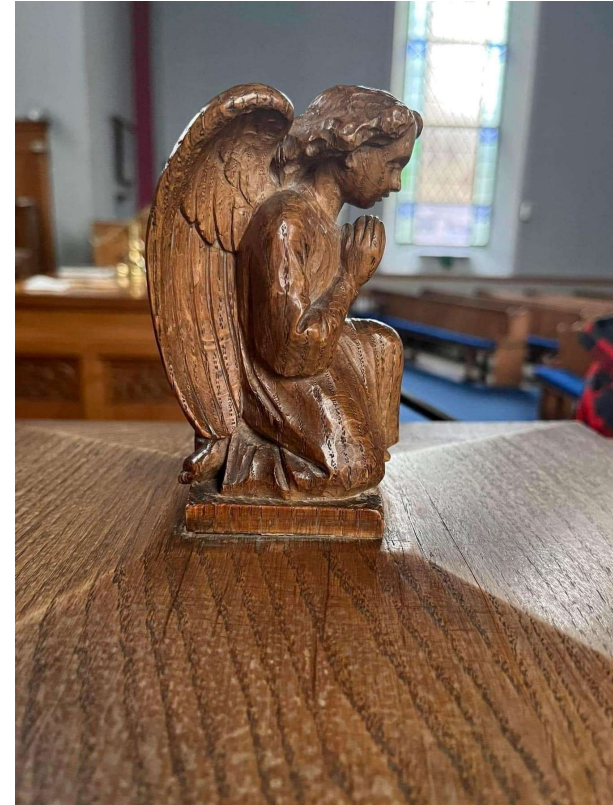


United Free Church of Scotland

St Andrew's Church, Bellshill

Baptism of children, adults and blessings/dedications



Minister

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What does baptism mean?

A sign is something that points to or represents something else e.g., a road sign pointing the way to a town or city. Baptism is a sign which shows two things: what God gives us, and what we promise to give God.

Firstly a sign that God gives forgiveness to everyone who turns to Him through Jesus Christ his Son. We are not born Christian, we do not become Christians because our parents are neither do we become a Christian by coming to church. A Christian is someone who has come into a new relationship with Jesus through faith by believing in him and then following him (Ephesians 2 v 8-9).

The bible tells us that before we come to God we are separated from him because of our sin, we need forgiveness through what Jesus has done by dying for our sin. Forgiveness is like being made clean, so the sprinkled water in baptism reminds us of that. This sign of washing points to the real forgiveness that comes only through faith in Jesus.

Secondly baptism is also a sign that we are joined with Jesus/ A sign for the relationship that he creates with us as we trust in him. A sign that we belong to him and to his church. Baptism has always been seen as the first steps into church (Matthew 28 v 19-20)

Why baptise children?

You can see from the section above that baptism makes most sense for those who have decided to follow Jesus for themselves so why do we baptise infants?

As we baptise them we are looking forward and praying that they will know Jesus for themselves. That as they grow up in the church, through the Holy Spirit and following the example of the faith seen in their parents, the child will know Him. So the baptism begins a journey that is completed when they accept Jesus for themselves and join his church later in life.

The United Free Church of Scotland is one of many churches which believe that believers should have their children baptised – we call this Covenantal Theology. In the Old Testament, every believer was to put the sign of faith (circumcision) on their children to show that they were to be welcomed as part of God's church. We believe that this practice of putting the sign of faith on our children has carried through into the New Testament as well (Matthew 19:13-15; Acts 2:39; Acts 16:15; Romans 4:11; 1 Corinthians 1:16; Galatians 3:6-9). If a person baptised as a child comes to faith, their faith is not shown in their baptism, but by coming to the Lord's Table. This act, like baptism, is a public declaration of faith (1 Corinthians 11:26) and is part of a body of privileges and duties that come with Membership

Which children should be baptised?

We have seen that Baptism is about faith and belonging. There are Christian believers who, in good faith, do not wish their children to be baptised until those children have come to faith themselves, and have declared that they trust in Jesus and want to follow him. We recognise that this is a perfectly valid option and we will welcome those young ones into the church family.

At the same time, as a Reformed and Presbyterian Church, we recognise that God gives his promises to believers and their children (Acts 2v39). The promises of God are there to be accepted in baptism, at whatever age. If baptism is about faith and belonging it must be about the faith of parents and belonging to the Church.

Therefore the Church baptises children when at least one parent is a member of the Church in good standing and we promote infant baptism in our church.

Because baptism marks the beginning of a process or a journey it is not finished the day your child is baptised. This journey but continues until your child (at whatever age), comes to and continues in living faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

This means that having your child baptised lays important duties on the parents and on people in the church. These responsibilities are seen in the vows that parent(s) and the church take as the child is baptised. Since these vows are taken before God they should be taken seriously by all concerned.

Baptism is about faith and belonging. It also involves taking certain vows. These vows express the faith of the parent(s) and also their commitment to play their part in bringing their child up in the faith praying that the child will know Jesus for themselves. Like any vow taken in church we rejoice that Jesus doesn't leave us to do that on our own but supplies through His spirit the strength to do this. Therefore you need to be clear about your faith as you bring your child for baptism.

The Parents' responsibility

It is because baptism is about continuing to learn about God's goodness and loving forgiveness we ask you to profess your faith again as your child is brought for baptism. At baptism you offer to God the new life of the child he has given you, and you promise to bring your family up in the Christian faith.

Parent(s) play a major part in the way your child learns of God's grace and love. Your child's faith will grow as you help them: as you pray, worship in church, and live out a Christian life. Baptism without the necessary follow-up of enabling your child to hear the claims of Jesus for herself as she grows makes almost no sense at all.

The Congregation's responsibilities

As a sign that the whole church is involved in baptism, it normally takes place during public worship in front of the congregation. This shows that the child belongs also to a church family. As a sign of taking their responsibilities seriously, the members stand with you during your child's baptism, for they have professed the same faith.

Within the church family, in Sunday School and Bible Class and by other means, the congregation will help to provide for your child's Christian growth. We hope that you will take these opportunities, and that since you are members not just of one congregation, but of Christ's church, you will make full use of them wherever you may settle in years to come.

God's work of grace and regeneration

There are no Godparents in Presbyterian Church. Our belief is that the whole congregation stands as the child is baptised, to show that they are taking a vow to pray for the child and to support the parents as they work to bring up their child in the Christian faith. We recognise that parents often want people to specifically support them in what they are doing and these should be people who have a profession of the Christian faith themselves.

Baptism is not a Christening service where a name is given or a service where the child becomes a Christian. Your child has already been given their name and becoming a Christian involves knowing Jesus Christ personally and that can only come later in life. Feel free to ask the Minister to explain these things or the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

The vows

As parent(s), you are required to declare your faith and make certain promises before God and the congregation. The vows you make are these:

- Do you present your child, earnestly desiring that, in God's own time, he will work by his Holy Spirit in your child's life to accomplish everything that is meant by Christian baptism?
- Do you profess your faith in God the Father who has created you, Jesus Christ who has redeemed you, and the Holy Spirit who makes you holy?

- Do you promise, depending upon God's promised help, by your prayers, teaching and example, to teach your child the truths and duties of the Christian faith (that is, what it means to be a follower of Jesus) and to bring her or him up in the life and worship of the church?

Your answer to each of them is "I or we do"

Blessings

If you are not a member of regular attender of the Church, then the door is not closed. We are happy to have a ceremony of blessing for your children during public worship on the Lord's Day.

For many it is important to take the time to thank God and seek His blessing on their child and their family, and this can be a meaningful, prayerful and honest way of doing so.

Adult Baptism

For adults who have come to a point of faith, who have not been baptised as children, they are baptised by sprinkling during the service of public worship that they are admitted to membership by profession of faith. Please see the additional leaflet on *What is a Church Member*.