

Stretching Exercises

Some churches practice the baptism of infants. Other churches "dedicate" babies and baptize adults. If baptism is symbolic of belief and commitment, at what point in life does the ceremony seem most appropriate? Support your response with examples from the Bible.

Think about your own baptism experience. How did you prepare for it? How did you feel before the ceremony? After the ceremony? Were you changed in any way? Was the decision to be baptized a part of a larger commitment? Have you been able to sustain the commitment?

Depending on church tradition, the ordinance of baptism may involve the sprinkling of water on the forehead or the immersion of the entire body in a baptismal pool. (Baptize comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means to dip, plunge, or immerse.) What argument might support the practice of immersion?

Membership in the church doesn't depend on any formal act of confirmation. Yet in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul tells us that "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." What is the difference between baptism in water and baptism of the Spirit?

Respond to these questions:

√ The church regularly engages in three symbolic rites— communion, foot washing, and baptism. What value do these ordinances have for Christians?

√ How does an "ordinance" differ from a "sacrament?"

√ What might cause a person to be baptized more than once?

√ Baptism offers a promise: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38, rsv). What does the "gift of the Holy Spirit" mean to you? Review chapter 5 before you respond.

Journal Opportunity

Put yourself into this verse (Romans 6:4): "[I was] buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, [I] too might walk in newness of life" (rsv). What does this mean to you? How does it make you feel? Encouraged? Obligated to make changes in your life? Think about it, then put your thoughts on paper.

