

# Baptism & Church Membership

## WHAT IS BAPTISM?

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ commanded his followers to be baptized (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament involving the application of water in the name of the Trinity. Baptism is a visible portrayal of the forgiveness and new life that Christ offers in the gospel, and indicates an individual's public admission into the visible church.

## INFANT BAPTISM

Historically, many churches have taught that baptism is to be administered not only to professing believers, but also to the infant children of one or more believing parents. At SMCC, we believe that baptism should follow a credible profession of faith in Christ, so we do not practice infant baptism. We do practice infant dedication as an expression of the parents' commitment to raise their child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4), and the church's willingness to support parents in this sacred calling.

## THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

Although baptism should follow a credible profession of faith, it is not first and foremost a symbol of our own faith or commitment to the Lord, but of God's work for us in the gospel. The water of baptism symbolizes the washing away of our sins (Acts 22:16, I Peter 3:21), and the immersion under water symbolizes our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-4, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:11-12). Some churches have spoken of baptism as a "sign and seal" of the promises of the new covenant: in baptism, God both speaks (sign), and promises (seal). Baptism is thus not only a symbol of the blessings of the gospel, but actually a communication and channel of those blessings—nonetheless, these blessings are accessible only through personal faith in Christ.

## BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Some churches maintain that only those who have been baptized subsequent to their profession of faith (and sometimes, only those who have been baptized by immersion) are eligible for church membership. While at SMCC we practice baptism by immersion, and strongly teach and encourage baptism following a profession of faith, we also recognize many genuine brothers and sisters in Christ among those who believe in infant baptism. While we disagree with infant baptism and seek to persuade such people to be properly baptized, we cannot in good conscience bar them from church membership, any more than we would excommunicate a convert to infant baptism. We believe church membership serves to distinguish followers of Christ from the world, and should therefore be drawn around Christ and his gospel, not around agreement in the debate among evangelicals concerning the proper subjects of baptism. Therefore, we welcome into our fellowship all of those who make a credible profession of faith in Christ, are willing to submit to the doctrine and leadership of SMCC, and are willing to support the mission of SMCC.

## STEPS TOWARD BAPTISM

Baptism should be taken seriously as an important step of public obedience to Christ. Baptism should be administered only once to any person unless a previous baptism is considered invalid. If you are interested in baptism, and/or making SMCC your church home, please contact Pat Swanson at [pat@smccnet.org](mailto:pat@smccnet.org) or 626.355.3566 x321. An elder will follow up with you to discuss further steps, which may include membership classes, being introduced to the church, and/or setting up a date for baptism.