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About Baptism and membership in the United Methodist Church

This is more an “infomercial” than a devotional this week. From time to time, I think we need to go back to United Methodism 101 and look at our basics. This is such a week with the Baptism of our Lord Sunday. (Adapted and condensed from a handout from Athens FUMC as well as materials from the United Methodist Board of Discipleship)

The Wesley Brothers and the early Methodists invited people to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined living. They placed their emphasis by putting faith and love into action. (How interesting - and we “Walk the Talk!”) This term of “practical divinity” has continued to be a hallmark of United Methodism today.

John Wesley urged Christians to “do no harm;” then “do all the good you can;” and finally, “stay in love with God.” In his preface to the Standard Sermons, Wesley confessed, “I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity!”

Our theological heritage can be seen not only in the emphasis on Christian living, but also in Wesley's distinctive understanding of God's saving grace.

Grace is central to our understanding of Christian faith and life.

Grace can be defined as the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it. We read in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: “For it's by God's grace that you have been saved. You receive it through faith. It was not *our plan* or our effort. It is God's gift, *pure and simple*. You didn't earn it, *not one of us did*, so don't go around bragging *that you must have done something amazing*.”
Ephesians 2:8-9 (Voice)

Our United Methodist heritage is rooted in a deep and profound understanding of God's grace. This incredible grace flows from God's great love for us. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says: “For God expressed His love for the world in this way: He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not face everlasting destruction but will have everlasting life. Here's the point. God didn't send His Son into the world to judge it; instead, He is here to rescue a world *headed toward certain destruction*.” John 3:16-17 (Voice)

Jesus gave his life on the cross so that we might have life; not just any kind of life, but an abundant life. We gather as a church to emphasize in word and deed God's love and God's grace through Jesus Christ. This grace at work in our lives leads us to be transformed; made new creations in Christ.

Jesus commissioned all of us at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: "Go out and make disciples in all the nations. Ceremonially wash them through baptism in the name of the *triune God*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then disciple them. *Form them in the practices and postures that I have taught you and show them how to follow the commands I have laid down for you. And I will be with you, day after day, to the end of the age.*" Matthew 28:19-20 (Voice) We are to make NEW disciples and DEEPER disciples, through the transforming power of God's grace.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, described God's grace as threefold:

Prevenient grace – Grace that precedes human decision. Prevenient grace elicits the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning His will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against Him.

Justifying grace – Grace given and received; marking the new life in Christ.

Sanctifying grace – Grace that sustains us and moves us on toward perfection.

How do United Methodist Christians practice their faith? United Methodists believe that faith and good works belong together. The Christian life should be confirmed by what we do. Personal salvation must be expressed in ministry and mission in the world. We believe that Christian doctrine and Christian ethics are inseparable, that faith should inspire service. The integration of personal piety and social holiness has been a hallmark of our tradition. We affirm "The same is true with faith. Without actions, *faith is useless. By itself, it's as good as dead.*" James 2:17 (Voice)

Baptism Is the Door

From the beginning, baptism has been the door through which one enters the church. It was inconceivable to many that one could respond to God's grace by reciting the renunciations, affirming one's faith in Christ and loyalty to the Kingdom, without joining the fellowship of those who are committed to mature in that faith. As the "Body of Christ" in the world, baptism commissions us to use our gifts to strengthen the church and to transform the world.

Why Baptize Babies?

From the earliest times, children and infants were baptized and included in the church. As scriptural authority for this ancient tradition, some scholars cite Jesus' words, "Let the children come to Me, and don't ever stand in their way, for this is what the kingdom of God is all about." Mark 10:14 (Voice) However, a more consistent argument is that baptism, as a means of grace, signifies God's initiative in the process of salvation. The baptism of children and their inclusion in the church before they can respond with their own confirmation of faith is a vivid and compelling witness to prevenient grace.

Baptism Is Forever

Because baptism is a sacrament of God's grace and a covenant that God has initiated, it should not be repeated. However, God's continuing and patient forgiveness, God's prevenient grace, will prompt us to renew the commitment first made at our baptism. At such a time, instead of rebaptism, The United Methodist Church offers the ritual for the reaffirmation of baptismal vows, which implies that, while God remains faithful to God's half of the covenant, we are not always faithful to our promises. Our half of the covenant is to confess Christ as our Savior, trust in his grace, serve him as Lord in the church, and carry out his mission against evil, injustice, and oppression.

Baptism Is the Beginning, Not the End

You have heard people say, “I was baptized Methodist,” or “I was baptized Presbyterian,” which could mean that in baptism they got their identity papers and that was the end of it. But baptism is not the end. It is the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith. It makes no difference whether you were baptized as an adult or as a child; we all start on that journey at baptism. For the child, the journey begins in the nurturing community of the church, where he or she learns what it means that God loves you. At the appropriate time, the child will make his or her first confession of faith in the ritual the church traditionally calls confirmation. Most often, this is at adolescence or at the time when the person begins to take responsibility for his or her own decisions.

If you experienced God’s grace and were baptized as an adult or received baptism as a child and desire to reaffirm your baptismal vows, baptism still marks the beginning of a journey in the nurturing fellowship of the caring, learning, worshipping, serving congregation.

How do I join a United Methodist Church?

Commit to Christ – Baptism is a sacrament of the UM church and is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Through baptism we are initiated into Christ’s holy church and given new life through water and the Spirit. If you have not been baptized, then our church is ready to assist you in making this commitment. As an adult or teen, you will come on Profession of Faith to receive baptism and confirmation. We have three approved methods for the application of water - Immersion, Pouring or Sprinkling.

If you have been baptized in another Christian church, then your baptism is accepted here, and you will join by Transfer of your Membership from another denomination.

If the last church you were a member of was a United Methodist Church, then you will join by Transfer of your Membership from an UM Church.

Commit to the Church – Membership in the Christian church is about commitment to Christ, and as members we covenant to express that commitment through Christ’s body, the church. When you take the vows of a member, you make a covenant to uphold the church by all the means listed below. These are key ingredients for making your membership matter. When we join the church, we vow to grant our **Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and Witness**.

The best preparation for joining is to pray about your commitment to Christ and to the church. If you have any questions about adult baptism or wish to consult about the baptism of a baby, please contact me. Through membership we declare and enact our commitment to Christ and the Church. We build up the community of faith and put love into action.

At Saint Paul’s, we serve each other, our church and our community by welcoming (all walks of life), by passionately worshipping God, by listening and learning (to share the Good News), by letting Jesus transform (us and the world), and by giving our monies and time and gifts for those we love (and especially for those who are hard to love, including seeking reconciliation with our enemies).

“And best of all, God is with us!” (John Wesley)





•WEEKLY PROGRAMS•

Sundays – 6:00 pm – Book Study

Mondays – 6:00 pm – Bible Study

7:00 pm – Ladies Night

Wednesdays – 5:30 pm – FAITHWEAVERS

6:00 pm – Choir practice

DHS Student Lunch will be January 16th from 11:15 am - 1:00 pm.

Have you seen our new online giving program? We're excited about the new things happening at Saint Paul's through our online community. You can securely give from our website at spumcduncan.com and via text message by messaging "walkthetalk" to 73256. You can even set up recurring donations. If you need help with this just contact the office.

We now have a Calendar in the Copy Room for you to put upcoming Events/Church activities on and to see when the church is Reserved for special occasions. Thank you.

Copies of the former Upper Rooms are in the bin that is marked Christians Concerned by the office. If you would like them or know someone to donate them to please take them.

United Methodist Women will meet January 17th at 6:30 pm.

The East Missional Area Strategy Team will be holding a Chili Cookoff on Jan. 24th at 6 pm here at Saint Pauls. All the churches in the District will be providing crockpots of Chili. Saint Paul's will be responsible for providing 6 of them. Prizes will be awarded. Everyone is invited to come and sample some chili.

The next Leadership Table Meeting will be January 31st at 6:30 pm.

Men's Emmaus Walk will be Feb. 21-24. Women's Emmaus will be Feb 28-Mar.3.

For King and Country will be in Concert in Wichita Falls on April 11th at 7 pm. Contact the office if you are interested in going.



Dennis Loafman out of the hospital

Marcia healing well after Surgery

Pulpit Candy

Victor Mortson's Audition



Schlein Family – loss of Terry
Louise Golden's Sister – Eye Surgery
All going through trials either illness or other
Parker Bowles- Determination and Focus
Stacy Mettler – Double Mastectomy

Jason Poorman – (Edith Suiters nephew) starting chemo for Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma

Addie's friend and relative on Hospice. Peace in her Family

Victor and Rebecca – Working on Dissertations

Ron Martin's friend in Norman – Back Surgery

Beth Horn – Illness regressing

RJ and Carla – for the loss of his son in law

Kathy Allred – recovering from Surgery

Trish Lister – Prayers that she will receive money either from Disability or Insurance this month to pay bills.

Lisa Hill – lost her mom

Ann Johnson – Trish Lister's Mom moving to assisted living.

Farah Doorman – Back Surgery

James Benkley – continued recovery

Sara Riggs – Going to Court on Jan 16th for Divorce

Jim and Edith Suiter – Jim is getting increasingly weary – he is beginning to talk of dying. It is a difficult time for both of them.

Paula McConnell – Trying to get to the bottom of some health issues, involving lungs primarily.

Courtney - The Allred's 11 yr. old grandchild with neurological issues.

Karen Gibson – Cancer

Gary Gibson – Cancer

Jan Smith – Cancer

Jennifer Shahan – Heart Problems

Iva Johnson – Hospice

Christy Thurston

Addie McMurrin

Karen Stanfill – Cancer

Rebecca's cousin has eating disorder, liver failure and on transplant list

Kathy Bridges – Cancer

Joe Perry – Kidney cancer

Stacy Mettler – Breast Cancer

Margaret Averre – Throat cancer

Daniel Whitney – Colon cancer; now liver cancer

Jennifer Allred – Spinal pain and fibromyalgia

Melinda Douglas – Lung Cancer