



# ONE BAPTISM



## 2016: Discipleship



Cover photo: Pastor Benard Suleman Bwakitare performing baptisms in Tanzania, in March 2015, during Bryan Cleeton and John Njogu's visit.

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## Discipleship Goes Public

**T**ry to imagine getting baptized without getting wet!

That thought experiment tells us something important about baptism. Western society does a good job of dividing life up into tidy boxes, like public and private, spheres of fact and faith. Religion does it, too: soul and body, belief and behavior.

Christians often gravitate to, or are pushed into, those inward and private boxes when it comes to their faith. But baptism comes along and leaves us dripping wet.

Baptism reminds us that following Jesus is tangible, visible, and public. Ours is an embodied faith that does not accept the fashionable boxes of pop religion and culture. Jesus is Lord over all the boxes. For disciples, it makes no more sense to believe in Jesus personally and not follow Him publicly than to think you can get baptized and not get wet. Discipleship is personal, but it is never merely private.

This *Bible Advocate* is special because in its pages you will read more personal, and public, testimonies than you usually see here. These baptism stories remind us that our faith is rooted in material history and experience. They really happened!

I remember mine. I was 15, tall and lanky. The creek was shallow. Sandbags dammed the water to a suitable depth. Pastor Ray Youngs, much shorter than I, was almost waist deep. I looked around doubtfully, the water barely past my knees. *Umm!* This was my practical concern as family and church, decorating the creek bank, sang hymns. Prayer was made. I held my breath, eyes squeezed shut, and in that grace-filled moment fell back in an ungraceful splash and was pulled straight up — by the ears — soaked, sputtering, and smiles.

That awkward and embodied spiritual experience speaks volumes about my personal and public walk since then as a member of Christ's body, a child of Abraham's clan, a kingdom kid. It has been inelegant, but it has been real — bone-and-skin, heart-and-mind real.

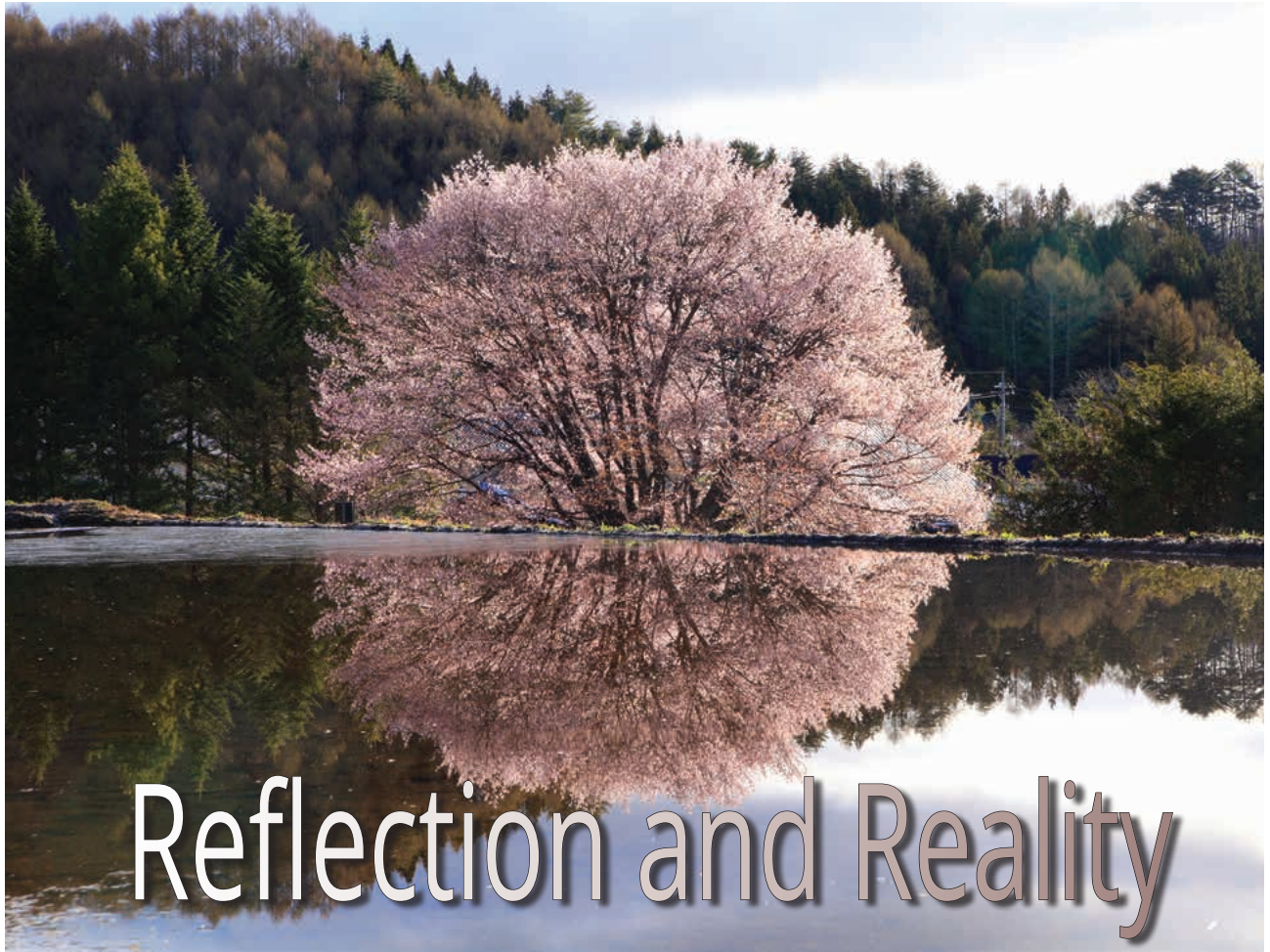
A decade later, another 15-year-old boy came to me asking to be baptized. He was either shy or proud; he wanted a private baptism. I couldn't, and I told him why. After some counseling, he found his courage and went public, and ended up dripping wet in front of everyone. Amen to that!

Disciples, live your baptism. Go public. And don't be afraid to get wet.

— Jason Overman







@ Norikazu—Dreamstime.com

## Spirit, water, and the unity of baptism. **by Calvin Burrell**

**T**he Bible is a big book — the Book of books. Though its truths are plain and simple in many respects, it can be complex and difficult, too. Let's settle for simple here.

The main message of Scripture can be summed up in two easy-to-grasp points: 1) God has shown His love for all people best through Christ's earthly life, death, and resurrection, so 2) we are called to trust and obey Him and to lovingly serve others in

Jesus' name as we wait for His return.

These summary statements give rise to many and more difficult issues, to be sure. Still, Christian teaching and practice can be easily understood at this core level. At this level also, it is unified: one faith! Paul makes this point when he writes, "one body, one Spirit . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all . . ." (Ephesians 4:4-6).

We'll get a feel for what's true about each of these seven simple "ones" as we explore "one baptism." What might this seemingly simple phrase imply if we had

no more Scripture to learn from? Does "one baptism," for example, mean that no difference exists between water baptism and Spirit baptism? Does it mean no one should ever be immersed in water more than once? In what sense is the Christian ordinance of baptism "one"? The answers proposed below are intended to maintain a simple, basic unity among the many texts bearing on this subject.

### Of water and Spirit

Water baptism happens when one believer is immersed by another — in water, naturally. Baptism in water is one earthy,

outward action reflecting inward reality. This inner truth is that a sinner has been converted, has confessed his sins to, and his faith in, the Lord Jesus, and has believed in his heart that God raised Christ His Son from the dead.

Keeping with Bible words, we say that this sinner has been forgiven of his sins and is thus delivered (saved) from the penalty of death. No longer liable to God's condemnation at judgment, the new believer is given life instead. This gift consists of new and improved existence now and endless existence in God's great tomorrow.

All this, we freely declare, is not our work as sinners but the work of God's Spirit inside us. By the Spirit, we hear the message of Christ in our hearts, not just in our ears. By the Spirit, we are moved past the dominant darkness of our unbelief into the dawn of God's love. And by the Spirit we are immersed into Christ's spiritual body, the Father's family of faith on earth (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Scripture says all this takes place precisely when faith mixes with the Word of God in our hearts and minds. All of it is encompassed by the one thing that may be called *Spirit baptism*. It is one awesome thing that we will attempt to summarize again below.

### Water's complexity

Where does water baptism fit into this marvelous spiritual paradigm of a life transformed for time and destined for eternity? It fits not as the dynamic of life now and forever; that dynamic role belongs to God's Spirit.

Rather, water baptism serves as illustration and preview of the transformed life. More than once in Scripture, water serves as a type, or shadow, of God's Spirit.

Baptism in water is one thing that, right at the start, previews and reviews Christian conversion. In its dramatic representation, by faith we see the death of Christ and our own death to sin, as that death is confirmed by burial. And by faith we see the raising of Christ and our own resurrection from a watery grave to a renewed and upgraded life of trusting obedience with the Lord.

Water baptism is one notable

into that church as represented in a local congregation.

Yes, baptism in water is one right thing. Ideally, it coincides closely with that baptism the Holy Spirit performed by immersing us into Christ, into His body. Realistically, however, few of us knew precisely the day or hour when we entered the invisible body of Christ by an invisible faith and our names were written in an invisible book that's in an invisible heaven.

If the date of our water baptism is not as near the time of our spiritual change as it might have been, still that date stands

*“While baptism in water changes a few things, the Holy Spirit changes more important things now and changes everything eventually.”*

and memorable thing that conforms fully to our Lord's example and teaching. It is one right thing that changes some things. It strengthens our confidence and courage to stand up for Christ in every situation, now that we have publicly confessed our faith and our sins by passing through the water.

Baptism also changes our standing with the local church by qualifying us for membership in it. Faith is the invisible door into God's church as a universal body. Baptism is the visible door

as an external reminder and sign of inward action known fully to God alone. As such, it never needs to be repeated.

### What if it is repeated?

As a teenager, I followed the call of my elders and the lead of my friends by being baptized in water — not once but twice. Why? I think I expected more from water baptism than it was intended to deliver. I thought baptism would put a positive end to most of my struggles against



sin. When that didn't happen, I tried again, hoping the second "going under" would make me a better "over-comer."

It didn't — at least not right away. More time and Bible study, though, brought me to understand the nature of conversion and of Christian life. Gradually I learned that new babies have a lot of growing to do, that none of Jesus' people are perfect — though forgiven — and that water baptism is not a pre-paid ticket to the holy lands of life that we seek.

So which of my two baptisms in water does God recognize among the steps to salvation and obedience? I don't know, and I'm no longer concerned about that part of it. I've come to see that "one baptism" in Ephesians 4 was not meant as much to prohibit multiple visits to the watery grave as it was to stress the organic unity in God's complete work through the Spirit. He calls us to Christ, converts us to Christ, and conforms us to Christ's character — little by little, one step at a time.

Often we stumble, but we get up and go on, repeating steps as necessary, living and learning to lean on Jesus all the way home. His grace-filled and truth-saturated response to our life's adventure — and our misadventures — has gotten us safe thus far and will get us safely home.

### Spirit's simplicity and unity

Immersion by the Holy Spirit into Christ and His church is baptism's "one" reality. Immersion in water is an insightful, essential, and dramatic reflection of that reality. While baptism in water changes a few things, the Holy Spirit changes more important things now and changes everything eventually. Water is the medium for an inspiring illustration; Spirit is the dynamic of an inspired and eternal life. Working together, Spirit and water achieve a single divine purpose in those who trust and obey.

No human can baptize anyone into a spiritual, heavenly body, but the Spirit of God can. And He does, when we admit our inward need, believe that

Jesus Christ is who and what we need, and confess our sins and our faith in His name. These are the human actions that Scripture links closely with "baptism by the Holy Spirit." Admit, believe, and confess: These human responses to the initiative of God's Spirit may or may not be immediately recognizable on the outside. But the Holy Spirit recognizes them on earth and confirms them in heaven by baptizing us into the only true church, as we believe.

### Complete package

Though we may rightfully recognize and profitably discuss other aspects and details of baptism, we join our voices with all other Christ-followers in declaring "one baptism." All other truths related to baptism in the Bible do not change the fact that the Holy Spirit, revealed in Paul's words, says that baptism at its core is one thing, not many.

Reader, have you known the moving and transforming power of God's Spirit in your life, and have you linked that awesome, heavenly work with an obedient, public, earthy declaration of your faith in Christ through the waters of baptism? Please don't settle for a fractional response to the gospel. The baptism commended in Scripture is one complete package of water and the Spirit.

BA

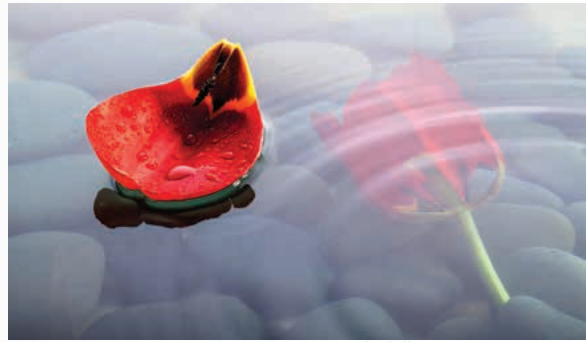


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# Preparing for the Plunge



@ Derek Phillips—Dreamstime.com

by Sherri Langton

“ baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

After saying these words, my pastor lowered me into the warm waters of the baptistry. I closed my eyes, pinched my nose, and relaxed my body. Once I was lifted out of the water, exhilaration flooded me. What I believed about Christ personally, I had declared publicly.

I thought of this recently during a baptism service at church. The only candidate was physically disabled and could not be immersed, so the pastor used a pitcher of water. No problem with that. But when he finished, the pastor invited anyone present who knew the Lord and had never been baptized to come forward for baptism. People flocked to the front of the sanctuary.

I wrestled with the pastor’s offer. Others he had baptized in the past had taken a baptism class and shared testimonies just before being immersed. True, the Ethiopian eunuch made a spontaneous decision to be baptized after he read about Jesus in prophecy. But Philip made clear, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:37). I now wondered if the pastor’s impromptu offer to be baptized lightened a solemn act that must be carefully and prayerfully considered.

The New Testament does not outline instructions for baptism. We gather from various passages that immersion is preferred (Acts 8:36) but extend grace to those who cannot be immersed. However, Scripture does specify *requirements* for baptism, gleaned from examples in its pages.

Primary is repentance — what John the Baptist drove home while baptizing in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:1, 2). We repent in response to conviction of sins and accept Christ as Savior. So before we enter the waters of baptism, we must be cleansed at the core.

There’s more. We not only believe this glorious news of Jesus’ death and resurrection but also identify with it, as happened in the early church. Infused with the Holy Spirit, the apostles burst with the incredible message of the dead Christ brought back to life and walking around. Baptisms flourished (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 13, 36; 9:18, 16:15, 33).

We know these baptism facts. Still, Paul’s advice in preparing for the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28) is appropriate for us to follow: Slow down and examine ourselves before we “take the plunge.”

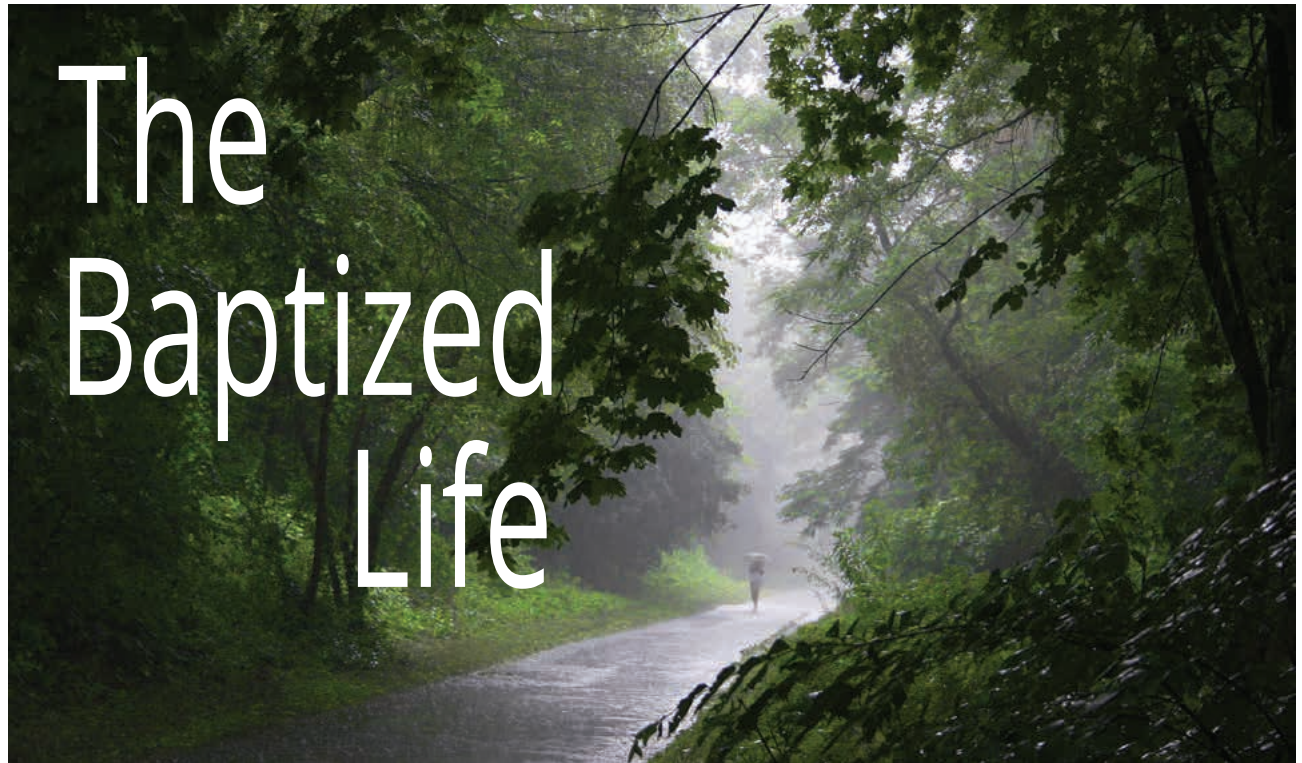
We can start by asking ourselves if we have been washed by Christ’s blood and identify with His death and resurrection. That’s easy to answer. Other questions are tougher. Do we have wrong motives to be baptized? Is baptism a religious show, for example? John the Baptist condemned the religious leaders who traipsed to the Jordan without showing fruits of repentance (Matthew 3:7-12). Our motives must be right with God before we’re baptized.

In seeking baptism, are we trying to please someone else — a spouse, a parent, a friend, or loved one? Baptism is a personal decision, between God and us. We shouldn’t let others pressure us into it or be baptized because everyone else has been.

Do we see baptism as something we can cross off our spiritual “to do” list once we come up out of the water? That is mindless. As we remember the broken body and spilled blood of the Lord Jesus, preparing us for the Lord’s Supper, so we must remember His blood washing our sins away and His body raised to life, preparing us for baptism.

Only God knows the hearts of the people who came forward to be baptized that morning. But the experience served as a warning to not approach this Christian ordinance casually. Baptism shows that Christ’s death and resurrection have moved from history to our hearts — and we want the world to know it. Now that’s a plunge worth preparing for! **BA**





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More than a symbol — more like living. **by Israel Steinmetz**

I was baptized by my father and another minister in a frigid northern California mountain stream at a campmeeting site we affectionately called Heaven's Hill. I was eight years old and had accepted Christ a few nights earlier at an altar call. In the twenty-six years since, I've lived in the light of that baptism. Though I haven't always articulated it in these terms, I've been pursuing a *baptized life*.

We tend to think of baptism as a one-time event that occurred in the past. We describe it as an outward symbol of an inward reality that previously took place. Just as Christ died, was buried, and rose again, so we have died to sin, been buried in the waters of baptism, and emerged to new life. This is all true of baptism.

But the main passage we draw this imagery from is Romans 6:1-11. A fresh reading of these verses indicates that Paul is not focused on a one-time symbolic event in the past — or even on the past event of new birth it pictured. Rather, Paul is talking about an ongoing way of life appropriate for those who have been baptized. Paul is talking about the baptized life.

### Inside out

The baptized life is one in which the inner reality of new birth is incarnated in daily life. *Incarnate* literally means "in the flesh," and baptism is intended to incarnate — make tangible and physical — the inner reality of salvation. By *salvation* we mean far more than an initial moment of new creation and justification from sins. We mean the entire scope of salvation, beginning with justification, continuing

through sanctification, and culminating in glorification at Christ's return. All this is implied and wrapped up in the act of baptism.

So it is that as Paul discusses the implications of baptism for the believer in Romans 6, the verbs he uses are past, present, and future. The baptized have died to sin in the past and are thus called to keep dying to sin in the present and the future. The baptized have risen to new life in Christ in the past and are thus called to walk in resurrection power now and forevermore.

This is the baptized life: a life that combines the unseen internal mystery of redemption with the outward living of righteousness. Because we died to sin on the inside, we keep dying to sin on the outside. This is the baptized life: a life that is not stilted at new birth but grows in resurrection power in anticipa-



tion of our physical resurrection. Because we were raised from spiritual death on the inside, we keep walking in spiritual life on the outside.

When Paul closes this section in Romans 6 with the words “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11), he’s not referring to a past memory of a one-time act but to a daily, ongoing approach to life — the baptized life.

### Transformation

We see this reality illustrated in Ephesians as well when Paul refers to “one baptism.” Paul begins chapter 4 with a list of heart attitudes necessary to pursue unity (vv. 1-3). He follows this with a series of seven central beliefs that unite us in our Christian identity (vv. 4-6), a discussion of the gifts that give us diversity but ultimately work toward unity (vv. 7-16), and finally an ethic that provides a united lifestyle (vv. 17-32). Each section of the chapter centers on Christ: His lordship over our calling, His central place in our identity, His initiative in gifting the body, and His example of righteousness.

Embedded in Paul’s list of identifying Christian beliefs is “one baptism” (v. 5). While the word *baptism* is not repeated, it is beautifully illustrated in verses 17-32 as Paul describes the transformation of the believer from sin and death to life and righteousness:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind . . . But you did not learn Christ in this

way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as the truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (vv. 17, 20-24).

sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin (vv. 1-7).

Paul’s imagery of laying aside the old self in Ephesians mirrors the crucifixion of the old self in Romans. Similarly, putting on the new self in Ephesians parallels walking in newness of life in Romans. This two-step process — death to sin and a new life of righteousness — is the essence

*“This is the baptized life: a life that is not stilted at new birth but grows in resurrection power in anticipation of our physical resurrection.”*

Reading this passage, one hears echoes from Romans 6:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of

of the Christian life. And it is the reality embodied in the act of baptism. Far from being an event that happened one day in the past, baptism is a lifestyle that must be lived out every day.

### Obedient act

So while we acknowledge the symbolic nature of baptism, we should also be cognizant of the ways in which it incarnates redemption. When we are baptized, we are publicly and tangibly participating in Christ’s death and resurrection. The act is not only a *confession* that we have already died to sin and been raised to new life but also a *commitment* that we will continue to do so. Baptism, while symbolic, is not an empty symbol. Rather, it

is a Spirit-filled act of obedience to Christ.

So motivated and so empowered, baptism is more than the sum of its symbolic parts. Like other righteous actions, it is an outward demonstration of the saving and sanctifying grace of God. It is a visible enactment of the gospel, or to borrow a phrase from Augustine, a “visible word.” Baptism is no mere ritual. Rather, it is intended to be one of the first righteous acts of a new believer, a singular “good work” that entails every other “good work” that follows by providing a

## Four discoveries

As we marvel at baptism, we discover its full meaning in the baptized life. This life means many things, but let us list four.

First, a baptized life is not just how we live after baptism but actually begins *before* baptism, when we join in Christ’s death and resurrection through repentance from sin and faith in Christ. Therefore, baptism is an empty and illegitimate act for anyone who has not taken this crucial first step.

Second, those caught up in the baptized life understand that

*“Far from being an event that happened one day in the past, baptism is a lifestyle that must be lived out every day.”*

blueprint for death to sin and life to God.

No wonder baptisms result in such communal joy and awareness of the Spirit’s presence. Intuitively, we sense that something far more than a symbol or ritual is being performed. Rather, the drama of redemption is played out before our eyes in baptism. If we find ourselves at a loss to describe all that baptism means, this should not cause us to reduce the meaning of baptism to our limited expression, but to marvel at its mystery.

baptism is not optional. Far too many have been persuaded to delay baptism in order to fulfill a man-made tradition or live up to someone else’s expectation. Far too many have avoided baptism out of fear, doubt, ignorance, or apathy. Baptism is not for a special class of Christians or for only those who personally value it. Rather, it is for all those who have begun living the baptized life.

Third, the Christian life following baptism demonstrates and incarnates death to sin and life to God. Baptism is an empty

charade if it is not accompanied by a baptized life. But when it is, baptism joins the Lord’s Supper as one of the “living words” that embody and dramatize the entire gospel story in a singular corporate act.

Finally, baptism looks toward its ultimate consummation in Christ’s return. At present, our bodies are out of alignment with our inner person. While our inner person has been spiritually resurrected in Christ, we await the resurrection of our physical bodies. But at Christ’s return, our bodies will be resurrected, victorious over sin and death. Then the baptized life and our redemption will be complete.

## Living out baptism

It’s been nearly twenty-seven years since I was baptized. I’m still discovering exactly what happened that day in those shallow, teeth-chattering waters. In the years since, I’ve baptized dozens of others in pools and lakes and rivers and church baptistries and prisons and hospital beds. I’m still marveling at the mystery of those events.

And as I marvel, I’m trying to live out my baptism and praying that those whom I’ve baptized are pursuing a baptized life as well. **BA**

**Israel Steinmetz** serves as dean of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





# Questions & Answers



**What** does the Church of God teach about infant baptism? I was christened as a baby in another church. Do I need to be baptized as an adult also?

**You've** recalled a word not in wide usage among us these days: *christen*. It was used early on of anointing (*kris-mas*, Greek) with oil (laying on of hands) or with water at baptism, as when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism, *christening* Him as Christ, or Messiah. Later, *christening* was used in the Roman church for naming infants at their baptism (sprinkling or pouring). By extension, anything used for the first time may be named, or *christened*, like a new ship being launched. By infant baptism, newborn babes are supposedly launched (*christened*) as Christians.

The Church of God's practice, on the other hand, is called *believers' baptism*. We teach that water baptism is a Christian ordinance designed only for those who come to the truth of the gospel through personal faith in Jesus Christ and a conscious, decisive repentance toward God.

Believers' baptism finds its main scriptural support in the close link between faith and repentance on the one hand and water baptism on the other. This link is seen in these primary texts that prescribe baptism, or describe it:

Matthew 28:19: By baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and by teaching, faith is manifest and disciples are formed.

Mark 16:16: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved."

Acts 2:38: "Repent, and . . . be baptized" are proper steps for those who believe.

Acts 8:36-39; 16:30-33; 22:16: Baptism requires believing on the Lord Jesus Christ with all our heart and "calling on the name of the Lord."

Romans 6:3-10; Colossians 2:12-14: Baptism presupposes conviction for sin as the disease and confession of Christ's death and resurrection as the cure.

1 Peter 3:21: Baptism is "the answer of a good conscience toward God" — impossible for those who know nothing of conscience.

By positioning faith and repentance as preceding baptism, Scripture implies opposition to infant baptism. An infant is incapable of experiencing either faith or repentance, let alone giving them public expression.

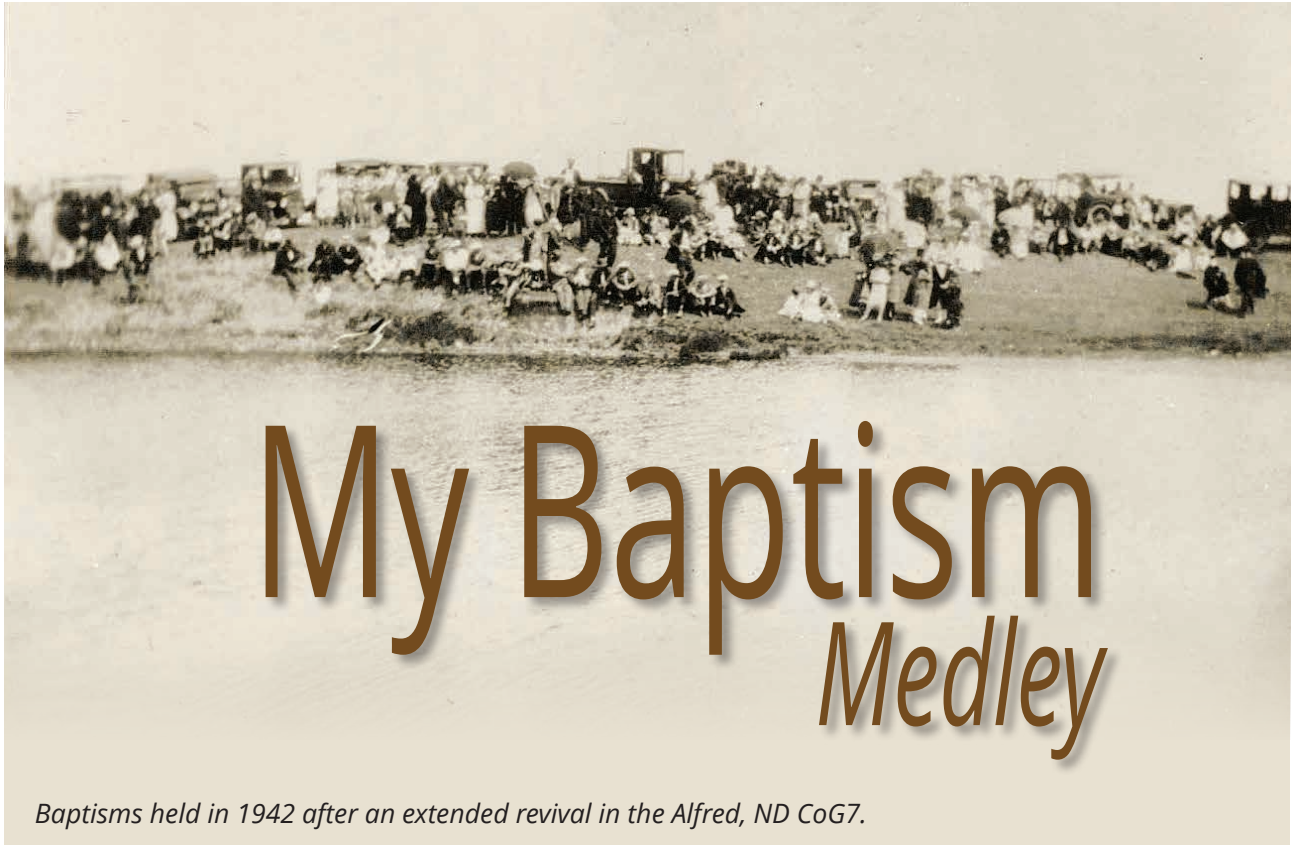
None of the texts listed above raises the option of baptizing babies or the very young. If the households of Cornelius and the jailer (Acts 10:24, 48; 16:31-33), who were baptized, included infants, it is not at all clear that they were immersed with the rest. The dedication of newborns and blessing of children by the church (Luke 2:25-40; Mark 10:13-16) should not be confused with the extra-biblical practice of infant baptism.

Faith and repentance, the two requirements for Christian baptism, are experienced and expressed by only those who understand the message of Christ and recognize their sins. Therefore it is inappropriate for infants to be baptized because they are unable to acknowledge faith in Christ, repent of their sins, and knowingly follow Jesus (This We Believe, p. 81).

. . . those baptized as infants should be 're-baptized' once they come to understand its meaning for the first time. Likewise, those who experience sprinkling or pouring for baptism as adolescents or adults are encouraged to be baptized in the proper biblical manner [immersion]. In neither of these cases would baptism be redundant. Other legitimate reasons for rebaptism may exist. Any reader who feels a need either for baptism or rebaptism is urged to consult a pastor or minister (This We Believe, p. 82).

Vital as it is in expressing our faith in Christ and repentance toward God, baptism does not assure us of God's forever smile. Knowing and trusting Jesus and turning from our sins do!

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Baptisms held in 1942 after an extended revival in the Alfred, ND CoG7.



Ken Lawson  
Cottage Grove, MN

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

In 1962, at age eighteen, I attended an Oregon youth camp at Silver Creek Falls. Youth from all over the West Coast came. It was a tremendous program, and the setting in the Oregon hills itself was worthy of visiting.

The camp program that year was led by Elders E. A. Straub and Ray Straub. Several CoG7 college students helped with the program planning and recreation.

At a fireside service, the Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of many teenagers, including mine.

I sought the counsel of Elder E. A. Straub about baptism. Just over thirty of us were baptized at that camp. Among them was Davy Crowson, a young man with muscular dystrophy and confined to a wheelchair. Everyone who ever met Davy loved him; his joy was contagious.

On Sabbath, all parents and friends were invited to Silver Creek Falls to enjoy Sabbath morning worship, eat a meal, and witness the baptisms in a pool created by a 100-plus-foot waterfall. Campers and visitors packed the trail and banks.

After the other baptisms were done — mine included — Davy was last. Elder E. A. Straub asked me (the biggest boy baptized that day) to carry Davy out to him across the slick rocks. Another one just baptized, Larry Tilley, walked beside me and held onto

my arm. After carrying Davy out to the spot, I was exhausted. We couldn't physically and safely hand him over to be baptized, so Elder Straub simply said, "You keep holding him. I will lay my hand on him, and then you lower him into the water."

The moment had me weeping, and the crowd on the bank was wiping away tears. After Elder Straub prayed and we lowered Davy, I heard a voice within me say, *You can be doing this the rest of your life!*

I fought that little voice for over two years, but in the fall of 1964, God won! In 2011, I retired after living my entire adult life loving the work of pastor. I especially loved every baptism I was privileged to be a part of. Thank you, Davy Crowson. Thank You, Lord!





Max Morrow  
Owosso, MI

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

I was 13 when I was baptized at the conclusion of a General Conference campmeeting in Stanberry, Missouri. My decision to accept Jesus as my Savior was at the end of the Sabbath morning service. Elder R. E. Burge had preached, though I do not remember a thing he said.

A half dozen of us teenagers sat on two park benches outside the tent for the service. When the invitation was given, one of the boys (Jimmy) went forward. One of the girls (Yvonne) turned to me and said, "Max, don't you think it's about time you went?"

That's all it took. I went forward and opened my heart to the Lord, dampening the altar with plenty of tears as I confessed the sins that riddled my heart. (I could take you to the very spot where I knelt at the altar that day.)

Perhaps three or four hours later that August afternoon, ten or so of us waded into Grand River for baptism. No counseling. No instruction. Just baptism — the next step. Though I knew very little about Christian living, I knew my sins were gone, that my sense of guilt was gone, and that I was ready to meet Jesus. As could be expected, I floundered terribly because of lack of someone to walk alongside and encourage me.

The years that followed were far from stable. At times I felt

close to the Lord; at other times I knew I was outside His will. My parents had been converted in a little non-denominational community church and baptized earlier that year. I had declined, though my mom had talked with me about being baptized with her, my dad, and my brother. I declined for *I wanted to be baptized by a Church of God (Seventh Day) minister*. Why? I don't know. I had not attended CoG7 services regularly. Campmeetings were about all.

Though I was not always true to my Lord, I consistently felt committed to serving Him. The genuineness of my repentance at the altar was absolute; I never wavered on that. How much better it could have been, though, if a wise, solidly grounded disciple of Christ had taken me under wing and led me till I could stand alone.



Robert Coulter  
Northglenn, CO

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8, NIV).

My parents became members of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Parkersburg, West Virginia, when I was seven years old. Elder Kenneth Freeman was our pastor. As I grew up in the church, I served as its song and youth leader, Sabbath school superintendent, and treasurer. I eagerly anticipated our quarterly youth rallies between the Parkersburg and Salem churches' YPOs (Young Peoples Organizations).

As a teenager, I was intrigued by our first elder's report of his experiences at the biennial meeting of Salem's General Conference in 1943, held in Des Moines, Iowa. When I learned that the 1947 session of Salem's conference would be in Salem, I asked my parents if I could attend. Mother arranged for me to room at her cousin's house and take my meals at the conference's dining hall.

Elder Freeman preached on the last Friday evening of the conference. As the congregation sang "Just As I Am," he gave the altar call. I responded by kneeling at the altar, repenting of my sins, and committing my life to Jesus. I was baptized by Elder Freeman on the following afternoon, nearly 69 years ago, with several other young adults.

I have never regretted making my commitment to Jesus or the decision to be baptized!



Harry Schlenker  
Alfred, ND

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, KJV).

I was brought up in a godly home. We attended church at the Alfred, North Dakota Church of God. In my early childhood, everything in church was in German: our Sabbath school, our worship service. As a young child, I memorized the Ten Com-

mandments, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer. Yet I needed salvation. John 3:3 says we must be born again!

On December 16, 1941, Elder Christ Kiesz, from the Eureka, South Dakota Church of God, came to Alfred to hold a revival. It lasted seven weeks and ended February 7, 1942. Toward the end of this revival, I gave my heart to Jesus.

Forty-one souls gave their hearts to Jesus at this revival and were baptized. Later in the spring we were baptized in a lake northwest of Alfred.

This revival changed my life. Jesus Christ became real to me. It's not that we just talk about the Lord; it's an experience we have with the Lord. Later in life I experienced what is written in Matthew 3:11: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. But he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (KJV).

After 74 years of salvation, I'm still witnessing for Jesus Christ.



*Norma (Schlenker) Pruitt  
Jasper, AR*

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father (Romans 8:14, 15, KJV).

In December 1950, Elder Heuer from Toppenish, Washington, held a revival at the Church of

God (Seventh Day) in Alfred, North Dakota. As the expression goes, Brother Heuer preached his usual "hellfire and brimstone" message. I was a timid little eleven-year-old, and I didn't go forward when the alter call was made.

When we got home, we were sitting by the wood stove to get warm. I didn't want to go to bed. This feeling came over me. For some unknown reason, I thought I was going to die. I didn't want to miss eternity. To my knowledge, I hadn't committed any big sin, except maybe drinking too much grape soda pop that I would beg Dad for.

I told Ma and Dad I wanted to go see my cousin Rachel. Why Rachel? She and my sister Marian were friends, and I was her friend, too. Dad and Ma didn't refuse, so off we drove in the middle of the night to Aunt Pauline Schlenker's place to see Rachel, her daughter. Elmer and Fennie Schlenker were there at the time. In those days we didn't have a phone; we just showed up.

I was put up on Aunt Pauline's bed. Everyone gathered around and prayed, and I accepted the Lord Jesus as my Savior. Then we went home. The following evening at the revival, Dad testified about my experience, and I was not bashful to tell the congregation how much I loved Jesus and that He saved me.

The Lord works in mysterious ways. During the last few days of the revival, Rachel and my brother-in-law, Kenneth (Marian's husband), also accepted the Lord.

In June 1951, Brother Heuer came back to North Dakota to baptize Rachel, Kenneth, and me in a small lake and stream south

of Alfred. We all felt the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.



*Abel Zaragoza  
Yucaipa, CA*

Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them. . . . For a righteous man may fall seven times, and rise again . . . (Proverbs 24:1, 16).

Growing up in the Church of God, I learned about God, the Bible, and Christianity in Sabbath school and worship service. I also learned at home, where my mom read Bible stories to my siblings and me. One of the teachings I heard about over and over was baptism — the importance of being baptized once accepting Jesus as personal Savior. I also heard about the Ten Commandments and the need to keep them.

Some of us teenagers didn't think we could. We thought we would fail, so we put off baptism and following Christ. Grace was taught, and I thought I understood it. But I didn't know justification by faith.

When I was 16 years old, my 17-year-old cousin was killed when he fell from a high waterfall. This death devastated my family and me. I bargained with God to bring him back, that I would serve Him the rest of my life.

Well, that didn't happen. I became depressed. I had already started hanging around the wrong crowd at school and was

*continued on page 27*



# A Worthy Craving



@ Hongji Zhang—Dreamstime.com

by Caitlin Meadows

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored (Titus 2:3-5, NASB).

I crave time with older women. Whether they are one year older than I, or fifty, I am hungry for time with them. This craving is spiritually innate. Titus 2:3-5 instructs older women to mentor the younger, to set a godly example for the next generation. So it makes sense that as a younger woman, I desire the influence of my female elders.

In our busy culture, making time for mentorship is not a priority. We all have our “to do” lists, demanding responsibilities, and personal needs. Giving of ourselves more than is required can easily feel more like an obligation than a blessing. Thus, many of us avoid the call and deny the instruction. In effect, we go on stressed out in our personal bubbles, completely unaware of the blessing meant for us when we obey.

I should give my time and attention to many girls younger than I. It’s convicting to take my eyes off myself and realize I’ve made them my last priority. If I crave mentorship from older godly women, why do I assume women younger than I do not crave the same from women like me? Sure, I can make excuses: “I’m not godly enough. I don’t know enough. I’ve never been in that situation. If I had time. . . .”

But Titus 2:3-5 mentions no excuses. Paul did not say, “Now, older women, once you have gone a whole year without sinning and mastered life, then you are to reach out to only the younger women you relate to the most.”

If the members of Christ’s body had to wait until they were perfect in and of themselves, they

would never be ready to glorify their Head. The body of Christ is perfect because Christ is perfect. I am liberated from the chains of sin and death because Christ liberated me. He is perfect and I am His. Nothing in life is about me without being about Him first. I am to point others to Christ. The instruction in His Word is intended to be accomplished *through* us but *by* and *for* Him. Obedience always begins with surrender and ends with unmatchable blessing.

Mentorship does not have to be difficult. It’s simply opening your door and heart to another person and humbly confessing, “I have surrendered every aspect of my life to Christ, and He is continually working on me to set me apart for Himself. You’re welcome to watch, learn, and ask questions. Learn from me, allow me to learn from you, and we’ll learn together. But please, keep your eyes on Christ and encourage me to do the same, because He is our ultimate Teacher.”

I long for the guidance of older godly women. I want to learn how to be a more selfless wife, how to more efficiently keep my home, how to someday be a mommy, how to be an efficient employee, and how to keep Christ first when juggling all of the above. I want to know I am not the only woman to encounter struggles or ask questions.

There is a certain community I crave — to know I am not alone. We are a church, a family who will spend eternity together praising our Creator. I hunger for that experience to begin now as I am both mentored by the older and mentoring the younger. Titus 2:3-5 is a call on women to increase the kingdom — definitely a worthy craving. **BA**

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# Sing a Redemption Song

by Whaid Rose

Christianity is a singing faith; its sweetest songs are of redemption.

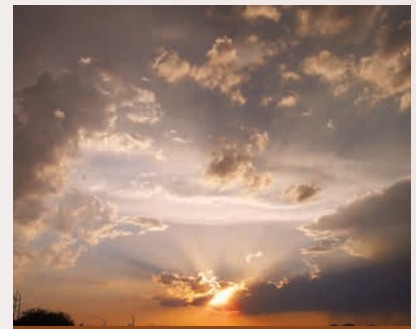
Among redemption songs, Charles Wesley's "And Can It Be?" is in a class by itself. Its captivating style, rich biblical and theological content, and riveting drama set it apart. Its opening question isn't one of doubt, but of wonder. Grasping a sense of the wide chasm between our depravity and God's mercy, we exclaim, as David did, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it" (Psalm 139:6).

Otherwise, sin is minimized, redemption taken for granted. Truth is, "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23); all is level at the foot of the cross. Speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast (1979), the late Fulton Sheen began by saying, "Mr. President, Mrs. Carter, my fellow sinners." We aren't sinners because we sin; we sin because we're sinners. Grasping the difference is the first step toward genuine repentance and saving faith.

That was a long time coming for Charles Wesley. Of Samuel and Susanna Wesley's eighteen children, we know only of Charles and John. Their search for a disciplined "method" of spiritual development led to founding the Holy Clubs, which evolved into the Methodist movement. But despite their godly heritage, these brothers struggled to know a personal relationship with Christ.

Then, by grace, their voyage across the Atlantic as missionaries (to help Governor Oglethorpe settle Georgia, the last of the English colonies) was turned into a journey of faith. They were confronted by the gospel as never before through the witness of Moravian Christians onboard their ship. Soon after their return to England, both brothers were dramatically converted. "And Can It Be?" is believed to be the first in Charles' vast hymn collection, written immediately after that life-changing experience.

Singing this redemption hymn is good preparation for the most solemn event on our church's annual calendar, for emphasis on taking the emblems worthily (1 Corinthians 11:29, 30) should go beyond examining our hearts to contemplating the true worth of Christ's sacrifice. So let the hymn ready your heart, not just for the Lord's table but to sing of our blessed Redeemer eternity long. We'll sing, for we cannot be silent; His love will be the theme of our song! We were worse than we cared to admit; Jesus is more beautiful than we ever imagined!



And can it be that I should  
gain/An int'rest in the  
Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who  
caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death  
pursued?/Amazing love!  
how can it be  
That Thou, my God,  
should die for me?

*Refrain:*

Amazing love! how can it  
be/That Thou, my God,  
should die for me!

He left His Father's throne  
above,/So free, so infinite  
His grace;  
Emptied Himself of all but  
love,/And bled for Adam's  
helpless race;  
'Tis mercy all, immense  
and free;/For, O my God,  
it found out me.

No condemnation now  
I dread;/Jesus, and all in  
Him is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living  
Head,/And clothed in righ-  
teousness divine,  
Bold I approach th'eternal  
throne,/And claim the  
crown, through Christ  
my own.





## Bread of Life

Murmurs ripple through the crowd.  
What kind of Messiah  
is this?  
Eat His flesh, drink His blood?  
Some scornfully mutter,  
He is mad.  
Many began to slink away.  
Even the Twelve flounder in  
bewilderment.

Today,  
the mystery revealed  
to all who believe.  
Humbly we bow, tear sliding down  
the cheek,  
hands reverently cup the bread, the  
wine.  
Remembering  
the unthinkable sacrifice.  
Jesus Christ  
the Bread of Life.

Yvonne Kays

# Good News!



A whole world in a single word. by **Oscar Mata**

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The English word *gospel* is of Anglo-Saxon origin, meaning “God spell.” It is a rendering of the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “good message” or “good news.” Behind the Greek word is the Hebrew *basar*, meaning “to proclaim good news” (Isaiah 40:9; 52:7). This is not news in gener-

al but the announcement of God’s sovereign action, His saving power and faithfulness (Romans 1:16).

In the New Testament, the word *gospel* is used in a variety of ways, each with its own emphasis (see chart).

**“Gospel of the kingdom”  
or “gospel of the kingdom  
of God”**  
Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14

Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom of heaven. In His ministry, God’s reign was “at hand,” or near (Matthew 4:17). The good news is that we have access to God’s kingdom. This is the gospel the apostles continued preaching, and the same gospel will be proclaimed until the end of time. Believing the gospel of the kingdom means submitting to God’s sovereignty. We know that every kingdom (government) has laws that govern with authority. So, as Jesus said, we cannot believe the kingdom gospel and disobey the precepts of God (Matthew 7:21).

**“Gospel of God”**  
Romans 15:16

The good news originates in God himself and announces His saving actions (Isaiah 52:7). We cannot speak of Jesus without first acknowledging that He is the Son of God. The gospel message is from the One who sent the Redeemer. Jesus declares the Father and is the only way to the Father (John 1:18; 14:6).

<p><b>“Glorious gospel of the blessed God”</b> 1 Timothy 1:11</p>	<p>The good news is wonderful. In it we hear the message of God’s majesty through Jesus Christ His Son. Anyone who honors the Father also honors the Son, and anyone who honors the Son honors His Father (John 5:23).</p>
<p><b>“Gospel of the grace of God”</b> Acts 20:24</p>	<p>The good news is the message of God’s grace to all human beings. This grace is seen in the gift of His own Son for our salvation (John 3:16).</p>
<p><b>“Gospel of Jesus Christ,” “gospel of Jesus,” or “gospel of Christ”</b> Mark 1:1; Acts 8:35; Romans 15:19</p>	<p>The good news is focused on the person of Jesus Christ. In Him alone is redemption embodied (Acts 4:12). If Jesus is not the center of the gospel message, then it is a false gospel (Galatians 1:6-8).</p>
<p><b>“Gospel of the Lord Jesus”</b> Acts 11:20</p>	<p>The good news proclaims Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3) and King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15). This means that all believers recognize His rule over their lives. We cannot believe that He is Savior only. He is Savior <i>and</i> Lord (Luke 2:11).</p>
<p><b>“Gospel of the glory of Christ”</b> 2 Corinthians 4:4</p>	<p>The good news tells us that the glory of Christ is the very glory and image of God. No other shares or declares that glory and dignity (Hebrews 1:3). Christ is glorious indeed!</p>
<p><b>“Gospel of peace”</b> Ephesians 6:15</p>	<p>The good news is the message of peace (<i>shalom</i>, all things set right) that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). This world needs the peace of God found in Christ (Ephesians 2:14-17), and only He can give it.</p>
<p><b>“Gospel of Christ” is the “power of God”</b> Romans 1:16</p>	<p>The good news is that <i>in Christ</i>, the power of God for salvation, is revealed. We enjoy this power in our lives by faith in Jesus Christ. That power will raise us again when Christ comes for us, and we will reign with Him forever (1 Corinthians 6:14).</p>

The gospel announces the good news of the redemptive work of God through His Son Jesus. When we announce it, we must include all matters relating to Jesus: His Father, His life, His ministry, His death, His resurrection, His authority, His kingdom, His commands, and the promise of His coming. It’s all good news!

We must be careful not to pervert the gospel, as Apostle Paul warned:

But there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:7b, 8).

Many say they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,

but their deeds deny Him. They disobey Him. How can we *believe* the gospel and not obey?

The sacrifice of Jesus bought our forgiveness. What must our gospel response be? “Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance” because “By their fruits you shall know them” (Matthew 3:8; 7:20). That is good news too! **BA**

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# The Gospel According to Prayer

What worked for Jesus works for His followers.

by R. Herbert



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Each of the four Gospels has its own unique traits, its own perspective on the life of Jesus. When we look at the Gospel of Luke, for example, we see a clear stress on Jesus as the Son of Man. But another, often less noticed, aspect of Luke's Gospel can be illuminating: its focus on prayer.

Prayer appears throughout the four Gospels, of course, but Luke's writing reflects a noticeable stress on it. While prayer is mentioned around fourteen times in Matthew, twelve times in Mark, and six times in John (depending on the translation), in Luke prayer appears on some twenty-six occasions. Luke notices prayer, comments on it, puts it in context, and ultimately, uses it as a framework for his Gospel.

## Bookends

The evangelist begins his account of Jesus' life, not with the Messiah's birth but with the prayer that preceded it. He tells us that, as the devout people of Jerusalem were praying in the temple (1:10), an angel appeared to the priest Zechariah and informed him of the coming birth of his son — John the Baptist — who would prepare the way for the Messiah (v. 17). In the same way, Luke closes his Gospel, not with Christ's ascension but with the disciples returning to pray and worship afterward in the temple, where his prayer-focused narrative began (24:53).

Between these starting and ending points, as Luke recounts the life and ministry of Jesus, he weaves into his Gospel contin-

ued references to prayer — especially the prayers of Jesus himself. In fact, Luke tells us more about the prayer life of Jesus than any other New Testament writer. While Mark mentions His prayers only three times, Luke does so continually. To read the Gospel of Luke is to hear Jesus praying just as much as it is to hear Him teaching the crowds. Only Luke tells us that Jesus prayed continually (5:16), and Luke includes seven accounts of Jesus praying that are not found in any of the other Gospels (see page 21).

## Example and instruction

Luke tells us that Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit descended on Him at His baptism (3:21). It is Luke who says that Christ spent the whole night

in prayer before He chose His twelve disciples (6:12). And only Luke gives us the added details that when Jesus took His closest disciples — James, Peter, and John — up the mountain so they could see Him transfigured as He would be in the kingdom of God, He first ascended the hill to pray (9:28). Those three disciples experienced Jesus’ private prayer before they witnessed His transfiguration (v. 29).

The third Gospel makes it clear that Jesus often prayed in the presence of His disciples and that He taught them how to pray, not only by His example (9:18) but also by giving them the prayer outline we call the Lord’s Prayer (11:1-4) and a number of parables on prayer. These parables are gems of instruction that teach us not to lose heart and to pray with shameless persistence (11:5-8; 18:1-8), as well as stressing the attitude we should have in approaching God (18:9-14). In these ways and in others, Luke shows that Jesus constantly urged His disciples to pray (6:28; 10:2; 22:40, 46, etc.).

### Life and ministry

In Luke we continually catch sight of the importance of prayer in Jesus’ own life and work. We see Him praying in every circumstance, from formal blessings to informal and spontaneous expressions of joy (9:16; 10:21). We see that He prayed before important events and after them — especially after performing miracles (5:15, 16). Luke says Jesus often withdrew at such times to lonely places and prayed (v. 16).

By the time we come to the end of Jesus’ ministry, we don’t doubt, if we’re attuned to Luke’s

message, that Jesus performed His works through prayer — not through His own strength (John 5:19, 30) but through a close relationship with God based on ongoing, empowering prayer.

### End of life

As we reach the end of Jesus’ life, we see His agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46), not as a unique situation but as yet another example of Jesus’ regular reliance on prayer, expressed at a crucial moment in His life. Luke gives us details of the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus no one else records, like the fact that “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (v. 44). Although all the Gospel writers tell us that Jesus returned from praying and found His followers sleeping, only Luke records that Jesus urged the disciples, “Get up and pray . . .” (v. 46).

Writing about the cross, Luke alone records Jesus’ words: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (23:34, ESV). These words would become the creed and archetypal example of Christian forgiveness — a prayer so radical and vital to Christianity, it is amazing that it appears

only in this Gospel. In the same way, Luke alone lets us hear Jesus’ final prayer: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (v. 46).

### Recognizing Jesus

It should not surprise us, then, that when Luke tells the post-Resurrection story of the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, he provides a detail that we might easily miss, but one that is of clear significance: Even though those disciples apparently walked and talked with the risen Jesus for hours, only when He prayed did they recognize Him (24:13-31).

Perhaps, by analogy, we can say that, to the degree we follow the examples and teachings of Christ in the “Gospel according to prayer,” others will recognize the Son of Man in us also. **BA**

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**R. Herbert** (a pen name) holds a Ph.D. in biblical and ancient Near Eastern languages, archaeology, and culture. He writes for a number of Christian venues, as well as for his websites *LivingWithFaith.org* and *TacticalChristianity.org*. All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.

## 7 Unique Prayers

**LUKE** 3:21  
5:16  
6:12  
9:18  
9:28, 29  
11:1  
22:32-46

These seven prayers of Jesus are found only in Luke. While the other Synoptic Gospels mention Jesus praying on two of these instances (5:16 and 22:32-46), Luke gives unique material in both cases.



A day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy was upon the Israelites as Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:2-4). They had a vicious battle on their hands, with no hope of deliverance. King Hezekiah sent his emissaries to the prophet Isaiah with a special message: “the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth” (v. 3). The people were fearful, much like a woman in labor who had struggled for hours without success to bring forth her child.

The illustration of childbirth

gives us something to think about. Though often fraught with pain and difficulties, childbirth is the manner God has chosen to repopulate the earth. Even more important to God is rebirth (being “born again,” John 3:3). This rebirth is God’s chosen procedure by which the kingdom of Christ is to be populated. And it is illustrated through baptism.

Prior to the start of His ministry, Jesus himself sought out John to baptize Him and, in so doing, left us an example to follow.

## Death and resurrection

Eternal like His Father, Jesus willingly laid His prior glory aside to experience humanity. He was exposed to the same temptations we face – the same vulnerability – and became subject to death.

In His humanity, the Son asked if there would be a way to sidestep His appointment with death. Yet in His divinity, He qualified the request: “nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). The animal sacrifices that had foreshadowed this moment could never take away sin. However, the Son’s obedience reached back and covered those who, also in obedience, had performed those ritual sacrifices. His sacrifice of Himself continues to reach forward to all who will come in confession and conversion.

The Son rose again and returned to the glory He had once enjoyed. His death and resurrection made it possible for all humanity to experience future glory in eternity with the Father. A stipulation: believe, be baptized, and be obedient to the Father’s will.

## Rebirth and growth

At an early age, I believed and was baptized. But obedience to God’s will has taken some time.

My baptism occurred at age thirteen at a campmeeting in the summer of 1947. During a Friday evening service, an altar call was extended. Without a spoken word, my sister and I stood and walked together to the altar.

The following afternoon, Elder Ennis Hawkins led my three sisters and me, along with a number of other teens, into the chilly lake waters. One by one,



we were baptized and thus signified our commitment to live for the Lord.

What next? Grow. Study. Learn. Do. Looking back, I believe I had been caught in a net of arrested development – stuck in the birth canal, not fully comprehending the significance of the commitment I had made. Life went on much as before. I read my Bible, attended church, learned the words to many a hymn, and memorized special verses. I taught younger children's classes from the time I was twelve or thirteen but failed to grow spiritually myself.

The years went on, and what little "armor" I had acquired developed a few cracks that left me susceptible to the influence of the world. My earthly father was a well of Bible knowledge, yet I failed to access this precious resource. I spent little time with family, preferring rather the company of non-Christian friends. Eventually, my interests headed in other directions, and church attendance became a mere facade.

Like Israel and Hezekiah, my birth as a child of God became a rather long, drawn-out delivery because of the gaps in my spiritual development. But God is faithful and has never given up on me. I am 81 years old and rejoice in Jesus as Lord and Savior as I continue to learn and grow.

### Gains and losses

Perhaps some desire to be baptized, but the thought of what they have to "give up" is overwhelming. Satan may have convinced them that the cost is too great. The truth is that what is given up cannot begin to

compare with what is gained in Christ.

Some might choose to not take that all-important step of baptism because they are fearful. They may wonder how their family and friends would view this decision and ostracize them. These people need to be encouraged, to take heart. The love of the Savior can fill and inspire them to stand – alone if need be – against real or imagined opposition: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves tor-

*“Though Satan has experienced many a failure, he still watches for any opportunity to abort our experience of new birth in Christ.”*

ment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

Though Satan has experienced many a failure, he still watches for any opportunity to abort our experience of new birth in Christ. The allure of the world can cause partial-birth abortion that extinguishes the light of Christ's love before it fully develops into a brightly burning flame, not easily extinguished.

The umbilical cord of the

world that nourishes with a taste for worldly pursuits must be cut. There is a need to be freed from the pull of sin, to experience total immersion and cleansing in the love of Jesus.

The Spirit of God descended on Jesus at His baptism, and God's voice from heaven expressed pleasure in His Son. In His subsequent ministry, Jesus often communed with His Father, spoke only His words, and performed only His will. Likewise, the new child of God must be first nurtured by milk, then advance to the meat of the Word in order to grow. The call has gone out to "taste and see" that the Lord is good, that He wants – nay, demands – first place in the lives of those drawn to Him: Spirit fed and Spirit led.

### Deliverance

When Hezekiah received Sennacherib's letter threatening destruction, he laid it on the altar of the Lord and pleaded for God's intervention (Isaiah 37:14). God answered with a mighty deliverance, and faith came full blown into the hearts of the people.

The Lord is still delivering souls from the clutches of sin. Even as the Father rejoiced in the obedience of His Son, so He and the angels in heaven rejoice over each individual who is brought to the birth, evidenced by the outward show of baptism. **BA**

### Dorothy Nimchuk

and her husband, Nick (retired pastor), are isolated CoG7 members in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Dorothy co-edits *Afterglow* and writes and self-publishes books.





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## Finding the New Testament in the Old. by Jason Overman

The word *baptism* and its variants appear almost one hundred times in the New Testament, but never in the Old Testament. Something exceptional was happening on the sandy banks of the Jordan River in anticipation of the Messiah and His kingdom, something unique to the redemptive event of Jesus Christ, something that would remain a basic distinguishing mark of faith for millennia of disciples born from its living waters.

But as we meander through the New Testament writing about baptism, we notice an unexpected feature. Although baptism is not mentioned in the Old Testament, when the New Testament

speaks of baptism, it often finds it attendant with and prefigured in some of the Old Testament's most familiar stories. This pattern of use both recalls the long flow of salvation history and enriches our understanding of baptism itself.

Let's take a look.

### John meets Isaiah

When John the Baptist bursts onto the opening pages of all four Gospels, his ministry is said to be preparatory. "Repent, God's kingdom is almost here!" he cries. And so it begins. Multitudes hear and confess and are plunged beneath the waters of the Jordan.

John is not a surprise for Israel, at least not for those familiar with Scripture. He was expected. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tie

the wilderness Baptist to a prophecy of Isaiah. The Gospel of Luke quotes the largest portion of it in reference to John:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the LORD;

Make His paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled

And every mountain and hill brought low;

The crooked places shall be made straight

And the rough ways smooth;

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Luke 3:4-6; Isaiah 40:3-5).

Get ready! The Lord God is coming to reign. That's the good news Isaiah proclaims (40:9, 10). John fulfills that cry. There is water and Spirit aplenty in this

“wilderness” to baptize the repentant in expectation of YHWH and His kingdom. Intriguingly, Isaiah specifically mentions these baptismal ingredients just a few sentences later. Looking both forward and back, he sees the “waters” and “Spirit” of Creation — old and new:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand . . .

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord . . . ? (40:12, 13).

The Bible begins with the Spirit hovering like a bird over the waters (Genesis 1:2) — Creation! This image is repeated at the beginning of the New Testament when the Spirit descends dove-like after Jesus’ water baptism (Matthew 3:16) — new Creation!

Old mingles in New. John the Baptist and Isaiah the prophet are joined as ministers of salvation in God’s creative works, and in baptism we are united with them in that ongoing story of water and Spirit, the lived story of our Creator.

### Peter and the Flood

When the apostle Peter discusses baptism, the analogous story of Noah and his ark springs to his mind. Peter’s retrospective figuration of Flood with baptism is potent:

They formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resur-

rection of Jesus Christ . . . (1 Peter 3:20, 21, ESV).

Peter is telling two stories — the days of Noah and Jesus Christ — and baptism narrates both. The Flood is God’s judgment on the world, the drowning of wickedness, and the restoring of creation. For the few of faith, the ark lifts up and “through water” brings salvation (Genesis 6-8). In the wider context, Peter conflates both Flood and baptism with the story that defines both: Jesus crucified and resurrected for our atonement.

The Passion is universal Flood in a man: the death-to-life story of Jesus. Peter writes, “Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring

### Paul and the Red Sea

When the apostle Paul speaks of baptism in 1 Corinthians 10, he invites us to adopt the Exodus generation as “our fathers” and to reread their one-time crossing of the Red Sea and ongoing wilderness journey “under the cloud” as symbolic illustration of the water/Spirit baptism we have experienced:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. . . . But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness (vv. 1, 2, 5).

*“Baptism is a drama typologically tied to key stories of Scripture. Each baptism is a small but special reenactment of the Bible’s central story: Jesus died and raised.”*

us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus condemns sin in His death and defeats death in His resurrection, bringing salvation to all.

New mingles with Old. Peter and Noah become companions in this message of God’s judgment and restoration as Flood and Cross converge in our baptism, and the truth of both is reenacted and embraced in water and in faith toward our Savior.

Paul tells a cautionary story: “Now these things became our examples . . . and they were written for our admonition . . .” (vv. 6, 11). The Corinthian church is carnal, just as Israel was (3:1-4). The Israelites began their journey of discipleship with a “baptism” after God’s saving act but later fell in the wilderness. The Corinthians are also baptized disciples but risk falling away into lust and idolatry, so they must be rebuked (10:6-14).





## Search and Rescue

Outside – the sun  
shines, birds sing, plants  
grow.

Inside – fear of an  
unknown tomorrow  
clouds my joy.

How will God provide?  
I hang in limbo, then ask:

Continue forward?  
Change direction? Wait?

I long for God's clear  
voice.

"This is the way.  
Walk in it."

Losing sight of who I am,  
who I'm meant to be,  
I struggle to break free  
from worries' chains.

My own resources  
exhausted,

I return to Scripture.

Lord, only You hold  
the key.

Linda Jett

Israel prefigures the church. Israel followed Moses through the sea, but only after they encountered God's redemption in a sacrificed lamb (Exodus 12, 14). Their "baptism" signified a trusting obedience to follow God in all things, even through the deep. But Israel's life beyond the sea did not live up to that sign, just as we, and the Corinthians – though baptized and following Jesus – can fall short of it and so too must be warned.

Old mingles with New. Paul and Moses join forces to alert the people of God of what befalls those who stray from the testimony of baptism – a beginning, not end, which informs the whole stream of our discipleship in service to our Lord and God.

### Jesus to Abraham

Baptism is a drama typologically tied to key stories of Scripture. Each baptism is a small but special reenactment of the Bible's central story: Jesus died and raised. And each earlier story symbolically points toward, and mingles with, Him: Creation, Flood, and Exodus, with all the power, promise, and warning that attend them.

Baptism is a leap of faith that publicly signifies our commitment to be immersed in God's story of salvation and walk of faith. Baptism tells this story and is our promise to live this story and make it our own as disciples (Matthew 28:19). The story is old and new, as wide as Genesis is from Revelation. We have heard it in John and Isaiah, in Peter and Noah, in Paul and Moses.

But we hear it chiefly, and most clearly, in our Lord Jesus

Christ, in whom we die and are raised again – by baptism (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:12).

In the water and Spirit of baptism, in Jesus, we span all these stories and more. As Paul writes, in baptism we are united with Christ and so reach, in faith, all the way back to the father of faith, Abraham himself: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . . And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:27, 29).

New mingles with Old again.

### Crossing the river

Of father Abraham, God says, "I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac" (Joshua 24:3).

Like Abraham, disciples of Jesus Christ once lived on the other side of the "river" – our former lives in sin and without God. But now passing through the water, we, like Abraham, are "led" of God in Christ as children of promise following on in faith.

As we recall our own baptisms and call others to the waters, let's mingle the Old with the New, and demonstrate how our individual histories have become a part of the whole history of Creation and Salvation. One Word. One Baptism! **BA**



## My Baptism Medley

continued from page 14

confused in my belief system. I began listening more intently to the sermons at church but still didn't make a commitment to follow Jesus.

One night, close to my high school graduation, some kids got together at a party to drink beer and smoke cigarettes and cannabis. I'd been to these before but didn't feel like going this time. My friends and I decided to camp on the beach instead. Coming back into town later, I stopped at a diner and saw a newspaper. On the cover was a picture of a friend who had been killed the night before at the same party I almost went to. He had been stabbed to death.

I began to process my friend's murder and thought about my cousin's tragic death. I realized young people die, too, not just old people. Just prior to all this, I thought I'd go the way of my so-called friends and turn to Jesus when I was 50 or so. The Devil had me fooled. I could lead a double life and control my own destiny — or so I thought.

I realized then that I needed to commit my life to Jesus once and for all. I made the public proclamation and got baptized and began my walk with God. He gave me the strength to let go of my worldly friends. When I stumbled, Proverbs 24:1, 16 gave me direction and confidence to get back up and follow the Lord.

BA



### Recommended reading

The article "Faith in a Wheelbarrow" should be read by *all* Christians [January-February '16, p. 6]. As a pastor in a different denomination, I'm recommending it to my congregation and posted your web address on Facebook recommending all my friends to read it. Keep up the God-ordained work!

C. T.  
Paint Rock, AL

### Jesus is God

How can you say, in the same paragraph, that "... God the Father has given us Jesus" and then say "He is God" ["Last Word," January-February '16, p. 31], meaning Jesus is God? You have totally contradicted yourself. Seems to me that you are trying to push the "trinity" on all of us. Please stop and stick to the teachings of the Bible and not the teachings of some worldly churches and beliefs.

S. T.  
E-mail

*Response from Loren Stacy: If you will check our website and our book This We Believe, both of which publish the doctrinal statements of the General Conference of*

*the Church of God (Seventh Day), you will find that the official position of our church regarding Jesus Christ is that He is deity. In part, our statement says:*

*"The sovereign deity of the universe is God Almighty, who is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. He is eternal, infinite, holy, self-existent Spirit who created, sustains, rules, redeems, and judges His creation. He is one in nature, essence and being. **God is revealed in Scripture as Father and Son**" (emphasis mine).*

*We believe that God's Word reveals that the Father and the Son are two persons, that the Father is superior to the Son in rank, that each shares the same nature and essence, and that each, being deity, may rightfully be called God. Speaking of Jesus, for example, John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (NASB). These three verses pointedly refer to Jesus as the Word (v. 14 begins, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us . . .," NASB) and present the Word as being **with** God (the Father), as **being** God (deity), and as being our Creator.*

*No doubt this understanding of Jesus is quite different from what our understanding was even twenty or thirty years ago. Nevertheless, this is the doctrinal position of our church at present, and it has been our position for quite some time. To recap: The Father is God (deity) and Jesus is God (deity), but the Father is not Jesus, nor is Jesus the Father.*



# CoG7 In Action

## Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings from Nepal. Thank you very much for your help to our people. As you know, 2015 was a very difficult time for us. We lost many people, houses, and churches during the earthquake. Because of your great help and support, some people have been blessed by blankets this winter and feel very warm. May God bless you and your efforts. Please continue to pray for Nepal. During the first week of February, we want to officially announce CoG7 as a ministry in Nepal. Our main focus will be the village churches. Within five years we are praying for one church for every village.



— Rajendra Sundas

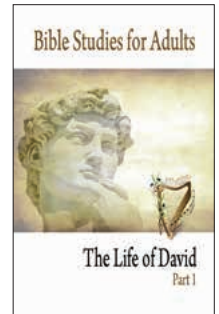
*Rajendra Sundas is a pastor who lives in Kathmandu. He is married with two children. His own home was severely damaged in April. When he was a young person, his family believed in Jesus Christ when his mother was delivered from a demon after a missionary prayed for her. He visited Jacob Rao, leader of our church in India, earlier this year to learn more about CoG7. An interesting point is that Saturday is the official day of rest in Nepal, so many*



*pastors worship on Saturday. This obviously makes it more simple for Christians there to accept the teaching of the seventh-day Sabbath.*

## The Life of David - Part 1

The adult Sabbath school quarterly for April-June 2016 is available for order. *The Life of David - Part 1*, written by Jason Overman, explores the early life of David, from his anointing as a shepherd boy by the prophet Samuel through the death of King Saul (1 Samuel 16-31). Thirteen lessons examine the events surrounding this remarkable biblical hero, and “the man after God’s own heart,” from a perspective of Christian discipleship to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the son of David.



Part 2 of *The Life of David* will follow for the third quarter 2016. Order print or markable digital versions from Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; [bap.orders@cog7.org](mailto:bap.orders@cog7.org); 303-452-7973.

## More on Curriculum

**Preschool/kindergarten:** In *God’s Power in Us*, the theme for this quarter, lessons introduce students to some Bible characters just before, during, and after the Babylonian captivity. Students will learn how God used many different people in different situations to display His power and glory.

**Primary:** Continuing where last quarter left off, *Blessing – God Blessing Us and Using Us to Bless Others* focuses on stories in Genesis and Exodus – from

## Lord’s Supper

The annual Lord’s Supper observance will be held in congregations throughout the General Conference after sunset on Thursday, April 21, 2016.



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Joseph in Egypt to the Israelites building the tabernacle in the wilderness. With the emphasis on “blessing,” students will learn about their many blessings from God and see how He desires to use them to bless others. Most importantly, they will understand that the greatest blessing God has given us is Jesus.

**Intermediate:** The first four lessons in *The Armor of God* review the importance of Jesus coming to earth to save humanity. The remaining lessons focus on Paul’s admonition to put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20) so we can engage in spiritual warfare against Satan.

## Are these books on your shelf?

*This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day):* \$10

*The Bible Adventure — In 66 Steps* by Calvin Burrell: \$9

*The Journey: A History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* by Robert Coulter: \$29.95

Order from Bible Advocate Press, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; 303-452-7973; [bap.orders@cog7.org](mailto:bap.orders@cog7.org).



Great Commission opportunities await CoG7 in Burundi, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and other least-reached nations of the world.

Starting this year, every congregation is encouraged to support one Cristo Viene missionary, and commit monthly to pray and financially support this leader’s mission.

To sponsor a missionary, visit [cog7.org/giving](http://cog7.org/giving), or earmark your local offering “Cristo Viene.”

Contact G. C. Missions at 303-452-7973 or [gcmisions@cog7.org](mailto:gcmisions@cog7.org) to learn more.

March is Missions Emphasis.



Find out more at [gcmisions.org](http://gcmisions.org)  
[f](#) / GCMissions [e](#) / MissionsGC

Photos (L to R): Shamas Pervaiz, Pakistan • Tluang Kung, Myanmar • Alexandre Masumbuko, Burundi



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# International Congress

## World Church News

### IMC Sabbath

Last November 7, CoG7 churches globally participated in a missions Sabbath to celebrate our united work for Christ through International Ministerial Congress (IMC). Ministry reports were shared; prayers and offerings were given. Church of God (Seventh Day) is now planted in 40 nations, with 20 more at various stages of development.

Our next IMC Sabbath will be November 5, 2016. Thanks for your cooperation and support in this worldwide work.

### 2015 in Review: Milestones

- *This We Believe* translations completed: Burmese, French, and Portuguese;
- Zone meetings held: Asia and Pacific Rim (in Malaysia) and Europe (in England), with leaders from 14 countries present;
- Ministries sponsored: Cristo Viene workers in 18 nations, Orphans and Widows ministries in four, Disaster Relief Funds (DRF) to eleven; pastors conferences in new regions — Punjab, India, and Kathmandu, Nepal;
- Missions completed: SHINE medical and dental teams in Mexico and El Salvador; more than 20 Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT) youth and young adults learned and



*French translation team led by Isai Urizar from Montreal CoG7.*

- served in Mexico City;
- Special projects completed: construction and opening of Pakistan Bible seminary; sustainability projects in Sierra Leone (farms) and Zambia (sewing).
- country, or a project.
- Translate evangelistic and discipleship materials from Mexican CoG7 (in progress).
- Improve administrative tools and assistance to national conferences; prepare conferences to print and distribute CoG7 literature locally.
- Plant CoG7 in three new nations.

### 2016 in Advance: Mission Goals

- Gain support from 35+ churches for a missionary, a



*Conference with Jacob Rao in Punjab, India — 40 pastors attending.*



# The Heart of Baptism

I was baptized on a Sabbath afternoon, August 6, 1960. The President of the United States was Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Elvis Presley topped the music charts. I didn't remember most of that; I had to look it up.

Baptism is such an important event in every believer's life. I'm a bit surprised by what I do and don't remember about mine.

I remember I was baptized by Elder E. A. Straub, my mother's uncle. My Aunt Adeline Blanke filmed the event with her state-of-the-art windup, spring-loaded 8mm movie camera. I stood in a long line of people waiting to be baptized in a pay-by-the-inch trout fishing pond near the Bloomington, California church. Most of all, I remember staring at crawdads that seemed very interested in my eight-year-old toes as I stood barefoot in the silt at the bottom of the pond.

I do not remember actually being baptized, and I do not remember who else was baptized that day. Over the years as I've traded baptism stories with friends, however, I have been pleased to learn that one or two of them were baptized with me. That knowledge makes me feel even closer to them.

Ephesians 4:4-6 has long resonated within me: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all Who is over all and through all and in all" (NASB throughout) — seven "ones" immediately following a plea to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3).

Unity is at the heart of baptism. This shared experience of all believers in Christ draws us together. Baptism itself is a testimony of our unity with Jesus. As we are baptized in water, we demonstrate that just as Jesus died, was buried,

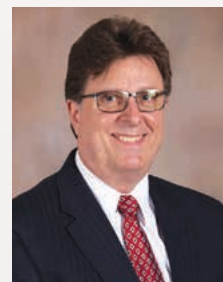
and rose again, we too have died as our former sinful selves, are therefore "buried" in baptism, and are raised again as new persons in Christ. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The importance of unity among the members of the body of Christ cannot be minimized. Examples of and pleas for this unity permeate God's Word. Unity was the prayer on Christ's lips as He approached crucifixion: "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20, 21).

I was baptized August 6, 1960, by Elder Straub, but that water baptism was symbolic of an earlier baptism. The Scriptures tell me that when I invited Jesus to come into my life as my Savior and Lord the evening of June 26, 1960, I was baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

My prayer continues to be that this unity of the Spirit will become and remain a premier characteristic of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), that the world may know that Jesus was sent to save it. We serve one Lord. We have experienced one baptism. We are one church.

— Loren Stacy







# District Family Ministries

District Ministries are thriving. Superintendents and area reps have good news to share and encourage your participation.

Your district may include the following ministries:

- ❖ Young Adult
- ❖ Youth
- ❖ Men
- ❖ Women
- ❖ Couples
- ❖ Seniors

Gifts of support are needed.  
Contact your district leaders and get involved!