

## What is the purpose of baptism?

We can sum it up in two words:

**Identification** – Baptism identifies you with Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. When Jesus died, he put sin to death in you. That doesn’t mean you never sin—we all still sin plenty!—but sin no longer dominates or defines you. Likewise, you identify with Christ’s resurrection. That is, just as Jesus is risen and living, so are you. You have the gift of eternal life in you. His resurrection power is in you *right now!*

**Inclusion** – Baptism signals your inclusion in the church, the body of Christ. In a sense, it’s your initiation rite. It’s the one thing we all undergo to bring us officially and publicly “into” Christ. Not that baptism itself saves you, but it signals salvation and enables the rest of God’s family to recognize you as a brother or sister.

## Do you have to be baptized in order to be “saved” and go to heaven?

It depends on what we mean by “baptism.” When you place your faith in Christ, you are “baptized” into him; that is, your life is immersed in his. This is “spiritual baptism” and it is necessary for salvation.

Water baptism is the outward sign of this reality; the visible follow-up. It’s not utterly necessary for salvation—after all, “the thief on the cross” died without being baptized, and he is definitely in heaven. We are saved by God’s grace alone, not by any good works, including baptism.

But that doesn’t mean water baptism is optional. Jesus commanded it, so we take that seriously. If a person is hesitant to get baptized we want to be curious about why. Is there something unclear about the gospel message? Something tentative in our commitment? Something frightening about the prospect of “going public” that we need to process more? We want to help you. Let’s talk.

## Is it important to be immersed?

We believe immersion is *important* but not utterly necessary. There are other modes of baptism, like sprinkling. But at Willowdale Chapel we immerse for two simple reasons:

First, the word *baptize* itself means to immerse, and we think that Jesus and the Bible writers used that word on purpose because, second, immersion best symbolizes what happens when you put your faith in Christ. Your whole life comes under his grace. Your whole person, body and soul, is now “in Christ.” In salvation you don’t just get sprinkled with God’s love and grace; you get soaked in it!

## What about those who were baptized as infants?

We recognize that in other Christian traditions, infants are sprinkled and then later undergo confirmation. It’s not our practice, but we accept into membership people from that tradition who want to make Willowdale their church. However, we do want to know that both baptism and confirmation were completed.

## **What is the difference between infant baptism and believer's baptism?**

In infant baptism, babies are sprinkled to remove Original Sin and put them under God's grace. Later, these children are catechized—instructed in the truths of the faith—and “confirmed.” They publicly profess their faith and are “confirmed” as true believers, which often results in their being allowed to receive communion or to join the church as members.

Our tradition is not entirely different. We have “baby dedication” in which we present babies before God, take vows, and pray God's grace and blessing upon them. Later, when they can profess faith in Christ for themselves, we baptize them.

The difference is when we apply the water. There is nothing in the Bible that says sprinkling can remove Original Sin and put a baby under God's saving grace. In fact, there is nothing in the Bible that says babies were baptized at all. But there are numerous examples of believers being baptized as their public declaration of faith. Thus we think it is “best practice” to hold off on the water until a person can articulate their personal faith in Jesus and undergo immersion.

## **When is the right time for a child to be baptized?**

We believe a child can understand the Gospel and receive salvation at a young age. And once a child does this, there is nothing to prohibit him or her from being baptized. But there is no hurry; in fact, there can be wisdom in waiting until the late elementary or middle school years. This is when young people can “own” the faith more maturely, appreciate the significance of the symbol, and remember their baptism for a lifetime.

## **Should a person ever be re-baptized?**

If anyone doubts that they had true, saving faith at their first baptism or confirmation, we would encourage them to be baptized again. 1 Peter 3:21 says that baptism is “an appeal to God for a good conscience.” Many people just “went with the program” when they were young, taking confirmation classes without really knowing Christ. Many people walked away from God and the church immediately afterward. If that was you, maybe you feel a need and a nudge to be baptized again. There's nothing wrong with being re-baptized for the sake of your own conscience.

## **How does Willowdale feel about people who still don't want to be baptized?**

We recognize that these are serious matters, so take all the time you need. We love you and we're here for you. We're always available for conversations. Let's keep journeying together; that's how we all grow in our faith.