

Island ECC Positional Paper

# Baptism

At Island ECC we baptise people who have put their faith and trust in Christ (believers). We do this because we are following Jesus' command to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). This tradition has continued down through the centuries with people who become Christians. Simply put, baptism is an external sign of an internal change. It does not make them a Christian. It is not a means of salvation, but a response to salvation. This is why we celebrate baptism – it represents a life changed by God.

Even before Jesus' time, baptism was practiced among early converts to the Jewish faith. Ceremonial washing with water was symbolic in Judaism, therefore baptism indicated a convert's willingness to wash away one's previous ways and identify with new beliefs and a new community. Baptism was also important in the ministry of the prophet John, who emerged about the same time as Jesus. John preached a compelling message to the Jewish people. He claimed that God was about to do something new and thus people should repent of their sins and prepare for God's saving work. In keeping with this message, John urged the crowds who heard him to be baptised, thereby symbolising their willingness to identify with and embrace his message. As many came forward, John became known as the Baptist, or John the Baptist. Jesus was even baptised by John. Though he was not repenting of sin, Jesus was aligning himself with John's message and ministry. After all, Jesus himself would be the fulfillment of the message John was preaching.

At the end of Jesus' ministry, His disciples followed Jesus' command (Matt 28:19) and took the message of salvation around the world. Other people would become disciples, or followers of Christ. When they did, Jesus wanted these new believers to publicly identify with him. So by participating in baptism, a new follower of Jesus symbolically aligns himself or herself with new beliefs and a new community.

In fact, the apostle Paul underscored the symbolic picture that being immersed into water communicates. He suggested that baptism represents a person's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-8). When participants are submerged in the water, it signifies the death of their sinful nature. When they come out of the water, it illustrates their new life in Christ.

## What does "baptism" mean?

To "baptise" comes from the Greek word "baptizo", to dip or immerse. It was a common word in the Greek language at the time of Jesus, for example, to dye cloth by immersing it in a coloured solution – the cloth was "baptised" in the dye until the colour changed.

Baptism is immersion, but more, it is a sign or a symbol. It points to something bigger. When believers are immersed in the water and lifted out, it is a picture of Christ's death, burial and resurrection and our new life in Christ. We identify ourselves with Jesus: "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Colossians 2:12 "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Galatians 3:26-27

## Why be baptised? There are several key reasons:

- Jesus commanded it.  
We have already seen that baptism is a command of Jesus in the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18. As Jesus was obedient to His Father, we too obey Him in baptism.
- Jesus was baptised.  
Jesus himself was baptised by John in the Jordan and set us an example to follow (Matthew 3:13-17). Jesus said to John that it was fitting that He be baptised and so fulfil all righteousness. His Father tore open the heavens to declare His love and pleasure for His son, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Jesus pointed the way for us to obey also, out of love for Him. If we love Him, we will obey Him (John 14:23).
- We identify with Christ.  
In baptism, we identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus: dying with Christ in His death and living again with Christ in His resurrection – that we might live a new life. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:



The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:3-4

- We bear witness to the world.  
In baptism we bear witness to the world, making a public proclamation of our faith in Christ and what He has done. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8.

### **Common Questions about Baptism**

#### **Do I become a Christian by being baptized?**

Baptism does not make one a Christian. Someone becomes a Christian when they make a personal decision to put their faith in Christ at some point earlier in their life. Baptism is not a means of salvation, but a response to salvation. Like a wedding ring that symbolizes someone’s marriage to their spouse, baptism is symbolic of the faith believers have in Christ. Simply put, baptism is an external sign of an internal change. It represents a life changed by God.

**What do you mean by “believer’s baptism”?** We baptise believers, that is people who:

- are mature enough to understand the gospel of Jesus.
- genuinely believe that he/she has sinned against God and that nothing can save him/her from sin except Jesus.
- have made a conscious decision to put his/her trust in God through Jesus.
- are willing to be baptised in order to publicly profess his/her faith.

#### **Why total immersion in water?**

We practice “total immersion,” i.e. that the person is fully immersed in the water when being baptized, because we believe this best reflects the biblical practice. We accept other forms, like sprinkling, if the situation does not allow for total immersion.

#### **What about infant baptism?**

We do not practice infant baptism – it is necessary for the individual to believe first (see “Why Believer’s Baptism” above). Instead, we dedicate babies/young children to the Lord. Jesus laid his hands on little children and blessed them (Matthew 19:13-15). In the same way, we lay hands on little children and dedicate them to the Lord. This simple ceremony is an expression of the parents’ willingness to raise up their child according to God’s ways.

#### **How about being re-baptised?**

If a Christian has been baptised as a believer, it is not necessary to be baptised again. If someone is unsure if he/she was a genuine believer at the time of baptism, re-baptism may be considered.