



## At the Baptism

Dear parent

Congratulations on your child's baptism. In every family it is something to be amazed about, a joyous event. It is not merely a good custom or church tradition; no, something great happens at baptism! For you as parent, it also brings responsibility – parents do indeed make a promise to God in the presence of the congregation! I want to talk to you about the rich meaning of baptism.

Before his ascension, Jesus gave his disciples the command: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.”* (Matthew 28:19-20). These words introduced the Christian baptism, the same baptism with which your child is baptised, as commanded by Jesus.

With baptism also goes the command to teach those who are baptised. The task of teaching your child starts with you as parent. After God had confirmed his covenant with us – that God as the only true God commits himself in love to us, and that we therefore need to love God fully – God said:

*“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). It is your responsibility, but also privilege, to tell your child, from an early age, about the Lord and his love, and, above all, to set an example for your child. Later on the church or school can build on the foundation that you have laid as parent. That is why the order of baptism demands from parents the resolution “to teach, and see to it that they are taught”.

# The meaning of baptism

1. **Baptism is something God is doing.** He takes the initiative. Baptism in the New Testament is the substitute for circumcision in the Old Testament. In Genesis 17 God made a special covenant with Abraham wherein God bounded himself to Abraham and his descendants in a special way. He would be their God, and they were to be his people. The circumcision of baby boys at eight days was a sign of this agreement (covenant). Circumcision was ordered by God, not by Abraham, just like the baptism that children would receive after Jesus' ascension. It is something God does, not people. With baptism, the Lord declares that he will be a God for your child, and that your child must live as a child of God.

2. Baptism confirms **that your child belongs to God.** Your child's name was mentioned in the same breath as God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This suggests something of the intimate association between your child and God. But, God also gave your child to *you*. You have to lead your child to Christ. What a privilege! Your child – who belongs to the Lord and has him as Father – is entrusted to your care. At the baptismal font, you undertook to take care of your child just like God would do it. You are simply doing it “in God's place”. You are looking after God's property!

3. Baptism **makes your child part of the church**, part of God's people, part of the community of believers. Through this, baptism gives your child a specific identity – one of inclusivity in the body of Christ. According to Prof Nico Koopman (a well known theologian) this confirms your child's human worth and dignity. Because you have already confessed your faith in Jesus Christ in public, you are part of the congregation. You are a communicant who declares that you love God. Now, your child also receives the status of a member of the church, as *part* of the congregation. You and your child have one God as Father. Just as God wants to be everything to you, God also wants to be everything to your child. Therefore, you are on equal footing before God.

4. Baptism is a **public confession of your faith in the Lord.** It is not just any child who is baptised in the church. No, the only children who are baptised, are those whose parents believe in the Lord - in word and deed! You are such a parent! How else would you be able to teach your child about the Lord if you do not know God yourself, if you are not a practising, witnessing child of God? With your child's baptism, you have, again publicly confessed your faith in the Lord. You have again committed yourself to God. It is a good starting point for the journey of forming your child's faith – the journey that you began with your child at the baptismal font.

5. **Baptism culminates in your child's future confession of faith.** The testimony in the New Testament is that, where people came to faith, they, and all in their household, were baptised (Acts 10: 24 and 48; 16: 15; 16: 31-33; 18:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:16). Faith and baptism belong together, even though one might come before the other. In our church the life in faith, of which the foundation is laid at home, is taken

further in the instruction in the catechism. The culmination of your child’s baptism takes place when he or she will in future confess: “I believe in God and have accepted Jesus as my Saviour”. When *that* happens, it will be the proof that your child accepted God’s promise made at baptism. Imagine how grateful you, as parent of the baptised child, will then be that you conscientiously fulfilled the role that you had to play in this journey.

**6. Baptism (also the baptism of your child) is an event with public significance.** It is indeed a momentous and intimate family affair. But, it is also a church event, more so than a private event. It is an event where God is at work. You will remember that we said earlier that God took the initiative in baptism? It is God that, through baptism, confirmed his claim on your child as his possession. With baptism, God commits himself to your child. This gives your child a new identity of inclusivity and human dignity. But, God also works in the community. That is why all this has consequences for how you view other baptised people in the community as well, and how you interact with them. Also, how you interact with those who have not yet been baptised, and to whom God would love to commit himself in the same way.

### *God himself helps you with this*

Baptism manifests God’s grace for people – the water signifies the blood of Christ that redeemed people from the curse of sin, even before they could understand or believe it. That is why baptism is called a sacrament (holy sign). This sacrament is now administered to your child and it comes with the great responsibility to be parents within God’s covenant. It is wonderful to know that parents do not need to carry this responsibility alone. They may ask God for guidance and the gift of discernment. As covenantal parents we do not need to doubt God’s presence. That is exactly what the Lord Jesus meant when he said: *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)*

At the baptism of:

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..... Minister

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Date *Rev Eugène Beukes*