A SIMPLE EXPLANATION
OF BAPTISM
THE NATURE OF BAPTISM

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.

Where do we find that Word of God?

As He was preparing to ascend back to heaven, Jesus said:

*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.* (Matthew 28:19 NIV)

Baptism is from God, since our Lord Jesus instituted Baptism, joining water to God’s Word and His triune name. This is how God makes us His dear children and disciples.

What does it mean to have a last name (family name)? When God places His name on us in Baptism, what does that mean?

Read Matthew 3:13–17. How are all three persons of the Trinity present and active in Jesus’ Baptism? How does His Baptism help us to understand the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our Baptism?
As Christians, we are God’s baptized people! We are His adopted children, together with all believers, and we live and die in the confidence that He has redeemed us and we are His.

How do people answer the question “Who am I?” How does Baptism help me answer that question?

What does the word “baptize” mean?

Baptize typically means “to wash with water,” whether by immersing, pouring, or sprinkling. Christian Baptism refers to washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, according to the institution of Christ.

And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash [literally, “baptize”]. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing [literally, “baptizing”] of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. (Mark 7:4)

What is different about the water of Baptism?

The water in itself is not different or holier than any other water, but because “God’s Word and command are added to it,” it is a “divine water” (Large Catechism, part 4, paragraph 14).

Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having
cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. (Ephesians 5:25–26)

Who instituted Holy Baptism?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, after His death and resurrection, commanded His Church to baptize all nations.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

What does it mean to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”?

“To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men, but by God Himself. Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is still truly God’s own work” (Large Catechism, part 4, paragraph 10). In Baptism, God puts His saving name on us and is truly present to bless us with all His gifts as His children and heirs.

Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance
upon you and give you peace. So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:23–27)

**Who is to baptize?**

Normally, pastors—Christ’s called ministers—are to baptize, but in an emergency when no pastor is available, any Christian should baptize.

*This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

(1 Corinthians 4:1)

*Note:* For a short form of Baptism in cases of emergency (that is, when death is imminent), see the last pages of this booklet.

**To whom does Jesus refer when He says that “all nations” are to be baptized?**

“All nations” refers to all people outside of the Church regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, and so on.

**Why should babies also be baptized?**

Babies are included in the words “all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy*
Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself. (Acts 2:38–39)

In Acts 16:13–15, 25–34 and 1 Corinthians 1:16, the apostles baptized whole households, which likely included children.

Babies are sinful and need what Baptism promises, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psalm 51:5)

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. . . . Therefore as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12, 18–19)

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the
flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:5–6)

The Holy Spirit is able to work faith in babies. Yet You are He who took Me from the womb; You made Me trust You at My mother’s breasts. On You was I cast from My birth, and from My mother’s womb You have been My God. (Psalm 22:9–10)

For You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. Upon You have I leaned from before my birth; You are He who took me from my mother’s womb. My praise is continually of You. (Psalm 71:5–6)

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matthew 18:6)

And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise’?” (Matthew 21:16)
Read Luke 1:13–17, 39–45; 10:21; and 18:16. As an unborn child, John was filled with the Holy Spirit and believed. The Greek words used in Luke 10 and 18 are unmistakably clear: Jesus rejoices that the Holy Spirit makes saving knowledge known to nursing babies (Luke 10:21), and He invites “little children,” including infants, to come and be blessed by Him (Luke 18:16).

Faith is not to be confused with intellectual ability. Those who argue for “believer’s baptism” and reject the Baptism of infants (or those with severe cognitive disabilities) often wrongly maintain that (1) infants are not guilty of (accountable for) sin or able to commit sinful acts; (2) faith is a human decision that infants cannot make; and (3) Baptism is primarily our promise to God rather than God’s promise to us. Not one of these views is based on Scripture.

Parents should not deny Baptism to their children any more than they should deny them other vital needs. The necessity of Baptism, however, does not mean that children who are stillborn or die before they are brought to Baptism are lost. We commend such children to the gracious care of their Maker and Redeemer, trusting His mercy and love even when we do not understand His will or His work.