

# What is Baptism?

For two thousand years believers in Jesus across centuries, cultures and continents have testified publicly to their faith through the simple practice of baptism. At times this has been done at great personal cost. But it is always a moment where someone declares once and for all their wholehearted commitment to follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

One of the first actions of Jesus' adult life was to be baptised by His cousin John. It was an expression of solidarity with humanity as he set out on a life and ministry that would culminate in His self-sacrificing death on the cross and His resurrection from death. John was initially reluctant, but Jesus insisted He needed to be baptised just like everyone else.



## Read Matthew 3:13-15:

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him.

Some of Jesus' final words to His closest disciples before His ascension were to "be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit." It was a step of simple obedience and identification with God. Again and again, His followers then challenged people who put their faith in Jesus to be baptised as one of their first steps of obedience in their Christian life—people from all sorts of backgrounds, with all sorts of baggage, with all kinds of hopes and dreams. The thing that united them was their new relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Read Acts 2:38-41

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God." <sup>40</sup> Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!"

<sup>41</sup> Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

The meaning of the original word 'baptise' is very helpful in understanding what the Bible teaches. It literally means 'immersion'. It was sometimes used to describe a ship sinking, clothes being dyed or a person who was overwhelmed by debt.

The New Testament explains that baptism is really a simple act of obedience for a follower of Jesus. It is a clear and public way a believer is fully and safely immersed under water (think ocean, river, pool, bathtub, not dripping tap) to symbolise their identification and participation in the death of Jesus. Their "immersion" into water reflects His descent into death. When someone is baptised they are affirming their decision to turn from their "old way of life" of sin, disobedience and independence from God.

After they have been submerged under the water, they are then lifted up again, reflecting Jesus' resurrection from death. A person affirms their commitment and devotion to a "new way of life" walking with Jesus.

## Read Romans 6:4

<sup>4</sup> For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.