

You Gotta Get Wet

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on January 11th, 2026, (Matthew 3:13-17))

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About thirty years ago, just when I was starting my ministry training, I was asked to be godmother to a friend's toddler and infant.

The family lived close to the church, so we all walked. Along the way it began to rain, and we all got slightly wet. My godson (who is now in his mid-thirties) complained that he was getting wet. His godfather simply told him he would be getting wetter once he was in church. At the time I thought nothing of it until we were part way through the baptism ritual. As he realised, he was going to get wet, my godson announced, 'I don't want to do this!'

I found myself in somewhat of a dilemma, here was this little person saying he didn't want to be baptised, and as a Baptist I thought we should listen to that. Then I thought about my own infant baptism, and how that marked a step along the journey for me, whereby my godparents shepherded me through the faith journey and along with my parents sent me to Sunday School and church and in time encouraged me to be confirmed. In those split seconds, I came to the conclusion, that, he was being baptised into a community of faith and all of us gathered would ensure that little seed of faith would be nurtured.

Since that time, I have baptised a household – two parents and three children who were aged from about 7 to 16 by full immersion. I have baptised an older man unable to get into a baptistry by affusion (pouring water over). I have watched as an infant was dunked into the font. I have reaffirmed my own baptismal vows by walking through the water following in the footsteps of Jesus. I have baptised many Persians as a sign of their conversion to Christianity.

What they all have in common is that everyone got wet. All were acts of faith by either the person or the community. All were public statements of belief, belief in a God who creates, Jesus who redeems us and the Spirit who sustains us.

Baptism can occur in many ways – sprinkling, affusion or immersion. It can occur at all ages. It can be in baptistries, rivers, oceans, fonts.

In the bible we will find many kinds of baptism.

1. John's baptism was one of repentance where those participating, were, making a decision, to turn around and go another way. That is what he was doing in the Jordan River when Jesus approached him.
2. Jesus' baptism – which he undertook not because it was necessary but because he choose to be one with the people and in so doing revealed to all watching just who he was.
3. Paul records the baptism of Lydia and her entire household – her whole household which would have included family, slaves, children, everyone who lived in her home.
4. Paul also records the baptism of the Ethiopian by Phillip. A foreigner who is trying to understand the Scripture is met by Phillip, who is able to explain to him what the story of Jesus was all about, and what is his first request – he immediately

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asks to be baptised. This encounter with Jesus in Scripture changes him immediately and he wants to follow then and there.

Baptism symbolises many things.

1. It is a reminder of just who God is – one who broods over the waters and creates the world, one who liberates and saves the people through the Red Sea, one who heals people like Namaan.
2. A sign of conversion and turning around to a new way, a sign of our new identity, where we are adopted into God's family.
3. Symbol of living and dying with Christ – we go down into the waters, into the depths and rise again with Christ. A symbol of dying to the old life and rising to new life.
4. Public statement of faith, we are making a public response to God, making a statement that we have a new kind of relationship with God.
5. An act of obedience to the command of Jesus – Jesus calls us all to preach the good news, make disciples and baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
6. Marks either the beginning of the journey of faith or a step along the way
7. Our ordination for ministry – marking a new moment in our life with Christ, as we live out our beliefs.

However, and whenever you were baptised, the act is not magic, but it must be taken seriously. It is an outward sign or symbol of that which is going on internally. Baptist's call this an ordinance.

For Jesus, his baptism did a number of things:

1. Confirmed who he was – the beloved Son of God.
2. Made a public statement of who he was
3. Marked the beginning of three years of ministry where he would teach, feed, heal, challenge and ultimately take the worst that the world could dish out, and take it with love and offering words of forgiveness as he died a horrific death.

I invite you to think about your own baptism, or if you haven't been baptised, what it might mean for you. In that act and in the reaffirmation, we have just participated in, you are doing a number of things.

1. You are telling the world that you believe in God – Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.
2. You are telling the world that you desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and follow him in all aspects of your life.
3. You are telling the world you are part of the worldwide Christian community, you have put your lot in with the rest of us, you have shown your desire to be part of the body of Christ.
4. You are telling the world that you will love, forgive and work for reconciliation between all people, God and the earth.

So beloved of God, go out today and taking your baptism seriously share God's love with all you meet, let this event mark the beginning of your ministry (whatever form that will take), remembering you got wet for a reason. Amen.