

This brief pamphlet is designed to introduce you to the church's understanding of baptism. It is hoped that you will be able to bring your child to baptism with a clear appreciation of what the sacrament of baptism entails.

### ***The Way of Jesus***

In the Christian faith Jesus Christ is at the centre. Born a Jew, he grew up with the influence of his parents and the rich faith of Israel. He was chosen by God to preach the Good News of God's vision for the way people should live. Not only did he speak of this in wise sayings and stories, but he also healed the sick and lived in close relationship with God.

Jesus trusted God and believed that God's vision for the world would be displayed in his life. In compassion Jesus reached out to those who were excluded from society. He challenged the wealthy about their lifestyle. Jesus would not compromise and died on the cross because he was determined to announce God's judgement and the dawn of the new age of justice and hope.

We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. We now accept that God was in Christ acting to save people from empty lives, from giving their lives to anything less than God, who is love. We now have come to understand that God is like Jesus. The Good News is that we are loved by God, and God looks for our response in relationship.

### ***Belonging***

People were attracted to the way of Jesus because it gave to their lives promise and hope, freedom and joy. They felt called away from a life centred on self, to a life in the community of believers which shared the same vision of Jesus. In this community of faith they received support and encouragement, prayed together and served the needs of those who were weak and poor.

In worship Sunday by Sunday, they gave thanks to God for the Good News that they had heard through Jesus. The vision of life that they had seen was compelling and they felt drawn to share it with others. Those who responded received instruction in the faith and life, and were baptised into the community which had Jesus Christ at its centre. Together the baptised made up the church – each had come to experience new life, leaving the old life behind.

### ***Water of life***

In the early church those who had been drawn into the way of Jesus were immersed in water in a river. St. Paul wrote that the person who had decided to enter this new life was drowning to a life based on self, and then, through the message and care of the community of Christ, was being inwardly renewed.

The symbol of water is used: it is powerful and has different levels of meaning. First, as there can be no life without water, so there can be no spiritual life without God's grace. Second, as the Hebrew people were freed from slavery

in Egypt by being led through the water of the Red Sea, so we are freed through baptism, which celebrates the liberating love of God.

Third, as water cleanses and refreshes, so in baptism we are given a new start in our life with God.

### ***The Baptism of infants***

In the early church, when a person turned to the way of Jesus, generally they were adults. But gradually the church came to baptise the children of believers. There has been debate as to whether this has been wise.

The Methodist Church continues to baptise children for the following reason. Before we can understand anything, God loves us. Each child is loved by God before they are aware of God's love. God loves us first and later we are invited to respond. God waits for our response, and the baptism of a child is our way of saying:

“Yes, this little one, even before they are aware of the mystery of love that brought them into being and surrounds them, is loved and cherished by God. We want this little child to grow up not only in the environment of the human community, marked as it is by sorrow and brokenness, but also in the environment of God's love, which is affirming and healing.”

The baptism of a child marks the beginning of a process of nurturing and shaping, in which the child is drawn into the way of Jesus. The child is surrounded by the encouragement and prayer of the community of faith, in addition to the love of parents.

### ***Joyful responsibility of parents***

Just as we want our children to grow healthy in a physical way by providing them with the best food, so we want our children to grow spiritually. We want to assist them in this by participating in the community of faith where we hear the Word of God. In this community we keep alive the spirit of thankfulness for all the gifts that we have received. The church keeps the vision of Jesus before our society. As we naturally want to guard our children from dangers that would harm them, so we want to offer our children food that will nourish their spirits. The church is the community where this takes place.

This *Little Essay* by Terry Wall is made available within the Methodist Church by The Faith & Order Committee.

The Methodist Church of New Zealand  
Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa

## ***The Joy of Baptism***



I baptise you in the name of  
the Father and of the Son and  
of the Holy Spirit.

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,  
baptising them in the name of the Father and of  
the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

Matthew 28:19