



SESSION 2

Baptism

Key takeaways for new believers:

- Baptism is an outward sign of the transformation that God has initiated within us. In isolation it does not save us – we are saved by faith alone.
- Though outward only, it is a significant 'marker' in the new believer's life and a powerful witness to his / her friends and family of the commitment to follow Jesus.

Part 1



- Review the '3 circles' illustration of the gospel. Discuss students' experiences of telling the story to others or contemplating it themselves
- Listen to or sing 'Amazing Grace' or meditate on its lyrics
- Allow participants time to discuss any pastoral / spiritual issues on their minds



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Part 2 (story)

identity

community

mission

Transition from session 1: having understood the gospel and made a commitment to following Jesus, what should we do now?

Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:1-3, 15-16, 21 / Matthew 3:2, 13-15, Mark 1:12-13, Acts 2:37-41)

A message came from God to a man named John who was living out in the wilderness. John went from place to place telling people that they should be preparing for God's Kingdom to come. They should be baptised – washed in water – to show that they had turned away from their disobedience and turned to God to be forgiven.

Everyone was expecting the Promised King to come soon, and they were eager to know if John was he. John answered their questions by saying, "I baptise you with water, but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am, so much greater that I am not even worthy to be His slave. He will baptise you with God's Spirit."

One day when the crowds were being baptised, Jesus Himself came to be baptised by John, even though Jesus had never disobeyed God. John tried to talk Him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptised by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" But Jesus said "It should be done because God requires it." So John agreed to baptise Him.

After His baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and He saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and settle on Him. God said "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

Immediately, following his baptism, Jesus was sent into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil and to begin his earthly ministry.

..... Years later, after Jesus ascended into heaven, His disciples continued His ministry - telling others about Him. On the day the Holy Spirit came, Peter told the crowds that had gathered of all that Jesus had done and of His death for their sins and His resurrection, Peter told them to turn away from the ways they had been disobeying God and be baptised to show that they believed and accepted his message. And that is what around 3,000 of them did.

Questions for discussion

1. What do you like about this story?
2. What bothered you about this story?
3. What does this story show you about God?
4. What does this story show you about people?

Part 3 (practice / takeaways)

identity

worship

mission

Ask the remaining questions:

5. What does this story mean for your life? How will you live your life differently having learned this story?
6. How will you remember this story?
7. Is there anyone you would like to tell this story to?

Pray that new believers will be both inspired and encouraged to make the public commitment of baptism. Encourage participants to have a one-to-one discussion with the church leadership if they would like to be baptised.

Pray through any pastoral or spiritual issues that may have been raised

Encourage participants to meditate on the following Bible verses:

- Matthew 28:18-20
- Romans 6:4
- Colossians 2:12

Other useful media resources

1. <https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search; ylt=Awrc3Cji8ChcAEQApXMPxQt.; ylu=X3oDMTByMDgyYjIjBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMyBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzYw--?p=jesus+baptism&fr=yhs-GenieoYaho-INTtraffichp&hspart=GenieoYaho&hsimp=yhs-INTtraffichp#action=view&id=17&vid=8b3793b7f8988270cf87d66af337031c>

Youtube video clip of John's baptism

2. <https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search; ylt=AwrDQqNC9ChcTEYAwywPxQt.; ylu=X3oDMTByMjB0aG5zBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzYw--?p=songs+about+Christian+baptism&fr=yhs-GenieoYaho-INTtraffichp&hspart=GenieoYaho&hsimp=yhs-INTtraffichp#id=1&vid=b2f22e03766058f166ffb7e5e6a0d87b&action=view>

Youtube video clip of Hillsong's Beneath the waters' showing actual baptisms alongside the track



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Notes for leaders - questions / topics that may arise

Here are some topics that may come up during the group discussion:

- What is God's Kingdom?
 - The Kingdom of God in the NT refers to the time when God comes to rule – His reign and authority which begins its fulfilment with Jesus' ministry on earth and people's acceptance of Him. The Kingdom also has a future fulfilment in the last days. This future kingdom comes when Jesus comes back – we inherit the 'kingdom' and all of creation is redeemed.
- Some accounts of this story refer to Jesus as baptising with God's Spirit **and with fire**, whereas this story omits the latter. Note that scholars are not consistent about what the term **with fire** means. It may refer to the purging or judging role of Jesus, or it may refer to the refining that the Holy Spirit brings (and physically fulfils in the tongues of fire we see at Pentecost). Whatever the case, we do know that John expects this coming person to fulfil the role of the Promised King. Discussions about the fire may distract the hearer from the main theme of this story. Although both of the proposed meanings of the fire relate to the theme, it may confuse someone who does not have a church background.
- What is the significance of John's baptism?
 - John's baptism was done to show that people wanted to stop sinning ("to repent") and obey God. Although the baptism was symbolic and the water had no physical properties to forgive sins, the act of public obedience would definitely have an effect on a person and give them greater encouragement to continue in their commitment to God.
 - John's baptism is not a full picture of what modern baptism symbolises, but it introduces the concept. John's baptism was different from the ceremonial / ritual washings for purity which the Jews of that day were accustomed to performing over and over again. What it symbolised was a breaking away from an old life of disobedience and a preparation for God's soon-to-come kingdom.
- So what does modern baptism represent?
 - It is the outward sign of what has taken place / is taking place internally. In isolation, baptism does not confer salvation. Salvation is by faith alone.
 - It reflects the believer's death to his / her old life and emergence into a new life by faith in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. Going down into the water symbolises death and emergence from the water symbolises the new life.
- Why do different churches baptise differently? Is full immersion the only way to do biblical baptism or is sprinkling with water acceptable? [Some new believers may have been baptised as infants and so may be curious about immersion baptism]
 - Both the Jewish proselyte baptism and John's baptism seem to be full immersion, and on the basis of that historical evidence, our church has chosen to follow that example. Also, immersion best encompasses the symbolism of baptism.



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- Given what modern baptism represents, why did Jesus undergo baptism? Some possible reasons are:
 - It was an opportunity for Jesus to show unquestioning obedience to God (who wanted Him to be baptised for some unknown reason)
 - Jesus was to affirm John's message of the need for repentance before the imminent coming of God's Kingdom, and this was the best way to do it.
 - Jesus was baptised a representative of mankind (in the same way that He represented mankind on the cross).
 - The occasion of the baptism was a powerful marker of the start of Jesus' earthly ministry – see both the Father's affirmation and the Spirit alighting on Him and His subsequent leading into the desert to be tempted.
- If baptism is just an outward sign of an inward process, why should new believers be baptised?
 - It is an important marker for each disciple of the commitment he / she has made to follow Jesus, in the same way that people were baptised in John's days.
 - It is an important witness to non-believers. It demonstrates to non-believing friends and family the seriousness of the believer's commitment. It takes on particular significance in countries where Christians are physically persecuted
- When should new believers be baptised?
 - Throughout the New Testament, the pattern seemed to be for believers to be baptised (almost) immediately they repented. Nowadays, there is often a period of weeks, months and even years in some cases between a believer's initial commitment and his/her baptism.
 - There is **no** prescription as to how quickly believers should be baptised after repenting and believing, but it can be very helpful to be baptised sooner rather than later because of the symbolism both to the new believer and to his/her immediate circle of friends and family of the new life that has begun.
- What about infant baptism? Does that count?
 - We advocate believer's baptism rather than infant baptism since the former reflects a conscious decision on the part of the believer to follow Jesus taking account of the cost, which an infant clearly cannot do. However, it is possible for young children to make this conscious decision so the believer's baptism is not restricted to adults or teens.