

Preparing for Baptism

Few moments carry the weight and joy that we experience at baptism. Baptism is where surrender meets salvation, burial meets birth, and obedience meets freedom. It is an intersection, a covenant where we are saved by no work of our own, yet pledge every future action and thought to align with God. Those who have had the sacred privilege of guiding a soul across this threshold become eyewitnesses of darkness becoming light. The promise of the gospel takes shape before our eyes. The truth that once confronted our old ways has become the anchor for our new life. We will fall short again, but in the eyes of God, we will remain a pure, new creation.

A seeker who reaches the point of baptism hasn't graduated or completed their journey in Christ, but they have reached a milestone where the weight of sin is washed away and the Spirit fills the void. Paul wrote that God "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). At baptism, we witness and are reminded of that mercy in our own lives – the death of the old life and the birth of a new creation.

The Two Questions

There are two questions we typically ask all seekers in the moments before they are born again at baptism:

"Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He came to Earth, lived a perfect life, died for your sins, was buried, and rose on the third day?"

"What is your good confession?"

The first question expresses faith, the second question expresses allegiance. Together, these two questions summarize the necessities of belief and surrender. When a seeker answers "Yes" (to the questions of belief) and "Jesus is Lord" (to the declaration of lordship), they echo the confession of the early Church (Acts 2:36, Acts 10:36, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Philippians 2:9-11, Colossians 2:6). These are not mere formalities, but proclamations of the new identity to which they are being raised.

The practice of these questions traces back to the early centuries of Christianity. Writings such as *The Apostolic Tradition* (c. Third Century A.D.) describe baptismal candidates declaring their faith aloud before immersion. The Trinitarian command of Matthew 28:19 and the confession of Romans 10:9 highlight this foundation. In an ancient world ruled by emperors, saying "Jesus is Lord" was subversive – it wasn't something your neighbors or co-workers would congratulate you for expressing. It wasn't even considered a respectable display of moral growth. The declaration "Jesus is Lord" marked a public transfer of allegiance from Caesar to Christ, and it likely made you a target for social shame and governmental persecution. No one would have emotionally made that declaration unless they had truly counted the cost of complete repentance, lordship, and the consequences of rejecting the world's norms.

It is within that spirit of a public vow (and not an emotional stirring) that we make the same confession. Every baptism joins the stream of believers who have declared the same truth for two millennia – Jesus reigns and our entire life belongs to Him.

Leading the Moment

Baptism is certainly a time for celebration, but it's also a sacred occasion that calls for focus, clarity, and reverence. Those leading a baptism should speak with confidence and peace – you're presenting and illustrating the fullness of the gospel. A seeker will have a more focused experience if they know what to expect before the moment, as they will also be juggling the emotions of their friends and family who may be there as witnesses. Leaders should walk the candidate through each step: The gathering, sharing, prayer, questions, and the physical process of being totally submerged in water. Many people's reference point is baptismal sprinkling, and they might be caught off-guard, perhaps even scared, of being submerged. After the candidate makes their confession, the leader should articulate the promise of the gospel being fulfilled at their confession: "Because of your good confession that Jesus is Lord, we now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and you will be added to God's body of believers" (Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 12:13).

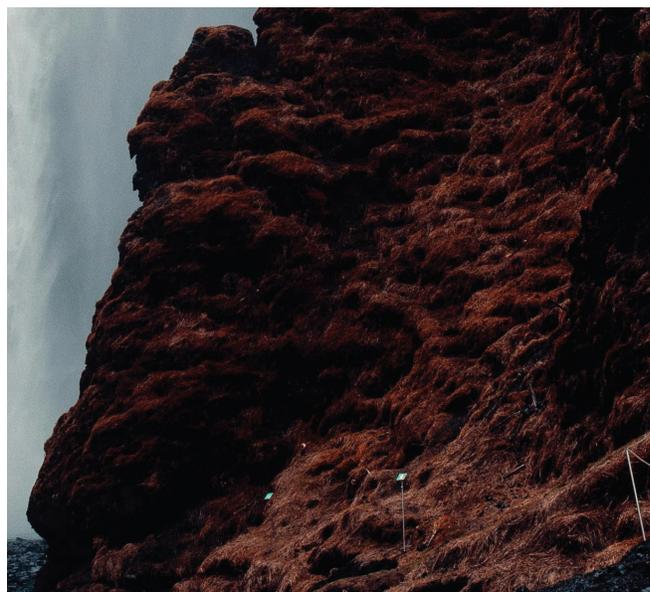
Before the baptism occurs, there's often a short time of sharing and reflection. It's helpful for the leader to prompt a few of the seeker's closest friends to share any encouragement – this works best when those sharing have been asked in advance. This group reflection can affirm the seeker's transformation and highlight how God has worked in their life. But keep the focus on Christ, not the individual. The center of baptism is not how remarkable the person is, but how merciful Jesus is. No matter how amazing the seeker is, they are being buried in water because they are in desperate need of a forgiveness they cannot provide for themselves. So give God all of the glory!

Logistical preparation of the baptism helps to resolve small details that might become distractions. Advise the seeker to wear modest clothing and have a change of clothes. Have a towel ready, and if you're hosting, provide extra towels for the person (or persons) doing the baptizing. Consider how you can be hospitable to any family member or guests who are attending the baptism. Don't rush the celebration, and if possible, coordinate a meal and a time of fellowship to follow the baptism. Baptism is also a great opportunity to begin to connect and share the gospel with the seeker's friends and family who are witnessing this community of disciples for the first time.

The atmosphere should be reverent and joyful. Baptism is deeply personal, but never private. It is a covenant and celebration belonging to the entire community of faith. Various responses from the church or people in attendance such as applause, tears, singing, prayer, and rejoicing are similar to what takes place in heaven when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7).

When Should a Baptism Occur?

There are moments when a seeker hopes to coordinate their baptism so that family and friends may attend, witness the gospel, and see the Church in action. These can be incredibly powerful experiences for non-believers, but leaders should weigh the planning against the urgency of forgiveness witnessed throughout the book of Acts. The Ethiopian eunuch stopped his chariot in the desert without an audience (Acts 8:36–38), and the Philippian jailer was baptized in the middle of the night (Acts 16:33). Ananias asked Saul of Tarsus, “What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away” (Acts 22:16). A seeker being baptized should prioritize their right relationship with God over the social aspects of joining a church community. Baptism should amplify the tone of declaration and decision, not the tired traditions and sacraments often expressed throughout denominational Christianity. Delaying baptism for convenience, attendance, or location can quietly dull the conviction that salvation is now.



A Word to Leaders

If you've helped lead someone through the callings of discipleship, lordship, and to the moment of baptism, you've shown great wisdom, compassion, love, and sacrifice. People don't accidentally follow Jesus – even the golden-hearted Ethiopian eunuch needed the help of Philip. Although your leadership played a crucial role, all the glory belongs to God. Keep the moment simple and centered on God's power and promises. Don't stress over being perfectly articulate – baptism is powerful because God acts.

The significance of baptism is the same whether it occurs in a baptistry, a lake, or a bathtub. Your role is to highlight what heaven already celebrates and to remind everyone present that this is more than water and words – it is a soul choosing a covenant with Christ. Share scripture as often as possible. Lead with awe and speak with conviction. When they rise from the water, let gratitude fill your heart because you've witnessed a resurrection.