

# **HARVEST INTERCONTINENTAL MINISTRIES UNLIMITED**



**WATER BAPTISM**

# Water Baptism

## I. Introduction

One of the first ceremonies every born-again believer should observe, either at the moment of salvation or sometime shortly thereafter, is water baptism.

It is important to note that baptism does not save an individual and it is not a requirement for salvation. We are saved by grace through our faith in Jesus. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV).

Baptism is symbolic but very powerful. It is meant to show the world that we love, trust and have put our faith and hope in Christ. Here is an illustration.

Baptism can be likened to a wedding ring. Here is how. Let’s say someone isn’t married, but puts on a wedding ring, would it make that person married? No, of course not. Similarly, someone can be baptized by water, but that does not make him/her a believer in Christ. That person must first and foremost accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior (be married to Jesus). What if the person is really married? He/she actually did go through the marriage ceremony but isn’t wearing a wedding ring. Would that mean they were not married? Of course, they are. Similarly, one can be a believer in Christ, but not baptized. Their sins are already atoned for and they have been forgiven by God. But imagine that this person is married, and he/she really, really loves their spouse. Would they wear their wedding ring (if they had one)? Of course! They would wear it so that the whole world knows they are married! In the same way, if we have trusted Christ to save us from sin, and He is the Lord and joy of our lives, then we will want everyone to know about it. So, baptism in a nutshell is a public declaration of our identity with Christ and the inner transformation we have experienced.

## II. Definition of the word, “Baptism”

The word “baptism” means “to dip, to immerse or submerge.” Below are different ways some Bible Dictionaries and Commentaries define baptism.

- Signifying union with Christ.
- Initiation into the Christian community.

- Ritual commanded by Christ to be practiced in the church.
- Identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.
- A rite signifying one's cleansing from sin through Christ's sacrifice.
- Outward sign of inward regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
- The immersion or dipping of a believer in water symbolizing the complete renewal and change in the believer's life and testifying to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the way of salvation.

### III. Importance of Baptism

If baptism is symbolic, why should one be baptized?

Though baptism is symbolic, it is important for believers to be baptized for several reasons based on the teachings of Scripture. Below are a few of the many reasons:

- **It signifies our desire to follow Christ.**

Jesus himself was baptized. He was not a sinner, yet he humbled himself in obedience to identify with us and give us an example to follow." *At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God's Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life"* (Mark 1:9 MSG).

- **It is commanded by Christ.**

Jesus did not only get baptized, but He also commanded his followers (us) to do likewise. *"Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20 GNT).

- **It demonstrates our obedience.**

Water baptism is an act of faith and obedience to the commands of Christ.

*"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

- **It depicts a public declaration**

Baptism declares that we are followers of Jesus Christ. It is a public confession of our faith in, and commitment to, Jesus Christ. *“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned’”* (Mark 16:16 NIV). Please note that this passage states, “whoever does not believe” is damned” and NOT, “whoever refuses to be baptized is condemned”. In other words, the focus is on “believing in Jesus” and not “baptism”.

- **It illustrates a movement from death to life**

Baptism is a symbol of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Our entrance into the water during baptism identifies us with Christ’s death on the cross, His burial in the tomb and His resurrection from the dead. *“Going under the water was a burial of your old life; coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as he did Christ. When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive – right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ’s cross”* (Colossians 2:12-14 MSG).

- **It connects us to a new family**

Baptism also connects us to the “body of Christ” – his people in the earth. In baptism there is a real sense of being joined with other believers, not just participating in an individual act of our own spiritual journey. *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...”* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13 NIV).

- **It Symbolizes the Washing Away of Our Sins**

Salvation entails the washing away of all our past, present, and future sins. They have all been forgiven because of the sacrificial work of Christ on Calvary. Being immersed in water is therefore a representational act of what has already taken place because of the shed blood of Jesus; our sins have been washed away just how water washes away impurities on our physical body.

#### **IV. How are believers to be baptized?**

- Baptism should be by Immersion.

- That is what Jesus did. *“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water”* (Matthew 3:16 NIV).
- Every baptism in the Bible was by immersion under water. The book of Acts shows us that this was the norm for every believer. Example: *“Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water...”* (Acts 8:38-39).
- Immersion best symbolizes a burial and resurrection.
- The church founding fathers agreed that baptism should be by immersion:
  - **Martin Luther** ---- *“I would have those who are to be baptized to be entirely immersed, as the word imports and the mystery signifies.”*
  - **John Calvin** ---- *“The word “baptize” signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church.”*
  - **John Wesley** ---- *“Buried with Him, alludes to baptizing by immersion according to the custom of the first church.”*

#### **V. When should baptism take place?**

Believers in the New Testament were baptized the same day (Read Acts 2:41 and Acts 8:35-39). In other words, as soon as a person decides to believe in Christ, he/she can be, and is encouraged to be baptized. However, being baptized immediately after accepting Jesus as Lord is not always possible. Hence, believers are encouraged to be baptized as soon as possible after their conversion experience.

#### **VI. Does HIM-U require a person who has been baptized by Aspersions or Pouring and desirous of becoming a member of a HIM-U local church to be re-baptized by Immersion?**

Yes, we do. While it is true that baptism is symbolic, and one is not required to be baptized or rebaptized by immersion in order to be saved, HIM-U believes that the right form of baptism is by immersion after one has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is worth noting that in churches where baptism is conducted by aspersion or pouring, it is generally done when a person is not of age to properly understand and make a personal commitment to Christ. Hence, to become a member of HIM-U, one is required to be baptized by immersion because it ensures that a personal decision to follow Christ has been made and it emulates the biblical pattern of baptism.

## **VII. Who should be baptized?**

Every person who has made the decision to believe in their heart and confess Jesus as Lord with their mouth. When Paul writes to the believers in Rome, he assumes that all of them have been baptized (Romans 6).

- *“Those who accepted his message were baptized” (Acts 2:4 NIV).*
- *“But when they believed Philip as he preached the Good News of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12 NIV).*

## **VIII. At What Age Should a person be Baptized?**

Water baptism should only be done when a person is old enough, ready enough, intelligent enough, and mature enough to make a public profession of faith to the Lord. In other words, when a person has accepted Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. The age at which a person should or can be baptized may differ depending on how well a person (child) has been brought up in the Lord. Someone who has been brought up very early in the Lord and His Word and has received the gift of eternal salvation at a much younger age could be eligible. In HIM-U, we do believe in baptizing children when they are old enough to understand what it means and have made a personal declaration of faith and acceptance of Christ as Lord. It is however extremely important to engage parents or guardians in the process if the person is a minor.

## **IX. Who Should Baptize?**

It is worth bearing in mind that water baptism is also an outward sign of being initiated into the Body of Christ, which is the Church. That is why HIM-U prefers that this rite be done in/by the church, since this would be a perfect symbolic act of becoming an actual member of the Body. It is for this reason that in HIM-U, water baptism is conducted by ordained ministers. Licensed ministers can perform the ceremony after receiving permission from their National Office.

## **X. What Should be Worn for Baptism?**

Women should wear a pair of pants under their dress/gown. Men should wear pants and a t-shirt or shirt. It is important for everyone to be aware that when your clothes become

wet, they stick to your body. Therefore, baptismal candidates should dress in a way that their bodies WILL NOT be exposed when they enter into and exit out of the water. Additionally, having a towel and a set of clothes to change into after the ceremony (if possible) is recommended.

In most cases, baptismal candidates and those officiating the ceremony wear white which symbolizes purity. However, the color white is not mentioned in the Bible as the clothes of preference for baptism. Consequently, the color of the clothes should not hinder a candidate from being baptized. HIM-U encourages the wearing of white clothes, but it is not mandatory. If a candidate does not have white, he/she can and should still be baptized.

### **XI. Can a Family be Baptized together?**

Yes! If each family member understands fully the meaning of baptism, and each one has personally placed his/her faith in Christ, we encourage family members to be baptized at the same time. It is a wonderful expression of commitment. However, it is important to remember that baptism is a personal statement of faith, not a family tradition. It is usually not wise to delay one's baptism while waiting on other family members to accept Christ. This puts an undue pressure on other family members and delays one's obedience to the Lord.

### **XII. Should a Baptismal Candidate Invite Others to Witness the Occasion?**

Yes indeed. It is strongly encouraged that candidates invite their family members, friends, associates, and community to come and watch this public confession. In fact, it is recommended that if a candidate can, he/she should host a "block party", "barbecue" or some form of celebration to mark this once in a lifetime event. This time can be used not just to eat and celebrate but to share one's conversion experience, testimony and a call for others to follow Christ. In essence, it can be seen and celebrated as one would celebrate a high school or college graduation. What a great opportunity it would be to announce to the world your decision to follow Christ and give others the opportunity to experience Christ as Lord. Please feel free to invite your pastor or a minister from your local church to share the gospel message in order for others to receive Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

## **Baptismal Ceremony (For Ministers only)**

Conducting a water baptism is an honor and a privilege. By participating in water baptism, God's people are revealing to everyone that they have made a decision to turn their back on this world and have accepted Jesus as their Lord. Wow! What a blessing to be a part of this marvelous occasion. Take it seriously, ensure it is special, and make it memorable for them! Invite the Holy Spirit to take control!

Prior to the ceremony, conduct a class to fully explain the importance of baptism and to make sure that candidates are saved. Also take the time to explain practical things that will take place on the day of baptism. Examples are: where the baptismal service will take place, how it will be done, clothes to wear, expected time of arrival, assurance that they will not drown (especially for those who aquaphobia), what they will be expected to say, etc.

- **At the pool/river/baptistery**

Sing a song or a few songs related to baptism. Example: "I have decided to follow Jesus", "Beneath the Waters" by Hillsong, "Come to the water" by Matt Maher, etc.

- Remind those in attendance of the importance of the occasion. Have at least two persons in the water to do the baptism. Pray inviting the Holy Spirit to take control.

**Have the candidate enter the pool/river one at a time.**

**Minister/Officiant** should ask the follow questions:

- \_\_\_\_\_(name of candidate), have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?  
If so, please say, "I have".
- Are you determined to live a life pleasing to God by the help of the Holy Spirit? If so please say, "I am."

**Minister says:** "Based on the confession of your faith, I baptize you in the name of Jesus by the authority of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, AMEN!"

Make sure the person leaves the water before the next person enters. Please help the person get out of the pool/water if assistance is needed.



While the person is leaving a song/chorus can be raised.

**After the ceremony:**

- Thank those who have been baptized and those in attendance.
- Share a brief word of encouragement of what it now means to be baptized in Christ.
- Give out the baptism certificates or state when they will be receiving their certificates.
- Invite those baptized to be at the next worship service (if it's not during a worship service) in order for them to be presented to the congregation.
- End the service in prayer and celebration.