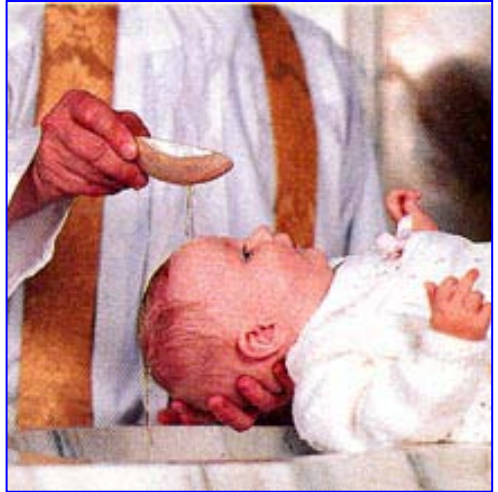


Why Do Lutherans Baptize Infants?



While this information does not contain the many Scriptures regarding what Baptism is, this is provided to specifically address the question of Infant Baptism.

To begin with it should be noted that infant baptism has been practiced in the Christian Church as far back as we can trace. There appears to be no time in the history of the Church when infants were not baptized. In addition to this there is no trace in either the New Testament or the early Church of the Baptism of the older children of Christian parents who had been brought up in the faith. It appears then that they were either baptized as babies or they were never baptized.

What this means is that Lutherans really do not have to defend the Biblical, Christian and Apostolic practice of infant baptism, it stands on its own. The burden of proof lies with those who would abandon it. Presently we find a segment of Christianity which practices 'believers' baptism. Some groups who do not practice 'infant' baptism might have some sort of child dedication ceremony (which, like 'believer's baptism', 'born again' apart from a water baptism, or 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' apart from water, are man-made inventions).

Lutherans baptize infants because: Holy Scripture.

"It doesn't say to baptize babies in the Bible."

The biblical command is to baptize people (all nations.) Our Lord Jesus clearly considered infants (babies) and children to be people. One of the few times that our Lord grew angry was when His disciples tried to keep the children away from Him. **"When Jesus saw this, he was indignant (angry). He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14.)** Our Lord tells us to baptize "all nations." He never tells us to baptize just reasoning adults. All nations clearly included the children of those nations. **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."** (Matthew 28:19-20.) Interesting too, notice the order our Lord commands to 'baptize'..(then) teach. As we do with children. Of course Scripture shows, as the Church too has always practiced, for adults, we teach then baptize. We MAKE disciples BY baptizing them!

And consider Acts 2, Peter's sermon that baptism is a gift for you and your children. In Acts you will find examples of entire households baptized. Scripture would be misleading or it is absurd to think that in these houses, there were no children. (1 Corinthians 1:16; Acts 11:14, 16:15,33; 18:8) Since almost every household in that day included children, some 'infants' were almost certainly baptized. The Greek word for "household" used in the New Testament specifically includes children and infants (cf. Genesis 7:23; 45:18,19; 46:6,7; 1 Samuel 22:16-19). The extended families of this period numbered dozens of people. The exclusion of children would have been completely inconsistent with the Jewish concept of family as an integral unit. This view is clearly reflected in the routine practice of "household baptism" in the New Testament. **"Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved."**(Acts 10:47-48, 11:14)

“But infants can’t have faith!”

If anyone suggests that babies can’t have faith, it is clear that Jesus disagrees with you. Those who have a problem with 'infant baptism' usually assume that saving faith must involve reason, a choice, a decision. The line of thought seems to be that since a very young child cannot reason - a child cannot have such faith. Most who follow this line of reasoning believe that baptism is a work of man which demonstrates, or flows from, faith. Many places in Scripture and Church teaching for the first 16 centuries disagrees with this idea. This is a sharp contrast with the repeated Biblical position that Baptism is a gracious gift of God that bestows saving faith, **born from above with water and the Spirit.** (John 3). What we need to remember here is the fact that the Bible teaches that salvation comes through faith and that faith itself is God's gift. **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”** (Ephesians 2:8-9) **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”** (Romans 10:17) **“Baptism now saves you.”** (1 Peter 3:21).

God's Word cannot be bound, it is always powerful and does what He promises. For example, a child is given the gift of a heart to pump blood and leg muscles to walk, even though that child cannot appreciate, express, feel, understand it at the time. Would we say the child doesn't have leg muscles unless they can walk or express or realize it? So too, a child can be given the gift of faith through the water and Word of Holy Baptism even if that child cannot appreciate it, express it at the time. A related problem is that by involving man (reason) in the process of salvation one turns God's action into something in which sinful man has a part (making a decision for Christ). In so doing one destroys the heart of the gospel message. (The fact that God saves us by grace, through faith!) Think about it for a moment, if I am involved in my salvation, did I do it right? Was I sincere enough? How can I ever be sure? Regretfully, contrary to Holy Scripture, Faith is turned from a gift of God into a work of man. And take note of the discourse in Titus 3, Romans 6, John 3 that all point to the act of Baptism, the saving work of God, we are passive.

Babies certainly can have faith, which is a gift of God, receive from His promise, consider... **“But if anyone causes one of these little ones** (Greek - “mikroon” – any child under 4 years of age with particular reference to infants) **who believe in me to sin, it would**

be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea...See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:6,10)

“People were also bringing babies (Greek - “brephae” – newborn children, babies) **to Jesus to have Him touch them. When the disciples saw this they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to Him and said, ‘Let the little children** (Greek - “paidia” -all those under four years of age including infants) **come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** (Luke 18: 15-17; cf. also Matthew 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-14)

“At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to little children (Greek- “nepios” - babies and very small children who cannot yet speak). **Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”** (Luke 10:21)

Baptism replaces circumcision, in greater fulfillment in Christ. Consider too, how odd of Paul to refer to something that happens to babies, in connecting it to baptism. In Colossians 2:11-12 St. Paul refers to Christian baptism as a circumcision. Since throughout the Old Testament God required circumcision of 'infants' on the eighth day after birth (Genesis 17:10-14 - except when one converted as a youth or adult) then clearly the baptism of infants shortly after birth is also a biblical practice. **“In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God who raised Him from the dead.”** (Colossians 2:11-12)

Yes, God's salvation to you and your Baptism is a result of His grace, all His work.

“But babies don’t sin and are not accountable to God!”

This is clearly seen in the fact that children die. The wages of sin is death. The theory that a child is not held accountable by God for his/her sins until they reach some 'age of accountability' cannot be supported from the pages of Holy Scripture. A related problem here is that this 'age of accountability' cannot easily be determined, as it is an invention of man. This also has the effect of eroding ones confidence in God's gift of salvation. (Was I old enough to make the decision to be baptized, did I really understand it?)

On the contrary, Scripture clearly teaches that we are sinners from the time of our conception (see Psalm 51:5) because we inherit a sinful nature from Adam (see Romans 5:12). The fact that infants die is God's sign that they are sinners (see 1Corinthians 15:22). We sin BECAUSE we are sinners, and we have this condition even as infants and little children (see Genesis 8:21 and John 3:6). Also, Romans 3:23 clearly shows that ALL have sinned and need the salvation that Jesus gives.

The argument over infant baptism is really a disagreement about the nature of faith and conversion. Those who reject infant baptism tend to view faith as a matter of intellectual understanding which is the result of a conscious deliberate decision to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. This view is in sharp contrast with the Biblical emphasis that faith is primarily a matter of trust. In fact, our Lord Himself suggests that the simple trust of the little child is a model which adults would do well to follow. Scripture teaches that faith is entirely the work of God, a free gift of His grace. People cannot decide to believe. God creates faith in our hearts through His Word and Sacraments. The conversion of an adult through the proclamation of the Gospel is no less a miracle of God's grace than the conversion of a newborn child in the water and the Word of Holy Baptism. In both instances the faith which results is entirely the work of God. Although we do not understand how God creates faith in Baptism and cannot explain why God chose to designate this action as a means of grace, we simply obey His command and believe in His promise.

“Infant baptism is just an error of the Roman Catholic Church that develop long after Christ.”

Infant Baptism has been the practice of the Church from the time of the Holy Apostles on. This can be established in three ways: First, some of the early Christian writers were not in favor of it (until a child could speak for themselves). This shows that it was certainly practiced! Secondly, we are told by the early Church Father Origen (240 A.D.) that 'infant' baptism was the normal practice. He writes: **"The church received a tradition from the apostles to give baptism to infants too."** Thirdly, as already mentioned we find no trace of the children of practicing Christians being baptized as older children or adults.

Those who deny infant baptism have a problem. They must explain why the fathers of the Church's first centuries speak of infant baptism as a universal custom. "The Fathers" is what we now call Pastors who led the Church after the death of the apostles. When we examine the writings of Irenaeus (d. 202), Tertullian (d. 240), Origen (d. 254), Cyprian (d. 258), and Augustine (d. 430), we see that they all spoke of infant baptism as accepted custom (though Tertullian disagreed, in wanting to wait until the baby was 3 years old).

Another objections,

“Jesus was baptized as an adult!”

If one takes this assertion to its logical end, then you must say: “Jesus wasn't baptized until he was about 30, so no one should be baptized BEFORE that age! In addition, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, and so all baptisms must take place in the Jordan or they are not valid. In fact, Jesus was a man and so women should not be baptized!” This is ridiculous, of course! One must note that Jesus was baptized for reasons completely different than why we are baptized. First, Jesus was sinless and so He did not need the forgiveness delivered in Baptism. Second, Jesus' Baptism was God's way of showing that Baptism saves us because Jesus has made Himself part of it. In other words, Jesus was not baptized to give us an example to follow (salvation by works!). Instead, He was baptized to show us the source and power behind the salvation given in Baptism. This becomes obvious when God uses Jesus' Baptism as a public witness to show us that Jesus is His Son, our Savior!

“Adults were taught first and then were baptized later. So we should wait for infants to grow up so we can teach them before we baptize them.”

This objection fails to distinguish the difference between infants and adults. Scripture clearly teaches that humans are conceived in sin. However, unbelieving infants have one advantage over unbelieving adults. Infants do not yet have a rebellious reason! Scripture teaches that we are conceived in sin and if we grow up as unbelievers we develop a conscious reason that is hostile to the Gospel. So, unlike infants who are in a position to receive the Gospel, adults need to have their reason humbled through the preaching of God's Word.

Adults must become like “little children” or “spiritual infants” before they can receive Holy Baptism. I use the following analogy:

Unbelieving infants are like a plowed field. They do not have the “seed of life” but they are in a position to receive it. In contrast, unbelieving older children and adults are like a field with hard soil (covered by weeds and rocks) that needs to be broken up and cleared out before it can receive the “seed of life.” This explains why infants are baptized and then taught, whereas older children and adults are taught and then Baptized.

“John Doe was baptized as an infant. But now as an adult he never attends church, he lives a life of unrepentant sin!”

The Bible teaches that our faith must be nurtured by God's Word, or it will die! Sadly, some who were baptized as infants are now living as unbelievers because their faith was not nurtured by hearing and reading God's Word. Such people should be called back to faith in Christ by the preaching of God's Word! However, the fact that some fall away after Baptism does NOT mean we should stop baptizing infants! For example, some adults are brought to faith in Christ through the preaching of God's Word, but then later fall away from the Faith. Does this mean we should never preach God's Word to adults because some later fall away? Of course not! In the same way, we still baptize infants even though, sadly, some later fall away from the Faith by rejecting our Lord's precious gift of grace.

“I will let my child grow up and decide for themselves.”

If you think of it, this is a foolish, careless statement. God calls upon you in your duty as a Christian parent to follow His Word and raise and teach your child in the Faith. Would you say, “I’ll let my child decide what they will have for supper, they can eat whatever they want?” Of course not, and how much more important, essential to their life is a relationship with Jesus.

Saved by grace alone!

Baptism of 'infants' is a great witness to the fact that it is God and God alone who saves us. That tiny child can do nothing for himself/herself. God alone gives that child the gift of salvation and all the promise of His kingdom.

Bottom line:

Is faith a gift of God or of the intellect?

As to babies not being of the age of reason and therefore not able to believe, and not needing what Baptism gives, it is shown that Christ disagrees.

- Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to baptize all nations, has taught us that infants can believe by God's grace working through Baptism.
- Lord Reason says, "I don't understand how a baby can believe, therefore I reject infant baptism. It makes more sense to me to do it my way."

Which Lord will you obey? Will you obey Christ and baptize "all nations," including infants, even though you don't understand it? Or will you obey Reason and reject infant baptism because you don't understand how babies can believe? Which Lord will you obey?

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