

Baptism

Also for Babies

“Oh, you’re from that church that baptizes babies? How can you sprinkle water on infants and say they’ll be in heaven? A person has to knowingly accept Jesus as Savior. Show me in the Bible where God says we should baptize babies.”

How do you respond? Is it so necessary to baptize babies? Scripture says yes! First, Christ clearly commands the Church to baptize “all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Certainly this phrase includes infants. Babies are a part of every nation. There isn’t the slightest hint in Scripture that God excluded infants from this command. Remember, “The promise is for you and your children” (Acts 2:39).



Second, listen closely to the Savior who hugged little children. Jesus spoke of “these little ones who believe in me” (Matthew 18:6). In the Greek language, the word translated “little ones” commonly refers to babies. So faith is not simply cognitive understanding. If that were the case, what would we say of the elderly Christian ravaged by Alzheimer’s? Has faith vanished? We thank our Lord for showing us that faith is a miracle of the Holy Spirit, who uses the gospel in the Word and sacraments. Adults receive this gospel when they read the printed word or hear the spoken word. The Spirit can use that gospel to create faith. When adults are baptized, they show that they joyously embrace Christ’s command, and the Holy Spirit strengthens their newly created faith. To create faith in babies, the Spirit uses the same powerful gospel, connected with the water through the Word.

Finally, remember also how Scripture describes the human condition. Babies are not born morally neutral or with an unblemished free will. From conception we are steeped in original sin (Psalm 51:5), which we inherited from our rebellious first parents (Romans 5:12, 17). Though we were born spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), God graciously comes to create an Easter miracle of new life within us (Romans 6:3, 4).

Yes, babies need Baptism, for Baptism “now saves you also” (1 Peter 3:21). Luther writes, “No one is to think that [Baptism] is an optional matter like putting on a red coat” (Janzow, page 98).

Some reject infant baptism because they question whether conversion is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit without input or impetus from the recipient. But babies are helpless. Babies cannot speak or assent. God must do everything. And that is Scripture’s message. “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). Baptism of babies is truly one of the loudest sermons on pure grace that the church proclaims.