

ALL YOU EVER WISHED TO KNOW ABOUT BAPTISM

Baptism is one of the two sacraments celebrated in our church. The other is communion. Baptism has become misunderstood over the centuries. It has been considered something magical - something needed to ward off evil. In modern times it has been considered no more than a custom with no special meaning - an excuse for a family get together. Baptism is much more.

The following questions have been asked of me over the years. Perhaps they can be useful in helping increase our understanding.

1. If my child is not baptized, will s/he go to Hell?

This question is based on the feelings and thoughts of a past generation. I feel that God who knows us through and through will not abandon a child in need (Psalm 139). Would the loving, caring God that we worship and love hurt a child?

2. I feel as if I should have the baby done "Jack's" parents would be disappointed if we didn't.

Ouch! We do not "do" children in the United Church. Nothing upsets a minister more than someone asking to have their child "done". A minister friend of mine follows up this question with "How would you like them done, roasted, boiled or fried?" If you want your child done, you are showing that you are not at all sure what you are asking for in baptism.

In baptism:

1) We accept Jesus as God's son (Mark 1:9-11)

2) We become members of Christ's church, participating in Christ's death and resurrection.

3) We accept a common discipleship with baptized people.

4) We accept Christ's invitation to new life.

5) We receive the promise and ask that God's spirit enter the baptized person.

6) We receive forgiveness for sins. (Heb. 10:22, I Peter 3:21, Acts 22:16, I Cor. 6:11)

In baptism you are saying "I belong here and I wish my child to belong". If this is not what you feel, then I would ask you to consider or reconsider why you wish a baptism.

If you take part in a baptism for you or your child, both you and the congregation make serious promises before and to God. These commitments the church takes very seriously.

3. Do I have to go to church or belong if I am baptized or my child is baptized?

God leaves us free will to make up our own minds, but yes you do make these promises to God at baptism. In fact, I cannot see how to keep the promises you make at baptism unless you do attend church and bring your child/children too.

4. Can a baptism be done at home after church?

In a baptism we are baptized into the Body of Christ. This is

usually done in front of the Body of Christ (the church) at worship (usually Sunday). There are exceptions. For example, health reasons or emergencies, but generally baptism is a public affirmation of faith and is celebrated in church during regular worship.

5. When I am thinking about baptism for my child, what should I do? If you are not attending church, this is the time to begin. Before you request a baptism, begin attending church for a few months so you become more comfortable with church policy and beliefs. This also allows the congregation to get to know you and your family. If you are already part of the church, or are in process of becoming a part of the church, then the next step is to contact the minister and ask to have your child baptized (remember **baptized not done**). The minister will meet with your family and talk with you about the meaning of baptism as well as the questions that you will be asked and the promises you will make. At this point, the minister will present your request for a baptism to the session of the church. The session is made up of a group of elders (people chosen by the congregation) who make policy for the church in a number of areas, including baptism. Once your request has been approved by Session the baptism can proceed.

Rev. Martin