

## BAPTISM: GOD'S GIFT TO US



### The Nature of God's Gift

Baptism is a sacrament, a special means by which God communicates grace and forgiveness to us. The water we use symbolizes God's love poured out for us, as well as God's power to

cleans us and make us new. Very specifically, baptism speaks to use of the saving activity of Jesus Christ.

Above all else, in baptism God acts through the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, it is God who does something, God who takes the initiative, God who gives, and we receive. This being the case, baptism is once and for **all, valid for all time because God's** grace is valid for all time. It is also important to remember that the minister performing the baptism is serving as an instrument of **God's grace. (I Corinthians 1:12-15)** Therefore, it is not the person nor the denomination that is of significance, but God.

### The Recipients of God's Gift

In the United Church of Christ children are baptized because baptism is God's gift and because Jesus himself considered children to be of great value and worth. We know that he often held children in his arms and blessed them, and on one occasion even became angry with his own disciples because they wanted to **send the children away. Jesus' response to them and to us is clear: "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs." (Matthew 19:14)**

Baptism, however, is not limited to children, for within our denomination, adults who were not baptized as children and who confess their faith in Jesus Christ may also receive this sacrament.

### Understanding God's Gift

Baptism is the sacrament of belonging. Through baptism, the Holy Spirit initiates us into the Christian faith and makes us members of **Christ's body, the Church. Baptism says to each of us, "You count: you always did and you always will."**

Baptism is also the first step in a lifelong journey of growing toward God, the first step in a faith journey which will have its

share of joys and challenges, struggles and moments of decision. It is with the aid of their parents that children make the first step in this faith journey, in much the same way that children take their first step and begin walking — **holding on tightly to an adult's** hand. At a later point on this journey, individuals are challenged to take an important step on their own — without the help of parents. This step we call Confirmation. At Confirmation, individuals affirm **what God has already done and claim God's gift for their own.**

**Because of what baptism says to us about God's amazing grace and our membership in God's family, it is important to celebrate this** sacrament when the body of believers is gathered for worship. In this setting, members of the congregation have an opportunity to respond in loving, nurturing and supportive ways to this new member of **God's** family and theirs. Unlike our physical birth, which is a private event, **baptism and birth into God's family is an event for all family members** to witness and celebrate. Thus it provides members with an **opportunity to "recollect" their own baptism and** in so doing to be **reminded once again of the awesome nature of God's gift.**

Susan C. Bertolette

### Scripture References:

Acts 16:25-34  
Acts 2:38, 39  
Corinthians 7:14  
Colossians 2:11, 12  
John 4:1-2  
Matthew 28:19  
Romans 9:16

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