

## Why baptism?

In the New Testament people who heard and believed the good news about Jesus Christ were baptised. It was a public declaration that they were committing themselves to Christ and to the church, which is the community of Christ. Baptism was also a public confession of faith and repentance.

Baptism is more than a rite of entry into the church. It is a sacrament: a symbolic action Jesus commanded us to do, and in which God conveys grace to his people. In the New Testament we see what baptism signifies and the grace God conveys in it:

- **Entry into the Kingdom of God** (John 3:5). This is a work of the Holy Spirit, but requires our cooperation and acceptance.
- **Being clothed with Christ** (Galatians 3:27). In Christ our old life comes to an end and we begin a new life in him. The analogy used in this verse is of removing an old set of clothes and putting on a new set.
- **Sharing Christ's death and resurrection** (Romans 6:1-5). In baptism we participate in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Something in us changes radically so that we now belong to God and no longer to 'the world', where sin and death reign.
- **Incorporation into Christ's body, the church** (Galatians 3:26-28, 1 Corinthians 12:13). We cannot belong to Christ without belonging to his people.
- **Renewal by the Holy Spirit** (Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Baptism is a welcome into the fullness of all that Christ has done for us as individuals and a welcome into his community. Baptism is an outward sign of the new life God gives in Christ, and our commitment to live this new life.

## Baptism of Children

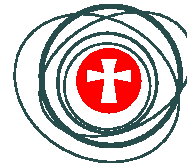
God has always related to people through his chosen community. The blessings he gives to individuals are given in and through that community. In the Old Testament his chosen community was the people of Israel. Through the work of Jesus all people are now invited to join his community, the church.

God has always declared that the children of the community are heirs of his blessings. Thus boys in the Old Testament were circumcised when they were eight days old. However, this was never an automatic guarantee of being right with God. Jesus warned people against assuming their religious heritage was enough to guarantee God's favour (John 8:31-40). As children grow they are expected to confirm their place within the community: to confirm that they accept the blessings and obligations of being part of God's people for themselves.

It is as if an inheritance has been set aside in a child's name, for when he or she reaches a certain age. The money in the fund has been set apart for the child, but in order to actually receive it the child must claim the inheritance when they reach the right age. In the same way all of the blessings and promises of God are held in trust for the children of believers. This is what we show when we baptise these children. However, the children will have to claim the blessings and promises for themselves if they are to benefit from them.

## Preparation for Baptism

- Since baptism is so important in the life of the church parents, wishing to have their children baptised must contact the minister *at least one month in advance*. The minister will meet with the parents to discuss the meaning of baptism.



Garnerville  
Presbyterian  
Church

- Baptism of children is only meaningful when one, or both, parents has a real and living faith. While faith is obviously personal, true faith will always express itself in life and action. Therefore the minister and Session will look for signs of this faith in those who wish to have their children baptised.
- Baptism is acceptance into the community of God's people. As part of the service the congregation promises to help bring up the child in the faith. Children should therefore normally be baptised in the church their parents regularly attend.
- If either the parents or the minister and Session decide that the baptism of a child is not appropriate, a service of thanksgiving and dedication will always be granted.
- A person who has already been baptised cannot be baptised a second time.

## The Service of Baptism

The main parts of the service of baptism are as follows:

- we remember and restate our faith as the people of God by saying the creed
- the congregation promises to play its part as the community of God's people to help the child grow up in the faith
- the parents confess their personal faith and promise to bring up the child in the faith
- the act of baptism



# Baptism