

The Sacraments at Christ Church Northeast
Baptism
Lord's Supper

Christ Church recognizes two sacraments as being ordained by Jesus Christ: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The name "sacraments" acknowledges the sacred origin and unique place of these two practices in the life of the church. It in no way ascribes to these practices the power to regenerate sinful hearts.

Covenant

The Bible is the story of God's covenant with His creation. From the opening chapters of the Bible, which tell of how our first earthly parents Adam and Eve sinned against God, God promises that the offspring of the woman will crush the offspring of Satan.¹ The rest of Scripture tells the story of how this promise is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, through his perfect life, death, and resurrection.

The word *covenant* refers to a relationship that involves mutual, though not necessarily equal, commitments. There are three primary covenants flowing throughout Scripture: (1) there is a covenant within the Godhead, among the Father, Son, and Spirit; (2) God creates, and thus forges a covenant with, His creation; and (3) the covenant of grace. This covenant of grace expresses God's saving purposes. It first arises in the people of Israel, and it is completed in Christ.²

Prior to Christ's taking on flesh, circumcision and the Passover meal were the signs of God's covenant of grace. However, Christ replaced circumcision and the Passover meal with new and better signs of the covenant: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These two sacraments are part of the church's regular worship and serve to communicate grace upon members of the Body of Christ.

Baptism

Circumcision was God's ordained physical act signifying His covenant of grace with His people. Hebrews circumcised their young men so as to mark them with God's grace. However, Abraham's true children were children of faith. The sign conferred grace; salvation from sin came through faith.³

Baptism is to the church what circumcision was to the ancient Hebrews⁴ – except better! All of God's children can participate in this sign. To be sure, it is a sign of God's

¹ Genesis 3:15.

² Recommended reading about the covenant: *God of Promise*, Michael Horton.

³ Romans 4:9-12.

⁴ Colossians 2:11-12.

cleansing through death and resurrection.⁵ It also points back to God's repeated deliverance of his children through water: for example, the deliverance of Noah and his family through the flood,⁶ the deliverance of baby Moses through the river,⁷ and the deliverance of the Israelites through the Red Sea.⁸

Yet, baptism is more than a sign, too. Since God has ordained it, it is a means of his grace upon the recipient. Properly understood, it is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and yet it is not the means of salvation (regeneration),⁹ which comes only by grace through faith in Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection.¹⁰

The Lord's Supper

The Passover Meal was God's ordained table at which the Israelites ratified their freedom from slavery – passing from death to life. At the first Passover, God instructed His people to prepare a lamb for dinner, and to place the blood of that lamb above the doors of their homes. Homes marked by the blood of the lamb were protected from the Death Angel, who took the firstborn son in every home not bearing the mark.

The Passover Meal, which was observed annually after the first Passover, was more than a memorial and yet not the act of salvation from Egypt itself. It signifies what God has done and what God would eventually do through the Messiah. Hence, orthodox Jews still partake of the meal.

The Lord's Supper is to the church what the Passover Meal was to the ancient Hebrews. Instead of being marked with the blood of a lamb, we are now marked with the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. And we proclaim Christ by partaking in a meal [of/symbolizing?] His body and blood. On the night that he spilled his blood, the Lord took the meal and pointed it at Himself! His ordination of this meal, thus, makes it a means by which grace comes to the partaker. Yet, like baptism, it does not regenerate (or save) the person. Regeneration comes through faith alone.

Who, then, participates in baptism and the Lord's Supper?

At Christ Church, baptism is for believers and their children.¹¹

Baptism

Again, like circumcision, members of Christ Church are encouraged to baptize their children so as to confer upon them the grace of God, which is the blessing from believing

⁵ Romans 6:4.

⁶ Genesis 6-9; I Peter 3:20-21.

⁷ Exodus 2:1-10.

⁸ Hebrews 11:29.

⁹ I Peter 3:21.

¹⁰ Romans 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7; Galatians 2:16.

¹¹ Acts 2:38-39.

parents to the child. This does **not save the child's soul** but pledges their life to God through the act of faith on the part of their parents and pledges the parents and the community to encourage and facilitate faith in them. Baptism is a sign of God's covenant, and God's covenantal promises are made to both believers and their children.

Lord's Supper

The table of the Lord's Supper is open. While one must be baptized into the Body of Christ to partake, one need not be a member of Christ Church. Parents are encouraged to lead their children, who have been baptized, to the Lord's Supper when it is realistic for those children to partake of the elements.

Teaching

Children will be taught the Word of God as revealed in Scripture. The creeds and the confessions of the reformational church will be used so as to clarify the covenantal teachings in the Bible. As the children of Christ Church grow, their faithful response to the grace given to them through the Word and the Sacraments will be evidenced.

It is important to remember that regeneration (or salvation) isn't something that is human-centered; it is initiated by and centered on the work of God in Christ Jesus through the Spirit. Thus, to wait for a child to properly understand what is happening at baptism is to subtly centralize the child's role or efforts. To do so is to misconstrue the proper biblical teaching of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Therefore, Christ Church doesn't require parents to baptize their infants or toddlers, but we do strongly encourage it.

Generosity

It is the opinion of the leaders of Christ Church in its charter that baptism and the Lord's Supper are biblically mandated sacraments to be observed. This is an essential.

As to the appropriate age of participation, we will honor the parents' teachings and decision for members of their household. This is liberty in the non-essential.

With Saint Augustine we will proclaim: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, love."