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BAPTISM

AT BLACKHAWK

WELCOME TO THE CONVERSATION

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

We're so glad you're exploring baptism! Whether you're new to faith or grew up in church, asking questions for yourself or a child, we want you to feel welcomed into this conversation.

For nearly two thousand years, Christians have practiced baptism in different ways. Some sprinkle water; others immerse. Some baptize infants; others wait for a personal profession of faith. These differences exist even among those who deeply love Jesus and take the Bible seriously.

At Blackhawk, we don't want baptism to divide us as Christians. But we do believe it matters—and we know many of you have questions. That's exactly why we created this guide. We want to share what we believe, why we practice baptism the way we do, and how you can take this meaningful step in your own faith journey.

One more thing: you don't need to agree with everything here to be part of our church family. We welcome all followers of Jesus, regardless of how or when you were baptized. We simply hope this resource helps you think biblically and prayerfully about baptism.

SIX QUESTIONS WE OFTEN HEAR

1. **What does baptism actually do? (the meaning)**
2. **Why should we be baptized? (the reasons)**
3. **Who is baptism for? (the recipients)**
4. **When can a child be baptized at Blackhawk? (age guidelines)**
5. **How is baptism performed at Blackhawk? (the method)**
6. **When and where are baptism services at Blackhawk? (practical details)**

Let's explore each one together

1. WHAT DOES BAPTISM ACTUALLY DO?

The short answer: Baptism is a beautiful picture of what's already happened inside you.

Some traditions teach that baptism itself saves you or makes you a Christian. We understand it differently. **At Blackhawk, we believe salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone—not through any ritual or action we perform (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).**

Think about what the apostle Paul wrote: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes " (Romans 1:16). The power that saves us? It's the gospel—the good news that Jesus died for our sins and rose again. Paul even makes a clear distinction in 1 Corinthians 1:17: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel."

Here's a powerful example from the early church

When the gospel was first shared with non-Jewish people, something amazing happened. A Roman centurion named Cornelius invited the apostle Peter to his home (you can read the full story in Acts 10). As Peter shared about Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon everyone listening, and they believed right then and there. They received eternal life, became a part of God's family, and experienced genuine transformation.

Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (Acts 10:47).

Notice the order? They believed first, then were baptized. Baptism didn't accomplish their salvation—it celebrated and declared what had already happened in their hearts.

So, what is baptism, really?

Baptism is the outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible transformation.

When you trust in Jesus, something spiritual happens that we can't see with our eyes. The Bible describes it as being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Water baptism makes that invisible reality visible. When you go under the water, it's a picture of dying and being buried with Christ. When you come up out of the water, it's a picture of being raised to new life with him. You're showing everyone—God, the church, your friends and family, even yourself—what's already true about you spiritually.

Think of it like a wedding ring

Most couples exchange rings when they get married. The rings and the vows happen together, and they're deeply meaningful. But legally, it's the vows that create the marriage bond. The ring is an outward sign of that invisible commitment. If someone loses their wedding ring, they're still married! The ring matters, but it's not what makes the marriage real.

Baptism works the same way. We're saved entirely by what Jesus did for us on the cross. We're saved through faith, trusting completely in him. Baptism is the outward expression of that inward reality.

2. WHY SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?

If baptism doesn't save us, why do it? Great question! Here are three important reasons:

Because Jesus asks us to

Jesus gave clear instructions to his followers: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..." (Matthew 28:19). When we're baptized, we're choosing to obey Jesus. But here's the beautiful part—it's not just about duty or checking a box. Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching" (John 14:23). Baptism becomes a love response, a way of saying, "Jesus, I'm all in."

To share your story with others

Your baptism is a testimony! It tells your friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors, "I've put my trust in Jesus." Since we share the gospel at every baptism service, people get to see a living picture of what it means to follow Christ. They'll remember your baptism, and that might be exactly what God uses to open their hearts to him someday.

To remind yourself of your commitment

Baptism creates a marker in your spiritual journey, a moment you can look back on and say, "That's when I publicly declared my faith." When doubts come or life gets hard, you can remember: "I've entered God's kingdom. I belong to Jesus." It's a physical reminder of an invisible reality that changed everything.

3. WHO IS BAPTISM FOR?

This is where Christian traditions differ the most. Should we baptize babies? Only adults? What about children who believe but are still young?

What we see in the New Testament

When we read the book of Acts and the letters of the early church, there's a consistent pattern: **people believed in Jesus, then they were baptized.** Often, it happened almost immediately.

- After Peter's sermon at Pentecost: "Those who accepted his message were baptized" (Acts 2:41)
- When Philip preached in Samaria: "But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news...they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12)
- When Peter preached at Cornelius's house: "...the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. So, Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water." (Acts 10:44-48)

The pattern is clear: belief first, then baptism.

What about infant baptism?

You might wonder: If the pattern is so clear, why do many churches baptize babies? That practice developed a few centuries after the New Testament was written. Different Christian traditions have different reasons for it:

- **Catholic tradition** teaches that baptism itself brings spiritual rebirth and is necessary for salvation, so infants should be baptized as soon as possible.
- **Some Protestant traditions** see baptism as similar to circumcision in the Old Testament— a sign that children of Christ-followers are part of God's covenant community.

We respect these traditions, but we understand baptism differently. Here's why:

The New Testament consistently links baptism with personal faith. When we read passages like Acts 16:34 ("...he and his whole household.") or Acts 18:8 ("Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed..."), it seems that everyone in these households had come to faith individually before being baptized.

An infant can't personally believe. A parent's faith isn't the same as a child's. And while parents always mean well when they have their babies baptized, the child won't remember it, which means it can't serve as a meaningful marker of their own faith decision later in life.

What if you were baptized as a baby?

Maybe you're thinking, "I was baptized as an infant. Does that count?" That's a personal question to prayerfully consider with the Lord. Many people in our church family have chosen to be baptized after placing their faith in Jesus—not because their infant baptism was "wrong," but because they want a baptism they can remember, one that reflects their own faith decision. For some, it becomes a powerful testimony to their kids or other family members.

4. WHEN CAN A CHILD BE BAPTIZED AT BLACKHAWK?

We love kids, and we celebrate when children come to faith in Jesus! Many kids genuinely understand the gospel and experience real transformation. However, baptism involves some abstract concepts that can be confusing for younger children.

Why we recommend waiting until 5th grade

Children think concretely. The idea that baptism is "a visible representation of an invisible spiritual reality" is pretty abstract! We want kids to truly understand that baptism connects them to Christ in a unique way while also understanding that it doesn't save them. That distinction can be tricky for younger minds.

Children's faith is closely tied to their parents' faith. This is normal and great! But many people who grew up in Christian homes reach adulthood and wonder: "When did my faith become my faith, not just my parents'?" If they were baptized very young, that memory can feel foggy. Did they really understand? Was it truly their choice?

Baptism can be a powerful marker of faith. It's a moment you can look back on and say with confidence, "That's when I declared my faith publicly. That was my decision." We want everyone's baptism—including kids—to be meaningful and memorable.

For these reasons, we recommend that children wait until the 5th grade before being baptized.

What about younger children?

We offer **Child Dedication services** throughout the year, a time for both parents and our church community to commit to not just telling a child about Jesus, but to walking alongside them as they discover for themselves who Jesus is. This is the parents' act of dedication, not the child's baptism.

Even though we recommend waiting until 5th grade, if you believe your child is ready to be baptized before that, we'd love to talk with you. Please reach out to Blackhawk Kids at (608)828-4200 or kids@blackhawkchurch.org. We'll explore your child's understanding together and, as a team, discern the right timing.

5. HOW IS BAPTISM PERFORMED AT BLACKHAWK?

At Blackhawk, we baptize by immersion—meaning the person is fully submerged under the water and then brought back up. Here’s why we practice baptism this way:

The word itself points to immersion

The Greek word baptizo literally means “to plunge, dip, or immerse.”

The biblical descriptions suggest immersion

Look at how the Gospel writers describe baptisms:

- People were baptized by John “in the Jordan river” (Mark 1:5)
- After Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water (Mark 1:10)
- John baptized “at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water” (John 3:23)

Why go into a river if you’re just sprinkling? Why would you need “plenty of water”? These details point toward immersion.

The symbolism works best with immersion

Remember what baptism represents? It demonstrates being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Paul writes about being “buried with him in baptism...also raised with him” (Colossians 2:12; see also Romans 6:3-4).

When you go under the water, it symbolizes death and burial with Christ. When you come up, it symbolizes resurrection—being raised to new life with him! Sprinkling or pouring water doesn’t capture that powerful symbolism in quite the same way.

What if someone can’t be immersed?

Sometimes medical conditions make full immersion unsafe. When that happens, we work together! We ask the person to guide us on what’s physically safe for them, and typically, they’ll ask us to pour water over them in a certain way. These baptisms are beautiful reminders that it’s the heart behind the act that matters most.

6. WHEN & WHERE ARE BAPTISM SERVICES AT BLACKHAWK?

We typically hold baptism services 3-4 times a year at one of our locations.

Who baptizes? Usually, a member of our pastoral staff performs the baptism. But if someone has played a significant role in your faith journey, we welcome them to participate. Since the New Testament doesn't specify who should perform baptisms, we celebrate these special relationships.

Ready to Take This Step?

If you're interested in being baptized, we'd love to celebrate with you! Simply fill out the [Baptism Interest Form](#) and we'll be in touch to get you the info you need or answer any questions you may have.

No matter where you are on your faith journey, you're welcome here. Baptism is a significant moment along that journey, and we're cheering for you, praying for you, and excited to see what God is doing in your life.