

**Baptism** is the outward (visible) sign of God's inward work in an individual, resulting in the commitment of the baptized person to live a new, changed life in Jesus Christ. By the grace of God bestowed through baptism, our sins (wrongdoings against God's desires) are forgiven. Considered a Sacrament (commanded by God through Jesus Christ) by most Christians, baptism symbolizes the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the heart and life of each baptized person. Evidence of baptism can be traced to early passages in the Old Testament, but the institution of Christian baptism is more commonly recognized as beginning with Jesus' own baptism by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:12-17, Mark 4:9-11), which also serves as the starting point of Jesus' ministry in this world. Then, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus gives instructions by commissioning his followers, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, NRSV). Thus, Baptism became a fundamental and essential element in the life of the early church that still continues today.

Persons seeking baptism are seeking a new beginning to all aspects of their lives in the name of Jesus Christ. At baptism, sin's control over a person is relinquished by power of the Holy Spirit. Although wrongdoings are still remembered by the individual and consequences of sin may still exist, spiritual forgiveness is granted in full by God so that the baptized person may begin a new life unburdened by guilt or conscience. Indeed, baptism does not mean that the new life will be perfect. Challenges will still exist, but through God's grace and the Holy Spirit's work in the individual, God provides a new perspective on the challenges faced. This empowers the baptized person to freely dedicate themselves to a significantly enhanced life of serving God and all people, just as Christ exemplified in his own life and ministry. As such, baptism becomes a lifetime commitment that calls for a sincere and dedicated effort to grow one's relationship with God.

Baptism occurs by the imposition of water upon those being baptized, thus symbolizing the cleansing of the old self that was previously trapped in sin. In accordance with most Christian churches in the world, an act of baptism must contain two essential elements: First, water must be applied. Second, it must be applied in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Holy Trinity). As long as these two elements exist, FaithSpring Church likewise receives the person as a properly baptized follower of Jesus Christ and member of God's family.

At baptism, water may be applied in a variety of means, including sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. In accordance with most Christian churches, FaithSpring also accepts and practices any of these three methods of Baptism (whenever and wherever it occurred), as long as the water is applied in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In order to receive baptism, a person does not need to reach a specific age or awareness. Baptism is a Holy mystery by which God acts in the life of an individual beyond our understanding, thus persons should not be refused their sincere request to be baptized unless they have already been baptized. In the case of infant baptism, the parents and/or caregivers of the child may answer the appropriate questions on behalf of the child. Among these statements made on behalf of the child, the adults and caregivers promise to raise the child in the likeness of Christ, committing themselves to help the child in understanding so that each child can make their own profession in Christ later in life. The child's own commitment often occurs in Confirmation, a structured learning opportunity that is offered after a person has reached an age and understanding of accountability. In regards to adults who might be mentally challenged or physically unresponsive and thus unaware of the baptism, family members and caregivers can answer the appropriate questions on the baptized person's behalf and commit to lead the person towards a life in the image of Jesus Christ.

God's work in individuals is always present, especially in the lives of those who have been baptized. Thus, one baptism per person per lifetime is sufficient. FaithSpring Church will not "re-baptize" individuals, even if a lifetime of sin followed a person's baptism. God does not make mistakes; therefore, the first baptism, whenever it occurred, is sufficient. However, it is encouraged for individuals to make a profession of faith when a new commitment to Christ is desired, thus serving as a pivotal point in a person's faith and life journey.

At FaithSpring Church, those who have never been baptized are encouraged to do so as soon as possible. Awareness and theology are very important, but awareness should not prequalify or prohibit individuals from receiving God's grace. It is important for an individual's faith journey to begin, then for the journey to be nourished with worship, prayer, service to others, study, reflection, and Holy Communion. As a response to baptism at FaithSpring Church, the FaithSpring congregation also commits to support all baptized individuals in their faith journeys so that the individual may grow into the person that God calls them to become.