Baptism: Three Important Questions

By the Rev. Canon Dr. J. Douglas McGlynn

There are three questions most Anglicans ask about baptism: 1.) Why is it important? 2.) Why do we baptize infants when some other traditions baptize only adults? And 3.) What does baptism accomplish? Let's take a quick look at them.

1. Why is Baptism important?

In the Bible, God expresses the relationship He intends to establish with people in terms of a covenant, a solemn promise. When God made the covenant between Himself and Israel, known as the old covenant, God gave a sign, an outward and visible expression of both His commitment to the covenant and Israel's reception of it. That covenant sign was the circumcision of male children (Gen. 17:1-22). In this covenant, God expressed His eternal purpose to raise up a people with whom to share His love and presence. Circumcision, the outward sign of the covenant, could not accomplish that purpose in itself. God's purpose could only be accomplished by an inward work as well as an outward sign. In the old covenant, God's way of creating a people is by an outward sign given in a moment to children by God's command and an inward work done in God's time by God Himself.

Baptism is important because it is the outward and visible sign of the new covenant we have through Jesus Christ. In this way, it is the New Testament equivalent of circumcision. It is an act commanded by Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19). That sign, unlike circumcision, is given to children of both genders because in Christ “there is neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28).
2. Why do we baptize infants when some traditions only baptize adults?

All Christians agree that salvation involves two pieces. The first is God’s work in Jesus Christ; the other is our response to that work by repenting and believing. We believe that baptism, like circumcision, is the outward sign of God’s promise to do the inward work. For this reason it can rightly be given to the children of believers. Other Christians see baptism as a testimony that the inward work has already been done and is only appropriate for those old enough to repent and believe. Anglicans baptize infants within the believing family and church community, taking the baptismal vows as a community to bring a child up within the faith.

3. What does baptism accomplish?

Baptism accomplishes three things: 1.) It is a visible word which proclaims to the church and the world that the one baptized is in need of a Savior and that God has provided that Savior in Jesus Christ. 2.) It is an act of initiation bringing the one baptized into the church community as a visible and outward sign of the new covenant. 3.) It is a means of grace, solemnly calling upon God to begin the inward work which He promises by the sign He has commanded.

By baptizing, we express our trust in God to do that inward work of shaping hearts toward Him. At the same time, through the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20), the Church is charged to see that those who are baptized come to a living faith in Jesus and have the opportunity to grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Him.

**QUESTIONS**

Use the following questions, along with the article above, to discuss and explore baptism in your community.

- Name some specific ways we as Sunday school teachers or youth leaders help our parish keep its vows to support and nurture our baptized members.
- How would you explain/defend infant baptism as a Christian practice?
Plan a Family Name Night

This quarter we talk about baptism, the outward sign of the covenant for Christians. On January 1, we celebrate Holy Name Day and remember the naming of Jesus along with His circumcision, the Old Testament sign of the covenant. As a family, you can celebrate your own names.

Buy a packet of alphabet beads at a craft store and help your child make a bracelet spelling his or her name or make a simple nameplate for your child’s bedroom door by gluing beans or beads on a piece of brightly colored paper then decorating it with markers.

While you do this, talk with your children about how you chose their names. If you gave a biblical name to a child, read a short story from the Bible about that person. Look online to find the meaning of your child’s name. You can also work together to make an acrostic poem of your child’s name. Come up with a positive word or phrase for each letter of your child’s name. End with the name devotion.

A Name Devotion

Read Matthew 1:21. As a parent, you picked out your child’s name, but Mary and Joseph didn’t get to make that choice. God told them to name their baby Jesus. The name Yeshua, (the Hebrew version of Jesus) means “God saves.” What does Jesus save us from and why is that important? As a family, make an acrostic for Jesus. Close in prayer thanking God for sending Jesus to save us and for giving Him a special name, just like we have special names from our parents.
Early Christians organized their year to remember and celebrate the important events of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, and the beginning of the Church. For more information, consult The Book of Common Prayer. Here are a few select events.

**Advent** – begins December 2. Advent launches a new Church Year (Lectionary Year C). Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends Christmas Eve at sundown. In Advent, we remember the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and look forward to His return in glory. Advent is a time to examine our readiness to let Jesus come into all areas of our lives. Traditional color used in churches is purple for royalty or blue for truth.

**Christmas** – December 25-January 5: Christmas begins at sundown on Christmas Eve and lasts 12 days. During this time, we rejoice that “the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us” (John 1:14 NIV). Traditional color used in churches is white or gold for celebration.

**Holy Name** – January 1: We reflect on the naming of Jesus when He received the covenant sign of circumcision (Luke 2:21). The name Yeshua, or Jesus, means, “God saves.” One can also reflect on other names for Jesus, like Lamb of God, Son of Man, and Good Shepherd. Traditional color used in churches is white for celebration.

**Baptism of our Lord** – First Sunday after Epiphany, January 13. Jesus insisted on undergoing baptism by John the Baptist. Before launching His ministry, Jesus shows His intention of identifying with humanity’s condition of sin, although He had no sin Himself. When we are baptized, we identify with Jesus’ death and resurrection for our sins. Traditional color used in churches is white for celebration.

**Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ** – February 2 (Observe in Sunday school on January 27 or February 3): Jesus was presented in the temple by His parents (Luke 2:22-38). While there, two witnesses confirm that He is the Redeemer of Israel. Simeon’s words over the child (vss. 29-32) are found in Evening Prayer. The second witness, the prophetess Anna, “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (vs. 38, NIV). Traditional color used in churches is white for celebration.

**Lent** – Begins with Ash Wednesday, March 6 and continues until Easter. During this season, Christians remember Jesus’ 40 days of fasting in the wilderness and the temptations that followed. During Lent, Christians identify with Jesus’ wilderness experience by fasting or working on their discipleship. Traditional color used in churches is purple for repentance.
In Your Toddler/2 Classroom

December Activities

During December, we celebrate **Advent**. Reproduce page 12 of this supplement for the children to color. **Advent is a time when we get ready for Jesus to come.**

Celebrate Baptism! **Materials:** One shell per child (a clam shell or something similar—these are available at most craft stores), magnetic tape (available at craft stores), permanent marker, and washable markers. Ahead of time ask the parents of each child for the date of his or her baptism. If a child hasn’t been baptized, you can use their birth date. A shell is often a symbol of baptism. **Shell magnets can remind us that we are baptized into God’s family.** Use the marker to write each child’s name and baptismal birthday on their shell (have the flat, straight part of the shell at the top). Let them decorate the shell with markers. Attach a 1-inch piece of magnetic tape to the back of the shell.

January Activities

Celebrate **Holy Name** on January 6. **Materials:** chalk, hair spray. **When Jesus was eight days old, His parents gave Him a special name. An angel told Mary and Joseph to name the baby “Jesus” to remember that God will save His people.** Reproduce the image on page 13 of this supplement. Have the children decorate Jesus’ name with chalk. Spray hair spray over their projects to keep the chalk from coming off.

Celebrate the **Baptism of our Lord** on January 13th. **Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.** When we celebrate baptism, we use a baptismal font. **Have a clergy person or altar guild member come to your classroom and show what happens at a baptism. Use a bowl of water to represent the baptismal font.** Afterward, make the sign of the cross on each child’s forehead and tell them “Jesus loves you, you are His child.”

February Activities

February 2 (teach January 27 or February 3) is the **Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ.** **Materials:** Copy of page 14 of this supplement, crayons. **When Jesus was a baby, His parents took Him to the temple.** They knew that God sent Jesus. **Color the present.**

Finish your emphasis on baptism. **Materials:** heavy paper, scissors, markers, sparkly stickers, tape or stapler. **Before class, cut out a crown shape for each child from the heavy paper. On each child’s crown, write Prince/Princess and his or her name.** **When we are baptized, we become part of God’s family.** That makes us, His children, princes and princesses! Let the children decorate their crowns using markers and stickers. After decorating, staple or tape the crowns together so the children can wear them.
In Your Preschool Classroom

Reproduce and send home Passing the Torch—
Family Edition (Page 3 of this supplement).

December Activities

During December we celebrate Advent. Reproduce page 12 of this supplement for each child. Advent is a time when we get ready for Jesus to come. This calendar helps us know when it is Christmas. Each day you can cross off one to remember that Jesus is coming.

Celebrate Baptism! Materials: One shell per child (a clam shell or something similar—these are available at most craft stores), magnetic tape (available at craft stores), permanent marker, and washable markers. Ahead of time ask the parents of each child for the date of his or her baptism. If a child hasn’t been baptized, you can use their birth date. A shell is often a symbol of baptism. Shell magnets can remind us that we are baptized into God’s family. Use the marker to write each child’s name and baptismal birthday on their shell (have the flat, straight part of the shell at the top). Let them decorate the shell with markers. Attach a 1-inch piece of magnetic tape to the back of the shell.

January Activities

Celebrate Holy Name on January 6. Materials: glue sticks, sand (colored if available). When Jesus was eight days old, His parents gave Him a special name. An angel told Mary and Joseph to name the baby “Jesus” to remember that God will save His people. Reproduce page 13 of this supplement. Have the children use a glue stick to cover the letters of Jesus’ name, then sprinkle sand on the glue. Tap the extra sand onto a tray.

Celebrate the Baptism of our Lord on January 13th. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. When we celebrate baptism, we use a baptismal font. As a group, go see where baptisms happen in your parish. Show the children what happens at a baptism (have a clergy or altar guild member do this if possible. Include a candle and oil if used in your parish).

February Activities

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February Activities

February 2 (teach January 27 or February 3) is the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Materials: copy of page 14 of this supplement, markers. When Jesus was a baby, His parents took Him to the temple. They knew that God sent Jesus. What would you give to Jesus? Draw a picture of your gift for Jesus.

Finish your emphasis on baptism. Materials: heavy paper, scissors, markers, sparkly stickers, tape or stapler. Before class, cut out a crown shape for each child from the heavy paper. On each child’s crown, write Prince/Princess and his or her name. When we are baptized, we become part of God’s family. That makes us, His children, princes and princesses! Let the children decorate their crowns using markers and stickers. After decorating, staple or tape the crowns together so the children can wear them.
In Your Elementary Classroom

DECEMBER ACTIVITIES
Use this Advent activity on December 2. **Materials:** paper, colored pencils, page 15 of this supplement. **During Advent we look forward to the coming of Jesus as a baby. We also look forward to when He comes again.** This symbol shows the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the alpha and the omega (Rev. 1:7-8). In English, we might say that Jesus is the A and the Z! Create your own symbol to show that Jesus came and will come again.

Celebrate baptism! **Materials:** small shells (a clam shell or something similar—available at most craft stores), permanent marker. **Shells are often a symbol of baptism.** Have each child write his or her name and baptism date (or birth date if they haven’t been baptized or can’t remember the date) on the shell. Tell them to take it home and put it in a place they can see it often as a way to remember that they are dearly loved children of God.

JANUARY ACTIVITIES
January 1 is **Holy Name.** Celebrate it on January 6. **Materials:** old magazines, glue, scissors, paper. **When Jesus was eight days old, He received His name. Jesus’ name was told to His parents by an angel. Jesus means “God saves.”**

**Jesus also has other names in the Bible.** Create collages of the names of Jesus using letters from magazines. A list of names of Jesus can be found at http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/parallel/paral19.cfm

Celebrate the **Baptism of our Lord** on January 13th. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River at the beginning of His ministry. When we celebrate baptism, we use a baptismal font. As a group, go see where baptisms happen in your parish. Talk about what happens in a baptism. If possible, observe a baptism and talk about what happened.

FEBRUARY ACTIVITIES
February 2 (teach January 27 or February 3) is the **Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Jesus was presented at the temple after His circumcision (Luke 2:21-38). While they were there, Simeon and Anna told Mary and Joseph that Jesus is the Redeemer of Israel. The prophetess Anna, “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (vs. 38). As a group, talk about ways that you can tell others about Jesus, just like Anna did.

One of the most important parts of the baptismal service is water. **Materials:** dirty rocks (one per child), water in a dishpan, towels, permanent marker. Give each child a rock. **Use the water to wash the dirt off your rock.** Give the children time to wash the rocks. **Just like these rocks, we are dirty. Our dirt is called sin. In baptism we use water to remember that Jesus washed our sins away by dying on the cross.** On each child’s rock write “Jesus washed my sins away.”

Absalom Jones
WHERE HE LIVED: Philadelphia, PA
WHAT HE DID:
Absalom Jones was born a slave. He taught himself how to read and write. He saved money to buy his wife’s freedom and then his own. Absalom Jones loved the Lord and cared about all people.
Along with his friend Richard Allen, Absalom took care of people with yellow fever. He and Allen attended a Methodist Episcopal church until the white members insisted that the African-American members sit in a separate place. They, along with all of the other African-American members left and started their own church. In 1802, Absalom Jones became the first African-American priest.

**HERO FOR CHRIST: ACTIVITY**
Absalom Jones stood up for what was right. Have students draw a picture of something they did that was very difficult and have them share their drawings with the class.
December Activities

Talk about Advent on December 2. **Materials:** paper, colored pencils, page 15 of this supplement. In Advent we focus on the coming of Jesus as a baby. We also look forward to when He comes again. This symbol shows the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the alpha and the omega (Rev. 1:7-8). We might say that Jesus is the A and the Z! Create a symbol to show that Jesus came and will come again.

Celebrate baptism! **Materials:** small shells (a clam shell or similar—available at most craft stores), permanent marker. **Shells are a symbol of baptism.** Have each kid write his or her name and baptism date (or birth date if they haven’t been baptized or don’t know the date) on the shell. Kids keep the shells as a way to remember that they are dearly loved children of God.

January Activities

**January 1 is Holy Name.** Celebrate it on January 6. **Materials:** old magazines, glue, scissors, paper. **When Jesus was eight days old,** He received His name. Jesus’ name was told to His parents by an angel. Jesus means “God saves.” Jesus also has other names in the Bible. Create collages of the names of Jesus using letters from magazines. A list of names of Jesus can be found at http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/parallel/paral19.cfm

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February Activities

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One of the most important parts of the baptismal service is water. **Materials:** dirty rocks (one per preteen), water in a dishpan, towels, permanent marker. Give each kid a rock. **Use the water to wash the dirt off your rock.** Give the kids time to wash the rocks. **Just like these rocks, we are dirty.** Our dirt is called sin. In baptism we use water to remember that Jesus washed our sins away by dying on the cross. On each preteen’s rock write “Jesus washed my sins away.”

**George Herbert**

**WHEN HE LIVED:** 1593-1633

**WHAT HE DID:** George Herbert was headed for a career at the king’s court with money and power, but then God changed his life. Instead of working for the king, God called Herbert to the ordained ministry. He became a priest in the Church of England and went to serve in a tiny village called Bemerton. In Bemerton, he preached at the parish church, visited the sick and wrote a book of poems. In his poems, Herbert talked about himself as a child of God. Many people consider Herbert one of the greatest writers of Christian poetry in the English language.

**Hero for Christ: Activity**

Have your students write their own poems about being God’s children. Give them the opportunity to share with the class if they wish.
Clapham Sect  late 1700s, Clapham, England

The Clapham Sect were wealthy aristocrats who came to faith in Jesus Christ toward the end of the 1700s. They worked as a team to bring about many reforms in England and lived out their faith in Jesus Christ by serving others.

Most notable was the abolition of slavery in 1807, an effort led by William Wilberforce, with the help of the whole team. Granville Sharp initiated a project in which the group established a colony for freed slaves called Sierra Leone in West Africa.

John Venn established free education for every child in the village of Clapham. Hannah More provided education for working class children.

In addition to these ventures, there were members who worked behind the scenes. These included Henry Thornton, a financial genius, who worked out the logistics of their ventures, and Zachary Macaulay who did their research.

Back in Time Discussion:
As a group, talk about ways that you can serve others. Come up with a small service project to do together.
December Activities

Advent marks the beginning of the Church Year and ends Christmas Eve. During this time, we remember the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and look forward to His return. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group read Luke 3:4-6 and discuss the following: How do you think the people of that day needed to prepare for Jesus? How do you prepare to let Jesus come into all areas of your life? One of the colors often used in the church during this time is blue which represents truth. Why is truth so important during Advent?


January Activities

January 1 (teach January 6) is Holy Name. We reflect on the infant Jesus receiving His name (Luke 2:21). The name Yeshua, or Jesus, means “God saves.” Look up other names for Jesus in your Bible. How do these names describe Jesus? (a list of names and Bible references can be found at http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/parallel/paral19.cfm) When you go home, look up the meaning of your name. Does it describe you?

Celebrate the Baptism of our Lord on January 13th. We remember how Jesus insisted on undergoing baptism by John the Baptist. Jesus shows His intention of identifying with humanity’s condition of sin, although He had no sin Himself. Read Matthew 3. How would you describe John the Baptist? How did John view Jesus? How is Jesus’ baptism different than the baptism we celebrate as Christians?

Back in Time:

John Calvin
1509-1564, Geneva, Switzerland

John Calvin was a reformer more associated with Presbyterians than Anglicans, but his theology and life have impacted the Anglican communion.

John Calvin

John Calvin became a Protestant as a young man. He headed the community of Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin contributed many writings to Christian scholarship. His most famous work was *Institutes of the Christian Religion* which explained Protestant theology.

When Queen Mary sought to return England to Roman Catholicism, many Protestant scholars fled to Geneva. Some of these scholars developed a new English Bible using Calvin’s commentaries and the *Institutes*. Called the *Geneva Bible*, it was the official Bible in England until 1611 when the *King James Version* was published.

Back in Time: Discussion

Calvin’s *Institutes* defined his beliefs. As a group, list the most important aspects of what you believe. How would you explain them to someone who didn’t know anything about the Anglican church?
During Advent we get ready for Jesus to come.
Count down the days until we celebrate Jesus’ birth. Cross off the date every day.

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Jesus
Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ

When Jesus was a baby, His parents took Him to the Temple and gave Him to God.
Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. Omega is the last. They show that Jesus is the First and Last (Rev. 1:7). Create your own symbol to show that Jesus came and will come again.

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