

Baptism and Communion at Church of the Cross

Because of the various views of baptism and communion held by the Christian Church and the history of controversy surrounding this issue, we thought it may be helpful to give a brief overview of our beliefs around this issue.

Baptism

Along with the rest of the Anglican communion, Church of the Cross practices both infant baptism and adult believers baptism. Baptizing infants does not preclude the baptism of adult believers, and as a church we baptize not only the children of our members, but also adults who come to faith in Christ. However, the baptism of believing adults is not the usual focus of disagreement among church traditions, so we want to specifically focus on the issue of the baptism of infants.

Why baptize infants?

- *Scripture:* There is no place in the Bible where the baptism of infants is specifically prohibited or proscribed—hence the controversy. However, a careful reading of scripture makes it clear that young children were fully included as members of communities of faith—both in Old Testament Judaism and in New Testament Christian communities. Matthew 19:14 is especially compelling in this regard when Jesus states, “Let the little children come to me, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these” (the Greek word in this verse for little children can also be translated “infants”). Jesus fully included little children in the Kingdom, and therefore we believe that through baptism their full inclusion in the church is signified and celebrated.
- *History:* In both Christian and Jewish history we see strong precedents for the baptism of infants. In ancient Judaism, children were not only included in the community through the practice of circumcision, but also through their practice of baptism. When a non-Jewish family converted to the Jewish faith, the whole family was baptized, including infants and young children. If the Christian church, arising out of Judaism, chose to discontinue this practice, there is no historical record of it. Instead throughout the writings of the early Christian church any reference to baptism affirms that infants were included in the practice.
- *Theology:* The baptism of infants is consistent with the theology of Anglicanism and the unique values of Church of the Cross. Anglicanism, growing out of the Reformation, believes that salvation ultimately begins with God who first reaches out to us in with the gift of Grace. Baptism symbolizes this truth of God’s priority of action in salvation and redemption. At Church of the Cross we place a high value on children and see them as full members of the congregation. In baptism we pledge to include these children in the community and to help their parents or guardians raise them with a knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.

What happens in Baptism?

In many ways this is a hard question to adequately answer because we can never fully comprehend the workings of God. But here are a few things that we believe happen in the baptism of infants:

- *The gift of salvation is offered.* In the sacrament of baptism the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is presented to the child. However, this gift is not fully appropriated until the child can respond with faith to the living Christ. The parents of a baptized child make the commitment of faith in the place of the child and raise that child with the aim that one day he or she will make these promises for themselves. As the theologian Donald Bloesch says, “the child is baptized toward faith rather than into faith.”¹ And John Calvin said, “Children are baptized for future faith and repentance.”² The journey of faith begins at baptism, but it certainly does not end there.

¹ Bloesch, Donald. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, Volume 2*. Harper and Row. New York. 1972. Page 13.

² Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* trans. Henry Beveridge Vol. II. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids, 1957. p. 543

- *The Grace of God is poured out.* Donald Bloesch captures this aspect well when he says, “Baptism is a sign of God’s efficacious grace poured out for us in Jesus Christ and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is a sign that God elects us before we decide for him, that God’s grace is the basis of our decision of faith. Yet baptism is more than a sign: it is a means by which the Holy Spirit comes to us and works upon and within us. Baptism plays a prominent role in our conversion and is not just a symbol of our conversion.”³
- *The faith community makes a pledge.* In baptizing a child the parents and the entire church pledge to bring up that child in the Lord. We take this pledge very seriously and expect the children or guardians of a baptized child to fully understand and commit to the promises they make in the baptism service. Baptism is a covenant making ceremony, and as scripture clearly shows, the making of covenants is a very important component of the history of the Christian faith.
- *Thanksgivings to God are presented.* We believe every child is a gift from God and therefore it is very appropriate to give thanks as a community for that gift.

Many of the things shared above may also apply on some level to the baptism of adults who have placed their faith in Christ. We believe that they are built up in God’s grace, that they are accepting the gift of salvation offered to them, that the community is pledging to help them grow in faith, and that together their baptism is a reason for all to give thanks to God for making us His children. In addition to all of this baptism is an opportunity for an adult to publicly testify to his or her faith in Christ.

We know that there will be some in our community who do not believe the same things we do about the baptism of infants. We welcome a diversity of views on this issue, and disagreeing with the practice of infant baptism should not prevent a person either from becoming a member or helping take leadership in our congregation. We also do special services of thanksgiving for infants whose parents want to publicly pledge their children to the Lord and give thanks for them, but who are not comfortable with infant baptism.

Communion

Communion, or Eucharist (which comes from the Greek word for “giving thanks”), is a central part of our services and theology. We believe that the weekly celebration of communion roots us in the objective truth of God’s character and His Grace in our lives. This helps the worship service to be about more than just an emotional or mental response connected to the music, prayers, and sermon (although that can be very important) but also about acknowledging, celebrating, and receiving from God the unchanging truth of who we are in Christ.

While we do not believe in Transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine are literally transformed into the physical body and blood of Jesus) we do believe that Christ is truly present in the elements in such a way that grace is bestowed and we are formed in our relationship with God. We welcome anyone who has been baptized and is committed to growing in Christ to partake in the Eucharist meal. Baptized children will often partake of communion in our church because we see them as full members of our community and we trust that their parents or guardians have committed to raising them in the Christian faith.

³ Bloesch, Donald. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. p. 14.