

Infant baptism

The Bible declares that God claimed humanity as God's own "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

"Both believers and their children are included in God's covenant love. Children of believers are to be baptized without undue delay, but without undue haste. Baptism, whether administered to those who profess their faith or to those presented for Baptism as children, is one and the same Sacrament. The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith" (Book of Order, W-2.3008).

Baptism, therefore, usually occurs during infancy, though a person may be baptized at any age. Parents bring their baby to church, where they publicly declare their desire that he or she be baptized. When an infant or child is baptized the church commits itself to nurture the child in faith. When adults are baptized they make a public profession of faith.

Baptism distinguishes children of those who believe in God's redemptive power from children of nonbelievers. The water that is used symbolizes three accounts from the Bible's Old Testament: the waters of creation, the flood described in the story of Noah, and the Hebrews' escape from slavery in Egypt by crossing the Red Sea. All three stories link humanity to God's goodness through water.

Baptism signifies:

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- The faithfulness of God
- The washing away of sin
- Rebirth
- Putting on the fresh garment of Christ
- Being sealed by God's Spirit
- Adoption into the covenant family of the Church
- Resurrection and illumination in Christ

(Book of Order, W-2.3004).

Unlike some denominations, Presbyterians do not require a person to be entirely immersed in water during baptism. Baptism is received only once. Its effect is not tied to the moment when it is administered, for it signifies the beginning of life in Christ, not its completion. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) believes that persons of other denominations are part of one body of Christian believers; therefore, it recognizes and accepts baptisms by other Christian churches.

Baptism is almost always administered as part of a worship service. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), baptism must be authorized by the session of a particular congregation and performed by a minister.