

## The Story Church - 5.21.23

### Down to the River: *The Purpose and Power of Baptism*

Part 3 of 4: *Why Do We Baptize Babies?*

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**SERIES INTRO:** “By baptism, we enter into a covenant with God, an everlasting covenant, we are admitted into the church, made members of Christ, made children of God. By the water of baptism, we are born again.” - John Wesley

The movement of Jesus that has swept over the entire world was born in blood and water. For thousands of years, believers from every nation and race, whether rich or poor, male or female, young or old, having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, were initiated into Christ’s Church through this mysterious water rite called baptism. What is the meaning of this strange, ancient ritual, and why does it still matter today? Join The Story through the month of May as we explore the purpose and power of baptism!

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**REFLECTION QUESTION:** OK, let’s cut to the chase. Prior to hearing this message, what was your opinion of infant baptism? How did you reach your conclusions?

What are the two largest schools of thought when it comes to Christian baptism, and how do they differ?

How many examples of infants and young children being baptized are found in the Bible?  
Is that alone reason enough to reject infant baptism? Why or why not?

How should Christians proceed when disagreements arise among believers that are not clearly resolved in Scripture?

**Genesis 17:3-12** Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised...”

What was circumcision meant to signify?  
At what age were Israelite males to be circumcised?

**Genesis 21:1-4** Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.

Why did Abraham circumcise Isaac as an infant instead of waiting until his son was old enough to choose it for himself?

**Luke 2:4-7, 21** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them... On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

At what age was Jesus circumcised, and why?

Whereas in the Old Testament, circumcision was the sign of the covenant, baptism became the sign of the new covenant in the New Testament. Read Jesus' *Great Commission* below. What did he tell his disciples to do? Notably, especially for a group of devout Jews, what did he *not* tell them to do?

**Matthew 28:18-20** Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."

While both circumcision and baptism are described in the Bible as signs of God's covenants (old and new, respectively), there are some important differences between the two rituals. What are they?

Because circumcision (under the old covenant) and baptism (under the new) are *signs* of our salvation (and not the *substance* of it), neither sign has the power to *save* us (see passage from Romans 2 below). Why is this an important clue to understanding the biblical case for infant baptism?

**Romans 2:25-29** Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

At what point did the Christian Church begin baptizing children and infants? How do we know? If baptizing infants is so clearly unbiblical, as some might say, then why is there no evidence of church fathers criticizing this practice as they so often did when heresies arose among the churches?

Whenever we baptize infants, what are we doing? And what are we *not* doing?

Are you (and your children, if you have kids) baptized? If so, what does that mean to you? If not, why not?

*Your Notes:*