

BAPTISM

A GUIDE FOR THE DRY

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DayOne





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So you've been invited to





Perhaps this is the first time you've ever been invited to one, or maybe you've been to similar events before.

Perhaps you're really pleased for the family member or friend who has invited you. Maybe you've seen some changes for the good in them since they've become a Christian. They seem to be happier, more relaxed, more confident, kinder. Maybe they've spoken to you about the way people in their church



have been generous and loving to them, or about the hope they now have because of Jesus. You can see that Christianity—including church, baptism, and all the rest of it—is a good thing for them.

Hopefully you've begun to see that the love they've felt is enabling them to show more love, genuine love, both to you and to others. Perhaps you wish in an often dog-eat-dog world that there was *more* community like the one your friend is involved in. Maybe the hope they have is something *you* wouldn't mind a slice of in days that are often so full of anxiety and hopelessness.



Or perhaps in all honesty you're a bit concerned about what's going on in their life. Maybe you've seen people become Christians before, and you're not sure you like what you saw. Could it be that you've seen someone become a Christian, and it seemed they went from being happy, open-minded, and sociable, to being miserable, narrow and aloof? (If that's the case, I'm not here to either condemn or defend that person—I don't know them, or your experience of them. I'll just point out that Jesus came to offer 'life to the full'¹, not a closed-off life.)

1 John 10:10, The Bible.



Or it could be that you're wondering whether this will turn out to be just a phase. They're really into Christianity now but maybe it won't last any longer than when they were spending loads of time on Lego or scrapbooking. Maybe Christianity is simply another hobby before something else comes along, like baking or renovating model steam engines.

Whatever you're thinking, it's important that you understand why they've invited you to their baptism. And here's the reason: they love you!

That's the reason that you've been invited to this baptism. Because your friend or family member is excited about this event: it's something important to them, and they want you to be there to share in it and celebrate with them.

I'm sure that at the service itself someone will briefly talk about baptism and what it means. But it can be helpful to have something to keep, to remind you of the strange thing you saw and, more importantly, what it meant!

So that's exactly what this booklet is: something to help you more fully understand what your friend is doing, in being baptised. Also, more broadly, I hope and pray it might help you get your head around what





your friend believes about Jesus, and the new life that he has called them to!

With the help of an early follower of Jesus, the apostle Paul, let's think about what baptism is, by considering *one question, and two pictures*.

The question: what will you see?²

You'll see a lot of water in what looks like an oversized bath or a tiny swimming pool. You may see some children trying to get as close as possible to the edge, along with nervous-looking parents hoping that they aren't going to have to conduct a brisk rescue operation.

Why is there so much water? It's needed for the two pictures that baptism gives us.

2 What you see might be slightly different from what I describe, though the two things being pictured will be the same. I'm sure the minister would be happy to talk to you about why they do things the way they do.



The first picture



You may know a lot about the Christian faith or you may know very little. Almost certainly though, you know it has something to do with Jesus.

That's right! The Christian faith utterly centres on Jesus Christ. It totally falls apart without him. Christians claim that Jesus is the Son of God, the one who has always been God, and the one who became an actual, living, breathing, sleeping, eating human being. And not only did he come and live a wonderful life of love on this earth—he died on a cross, and then rose again from death three days later.



What does that have to do with your friend today, though? Listen to what Paul the early follower of Jesus says:

Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.³

Have you ever seen two people who are such close friends that they go everywhere together, do everything together? It's almost unimaginable that you'd see one of them without the other.

That's the first picture. Paul tells us that the Christian, the person who trusts in Jesus Christ, is in such close relationship to Jesus, so closely identified with him, that whatever Jesus has done it's as though they've done it too.

In particular, just as Jesus died, it's as though they died along with him. And just as Jesus rose again from death, it's as though they rose again too. So that they could stop living their old life and begin a new life with

³ Romans 6:3–4, The Bible.





him: a life where God's Spirit is at work in them to help them be more loving, more patient, more joyful—more like Jesus himself.

And that's what's pictured in baptism. You'll see your friend going down into the water, representing death. Then (hopefully!) you'll see them coming back out of the water, representing new life.

You've probably known your friend for quite a while—perhaps you're their parent and you've known them since day one! So, this is a fair question: Why do they need a new life? What's wrong with the old one? They seemed to be getting on pretty okay before.

In fact, the new life that Paul talks about is something a lot more drastic than just turning over a new leaf, getting up half an hour earlier, going to the gym more regularly. The way to this new life is through death!

Why does it have to be so drastic? Why does anyone have to die to an old way of life, to live a new life?

To answer that question, let's think about the second picture that baptism gives us.





The second picture



A while ago, our shower broke and we weren't able to get a plumber to fit a new one for a few weeks. So while we waited I bought one of those rubber tube things that fits over your taps and ends in a shower head. And it was great. As long as you don't mind having a shower at about a third of the normal water pressure, and having to push the tube back onto the taps every twenty seconds, and not being able to stand up straight. As long as you don't mind never feeling really clean, rubber tube things are great! But then, the





plumber came and fitted a new shower. Ah, the joy of the next morning: feeling truly clean for the first time in weeks!

So why does your friend or anyone else have to ‘die’ with Jesus and be raised to a totally new life, a life with God?

Well, imagine attending a royal feast and wearing dirty clothes. It wouldn’t work, would it? Or how about going for a family meal stinking to high heaven?

Yet the Bible says that when I try and come to God based on the fact that I’ve lived a fairly decent life, that’s what it’s like. Because I’ve lived my life *not* loving God as I should, *not* loving the people around me as I should. I’ve rolled around in the filth of pride. I stink of the stale B.O. of selfishness and self-deception. And the King, the Father, God himself, who hosts the feast—he won’t let us in like that.

The beautiful feast of life with God begins now and lasts forever. But how do I get in to this great feast? Surely I need to get myself home for a good wash. Get out the shower gel. Wash off that selfishness. Then, pop down to Moss Bros or John Lewis for a nice new suit or evening dress. Turn over a new leaf and start to live right.





Then I can attend the king's feast, right? Once I've scrubbed away the pride and started to be humble. *Then* I can get along to the family meal, yes? No. That's not the answer that Jesus gives us.

Rather, he says *he* will do everything to make sure we are clean. *He* will do everything to make sure we're dressed appropriately for the occasion. Being cleaned by Jesus is the second picture that baptism gives us. The apostle Paul talks about coming to see his own need of being cleaned by Jesus. And he tells us the words of a man named Ananias who spoke to him about Jesus and then told him:

*Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*⁴

Why will you see so much water? Because that water symbolises the way that Jesus washes us, makes us clean—not on the outside, but on the inside.

And this is where one of the biggest, most practical, most day-to-day questions you and I can ask ourselves comes in:

Why did Jesus have to die? Why did God allow his wonderful Son to die a horrible death on a cross?

4 Acts 22:16, The Bible.





That's a question I started to ask when I was eighteen. It's a question I'm still realising the answer to now, at forty-something, and that I expect to keep exploring until I die—and probably beyond!

And here's one aspect of the answer: Jesus died, to make me clean.

I'd made myself unclean by my rebellion against God and his good ways. But Jesus through his death makes me clean; fit for the royal reception; appropriately dressed for the family meal.

You see, God's *justice* is so certain that he'll never sweep wrongdoing under the carpet, pretend like it never happened. So, a price has to be paid for my rebellion and for your friend's—and for yours.

But also, God's *love* is so expansive, so wonderful, so full, that he delights to bring rebels like us back to himself—even though the cost is great.

And the cost really *is* great. It's greater than diamonds and pearls. The cost looks like a man gasping for breath, with a crown of thorns being pushed into his skull, nailed to a Roman instrument of torture. The cost looks like God's Son being punished, crushed, in place of people who would rather spit on him than worship him. And doing all this because of love.





In being baptised your friend is saying they are dirty because of sin and they can't make themselves clean. And in being baptised your friend is saying that in Jesus, the one who died and rose, they have found the one who makes them perfectly clean and brings them to the feast. So that now they are in a new relationship with God. They aren't a rebel against him anymore. They are his child. He is their Father. They know his love day by day. They know that he honours them rather than condemning them. They know they don't need to fear what the future holds because they know the One who holds the future. And they'll know him and his love forever. No wonder they seem happier! Because it's a great thing to be able to let our guard down in front of close friends and family, and live without pretending. Isn't it wonderful to know that someone knows me as I really am, warts and all, and yet still loves me?





What next?



It sounds so drastic to think of dying and rising again, doesn't it? But the death and the new life—they're all totally achieved by Jesus. And that's why people like your friend are able to enter into that new life—because of the death and rising again of Jesus.

It may sound unpleasant to think of dying and rising again, perhaps like something from a zombie movie. And yet it's through being identified with and trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus that your friend has come to this good new life: this life of fullness;



this life of true community with God and with others; this life of certain hope for the future; this full life that begins now and lasts forever.

Does this new, full life mean that your friend will now be perfect? I've been a Christian for over twenty years, so I can say with a fair bit of certainty, no! Christians don't suddenly become perfect. Your work colleague won't become the new Mary Poppins. Your daughter probably won't suddenly bloom into a 21st century Florence Nightingale. Your son certainly won't transform overnight into Jesus. Far from it. And yet, in time you will see changes. Slow, gradual changes in the way they act, speak, and think. Enabling them more and more to live the life they were created for. Bit by bit, imperfectly but truly, becoming more like Jesus. Because God is at work in them by his Spirit.

You know, there's a joy in being physically clean—like when your new shower gets installed. There's a greater joy in being spiritually clean—knowing that Jesus has washed us clean, and equips us by his Spirit to live the life we were designed for. But the greatest joy is in knowing that you're welcomed by God as a beloved child. That's the joy your friend, and millions of others around the world, have come to know. That's the joy that's pictured in baptism.





Given the greatness of joy that's involved here, don't you think it's worth investigating a little for yourself?



Let me suggest to you a couple of different ways of exploring Jesus further:

For me, the joy was found through reading John's Gospel, an eyewitness account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I'm certain someone from the church would be happy to freely give you a copy to read. I should warn you though—as I read this account, it was deeply unpleasant to realise my own dirtiness. And it can still be uncomfortable to realise how much of that filth of pride and selfishness and the rest still clings on to me, years later. But the joy of knowing Jesus, knowing his cleansing, his free forgiveness, acceptance and new life, far more than makes up for that.

Or you could check out this website which has lots of videos where you can explore specific questions you might have about Jesus and Christianity, or explore the difference trusting Jesus has made in people's lives: www.christianityexplored.org

Perhaps though, as you've seen your friend be baptised and heard about what that means, you realise, 'Yes! I want in! I want Jesus!'





Would you pray this prayer? There's nothing magical about the words, but if you truly want to trust Jesus and follow him this would be a really helpful thing to pray from the heart.

Lord God, thank you for the way that you brought my friend to know you.

I want to know you too.

I recognise that I've turned away from you, that I've made myself unclean before you.

Thank you for sending Jesus to live and die and rise again. Thank you that in him I can be clean and can begin to live the life you designed me for.

Please help me turn from my old life and trust in Jesus. Please, by your Holy Spirit, help me live for Jesus day by day.

Amen.

Whether you've trusted in Jesus or still need to work through these things, I'd love to hear from you and to help you in this. Why not drop me an email at richard@careybaptistchurch.org.uk? Or perhaps, even better, chat to your friend or the minister of their church!

God bless you.

Rich Baxter







BAPTISM

A GUIDE FOR THE DRY

You've been invited to a baptism...
But what's it all about?

In this helpful little booklet, Rich Baxter uses one question and two pictures to help you get right to the heart of what your friend's baptism is all about, and how it all relates to Jesus and his gospel.



Rich Baxter is Pastor for Outreach at Carey Baptist Church in Reading. He is married to Dorcas and has three lovely children. He and Dorcas love finding out new facts about dinosaurs, Lego and unicorns from their three young children. Rich loves to point others to Christ, and encourage and equip believers to do this—and is amazed that a church pays him to do so!

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