

Be Baptized

Immersed into the Name of God



A **Next Steps** Resource of Mercy Hill Church

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Much of the content of this booklet has been adapted from a sermon delivered by Nick Weber at Mercy Hill Church entitled “Immersed into the Name.” If you prefer listening to reading, you can find this sermon online at mercyhillchurch.org.

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized"

Acts 2:37-38

Contents

Finding Jesus	7
What Is Baptism?	7
Baptizing “in the Name”?	8
Familiar but Perplexing.....	8
Two Textual Notes.....	10
Four Layers of Meaning	11
Layer #1: We’ve Been Hounded by Grace	11
Layer #2: We’ve Been Surrounded by Love.....	13
Layer #3: We’ve Been Given a New Name.....	14
Layer #4: We’ve Been Infused with New Life	15
Because of the Cross!	17
Want More?	18
Need Help?	19
What’s Next?	19

Finding Jesus

You've been looking in from the outside for some time now, wondering about this Jesus of Christianity. You're open to it all, but not a little skeptical. Nevertheless, you keep seeking, you keep asking, you keep learning. And then—just as much a surprise to you as to anyone else—something changes. And you come to realize that, even as you've been pursuing God, at an even deeper level, it is he who, in fact, has been pursuing you all along (John 6:44; cf. Joel 2:32)! He's been drawing and softening and opening your heart to his. And now you too are ready to take Jesus as your Lord, Savior, and Treasure. Amazing grace! As the good news has been preached, you've come to see in the face of Christ the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6). And so you call on him (Rom. 10:13). You repent of your sin and put your trust in this one who lived, died, and rose for you.

So what now?

People were asking this very question after Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost: "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). And what was Peter's response? "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and *be baptized . . .*'" (v. 38).¹

What Is Baptism?

"[B]e baptized," he says. And with this yet another question is thrust upon us: namely, what exactly is baptism?

Baptism, we might say, is "going public" with your faith in Jesus. It's a declaration to the world that you are not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16)—even to you! It's being immersed into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). It's being brought into the very fellowship of the Trinity and family of God. It's a sign and seal of your

¹ Any emphasis in Scripture citations has been added by the author.

participation in Christ. It's going down with him in his death and rising up with him in his resurrection life (Rom. 6:3-4). It's passing through the judgment waters of God by way of Jesus our Ark (1 Pet. 3:20-21). It's a picture of your new creation in him (2 Cor. 5:17).

That's a lot! (And, truthfully, it's only scratching the surface.) I certainly can't elaborate on all of this in our little booklet. But what I do wish to do is spend a bit more time considering with you in particular this idea of baptism as "being immersed into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Here we are alerted to what is an unimaginably rich reality—and yet it is something often overlooked, it seems to me, so far as baptism is concerned.

So do me a favor: before you proceed, open your Bible and read Jesus' words in Matthew 28:18-20. What he says there about baptism will be the launchpad for all that I shall attempt to say here. May God bless you as we reflect on these marvelous words together!



As we've seen, in Acts 2:38 Peter says that baptism is the logical next step following one's initial repentance and receiving of Jesus. Before opening this booklet, what would you have said baptism is? Why do Christians do it? Why does Jesus ask his followers to do it? If you haven't already, read Matthew 28:18-20. What do you think it means to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? What do you hope to gain from this small study?

Baptizing "in the Name"?

Familiar but Perplexing

In verse 19 of Matthew 28, Jesus is commissioning his disciples and he issues this command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .*”

It's that little prepositional phrase there at the end of this verse that I should like to draw your attention to in particular. It's a phrase that, if you've spent any time in church at all, it very well may be familiar to you. Perhaps you yourself have already been baptized. Or maybe you've seen someone else “taking the plunge” at one point or another. If you have, well, no doubt, you probably heard these words being recited by the one doing the baptizing: “I baptize you,” the minister would say, *“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

We hear these words. We say these words. But do we know what these words actually mean?

Are they to us the equivalent of some shiny little bow we attach to our Christian ritual the way we do with wrapped gifts around Christmas time? The bow is unnecessary, it doesn't add anything to the gift. But it does make the box look pretty and seem a bit more important than it otherwise would. Is that what these words are? Just ribbon and frill?

Perhaps we've come to think of these words as a sort of magical formula that somehow makes the baptism valid. Like Harry Potter at Hogwarts learning spells—if you don't say the magic words, the spell doesn't work. Is that it?

I remember the first time I ever baptized someone. It was in a jacuzzi (nothing says “I'm ready to be united with Christ in his death” like going under the warm, relaxing waters of a hot tub!) at the house I was renting in See Canyon near San Luis Obispo, California. I was the college pastor at my church at the time and one of the students in my ministry wanted to make a public profession of her faith. And so, appropriately, she wanted to be baptized.

Well, when the time came for me to actually go through with this, I think I was so excited and things that—wouldn't you know it?—I forgot to say the magic words! I can't remember what I said, or if I said anything at all. But I do know this: I didn't say (like any good minister should): “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” When someone kindly brought it to my attention later, I really was genuinely concerned. “Oh no,” I thought. “Does that render the

whole thing invalid? Does that mean we have to do it all over again?"² I was embarrassed. I was confused.

It all seems so humorous to me now, but it does bring us to face the question yet again: what do these words given to us by Jesus in Matthew 28 actually mean? Why do we even bother to say them?

O brothers and sisters, after studying the matter, my sense is that they mean more than we can even fathom. But I want to identify at least four layers of meaning for your consideration and encouragement here.

Two Textual Notes

Before I proceed any further, though, let me quickly set up the discussion by making a couple textual, interpretive notes. And this really will make sense of the tagline I referred to at the start with this idea of baptism as being "immersed into the name" of God.

You see, the first thing we must know is that the Greek word translated as "baptizing" in Matthew 28:19 literally means to plunge or "immerse." When you're baptized you're "going under," as it were.

The second thing to note is that the Greek word translated "in" in our text literally means "into." Your Bible probably alerts you to this in the footnotes. There's a perfectly good word for "in" in Greek (*en*), but this word here is not it. The word chosen here is *eis* which, again, can be more appropriately rendered "into."

So then, filling this out, when a person is baptized they are being *immersed into* the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I admit, this might not seem all that helpful to you at this point. In fact, you may now even feel more confused! But, nevertheless, I assure you, these are textual clues that are pointing us forward towards a deeper understanding of all this. So hang in there and let's carry on . . .

² One might think of that poor Catholic priest who, at least according to their tradition, had thousands of his previously performed baptisms declared invalid because he changed a single word of their sacramental formula (see <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/baptisms-performed-phoenix-priest-invalid-changed-one-word-rcna16268>)!

Four Layers of Meaning

At last we're ready to consider the various layers of meaning found in these words. I have four layers in particular for us to consider.

Layer #1: We've Been Hounded by Grace

With the reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit here, I think we are meant to realize first that our salvation is the result of a joint effort among the persons of the Trinity. It has often been noted that, with regard to man's redemption, the Father *architects* it, the Son *accomplishes* it, and the Spirit *applies* it.

With regard to man's redemption, the Father architects it, the Son accomplishes it, and the Spirit applies it.

- The Father *architects* it. By this we mean that he's planned it, promised it, and prophesied concerning it. He's filled the Old Testament with countless symbols and shadows pointing the way towards it. He's the ultimate Architect of our redemption.
- The Son *accomplishes* it. By this we mean that the Son brings to pass all that the Father has planned. That's why Jesus is always pointing back to the Old Testament and helping his disciples interpret his life and death in view of all that God had spoken of him there (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).
- The Spirit *applies* it. By this we mean that, after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, he pours out his Spirit (the Holy Spirit of God) and, in so doing, he gives (or applies) to us freely by grace all that he accomplished for us at the cross.

All of this is to say that, when a person finally comes to the place of faith in Jesus and desires to be baptized, we must know that heaven has already been tirelessly working behind the scenes with a view to such an end! When you are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit you are being invited to see how busy God has been on your behalf, how much every person of the Trinity has been up to in grace for you.

That's why I chose the word "hounded" for this point: "We've been *hounded by grace.*"

I get the idea from an old poem called "The Hound of Heaven" written by Francis Thompson back in the late 1800s. I won't dare quote any of it here. I looked it over and the English was so dated I could barely understand any of it myself. But, as I stumbled my way through it, one thing became clear: Francis was recounting how, though he had run and run and run from God, God in grace ran faster after him. Hence, "the Hound of heaven." God wasn't going to let him get away.

One old minister wrote of this poem:

The name is strange. It startles one at first. It is so bold, so new, so fearless. It does not attract, rather the reverse. But when one reads the poem this strangeness disappears. The meaning is understood. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and unperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace. And though in sin or in human love, away from God it seeks to hide itself, Divine grace follows after, unwearingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to Him alone in that never ending pursuit.³

So while your baptism, in one sense, certainly marks off a new beginning—a fresh work of God in your life, a going down with Christ in death and coming up a new creation in him—it is also, in another sense, the consummation, the climax, the grand finale of a work God's been up to on your behalf from even before you were born! As Paul writes in

³ John Francis Xavier O'Conor, *A Study of Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven* (New York, NY: John Lane Company, 1912), 7.

Ephesians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world . . ." Look closely. The Father, the Son, the Spirit—they're all in play here. And they've had their eye on you from "before the foundation of the world"!

Therefore, when a person is baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it is not an afterthought in the mind of God. Far from it. It is instead the culmination and climax of his unwavering pursuit (or "hounding") of you through the ages!

Layer #2: We've Been Surrounded by Love

This idea of being immersed into the name of the Trinity surely carries with it the sense that we are entering into relationship with them in some way. Now, to be clear, I'm not implying we become the fourth member of the Trinity here. God forbid! But I am saying that we are somehow being folded into deep and intimate relationship with the three-in-one God. And, therefore, being baptized into God's name means also that we are therein being surrounded by God's love. His affection is coming at us from every side. When we go under the water, it's as if we are plunging into his very heart.

*When we go under the water, it's as if we are
plunging into his very heart.*

This notion of being surrounded by love, perhaps, will make more sense to you when we consider what the relationship of the Trinity is like even among the Father, Son, and Spirit themselves. For this, there is no better explanation, I think, than that put forward by C.S. Lewis in his masterful little book *Mere Christianity*. There he writes:

All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that ‘God is love’. But they seem not to notice that the words ‘God is love’ have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love. . . . [W]hat Christians mean by the statement ‘God is love’ . . . [is] that the living, dynamic activity of love has been going on in God forever and has created everything else.

And that, by the way, is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions: that in Christianity God is not a static thing—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.⁴

So consider the way the Father, Son, and Spirit think of one another. Consider the love that they have always had for one another. Think of the divine dance of God. And then think of being immersed, being brought into, being included in and surrounded by that!

That’s what it means to be baptized “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Layer #3: We’ve Been Given a New Name

But we can keep going. This idea of being baptized “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” surely carries with it more than just the notion that you’ve been brought into relationship with the Trinity—like some sort of friend or dance partner. Indeed, the fuller picture is that of God putting his own *name* upon you.

Such a thing speaks to the very core of our identity, of who we are. And it brings into view the gospel doctrine of adoption. It reminds us that in Jesus we’ve been brought into the family of God. Baptism, in essence, is God putting the family name upon you. This is why Paul could speak of baptism and adoption as correlating realities in Galatians 3:26-27: “[I]n Christ Jesus you are all *sons of God*, through faith. For as

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1980), 174-75.

many of you as were *baptized* into Christ have put on Christ.” Your baptism and your sonship go together.

It seems to me that everyone, by nature, spends so much of their time and energy trying to make a name for themselves. We want people to like us. We want people to think we’re special. We want to feel like we’ve arrived, like we’re someone to follow.

*Baptism is God putting the family
name upon you.*

And, sadly, this sort of thing even finds its way into the church. We use our religion—our good deeds, our church attendance, our ministry leadership, etc.—to try to make a name for ourselves, to stand out in some way. But, at the end of the day, when you’re lying awake in bed just before powering down, and you’re finally a bit more willing to be honest with yourself, aren’t you exhausted from it all—this endless effort spent trying to make a name for yourself? Doesn’t it always feel a bit hollow, a bit unstable, never enough—no matter how hard you try?

And it’s to us there, in the place of our exhaustion, that this word from Jesus comes. We can be baptized—freely, by grace—into the name of God. We could never earn it. It’s a gift. We are cast into it. It’s stamped upon us. And with it we are invited away from our ceaseless striving and into the enduring rest of Jesus.

Layer #4: We’ve Been Infused with New Life

With this fourth layer, now, I wish to bring out the fact that when you’re truly immersed into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you’re not just given the family name, you’re given the family’s *genetic material*. In other words: you will start to look more and more like a part of the family (in the way you think, feel, speak, and act).

It's always fun, as your kids grow up, to try to identify who it is in the family, immediate or extended, that they look most like, isn't it? You're comparing them to old photos of yourself when you were young. You're looking at grandpas and grandmas, aunts and uncles. You're not sure exactly who he or she looks like, but you know they're going to look like somebody. Why? Because they have your genes.

It's that same idea I'm referring to here.

Being immersed into the name of God pictures this idea of being born again. You are going under with Jesus in his death and coming up with him in his resurrection. And now you have, not only a new name, but a new power, and a new freedom—to live and love as he does, as you were created in the image of God to do at first. You're going to take on the characteristics of the Father and the Son and the Spirit. You're going to start to bear family resemblance.

I think the words of Jeff Vanderstelt in his book *Saturate*, wrap all of this up nicely for us:

Our new-creation identity is expressed in our baptism. To baptize is to saturate. Our baptism represents that we are now saturated within the Godhead. This saturation into God makes us different. God changes us. This is very important, because God wants us to know that we are new creations with new identities before he calls us to live new lives.

This is why Jesus commands that we baptize disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our baptism is a physical display of our old life of sin and death being buried with Jesus Christ in his death. It is also a sign of our new life of faith, hope, and love, as we have been raised with Christ into new life. We have a new life, a new identity, and a new name. . . .

Your new name represents both who God says you are and what he plans to do through you. You are saturated with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It starts with God and his work, which changes you so new work can come through you.⁵

⁵ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 131-32.

Because of the Cross!

As we draw things to a close now, if I could leave us anywhere, let me leave us at the foot of the cross. We must not forget that we owe all of this to Jesus' work there at Calvary:

- We have been *hounded by grace*, but it is only because he hung on that tree abandoned and suffering under the curse of God's law: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13).
- We are now *surrounded by love*—invited into the dance of God, but it is only because he was surrounded by enemies there on the cross, and even cast out from the Trinity as it were: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). The Trinity broke ties with itself to let you and I in. Do you get that? The only reason we get invited into the dance of God, is because the Son was sent home like a high school kid without a date.
- We have now *been given a new name*, the family name, but it is only because Jesus let his own name be trampled into the dirt on our account. They mocked him: "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Matt. 27:29). The crown of thorns they fastened to his head made a joke of Jesus' true identity as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And he let them do it—all so that he could attach to us the name of his Father and welcome us into his family. What love is this?!
- We may have been *infused with new life* through the outpouring of his Spirit, but let us not forget that it is only because he first poured out his blood in death for our sins on that cross.

So, no, these words from Matthew 28:19 are not some mere bow that we just string up and attach to our baptismal ceremonies. And, no, these words do not outline for us some sort of magical spell nor enchantment. This isn't hocus pocus, and it isn't Hogwarts.

But these words do direct us to the multi-layered significance of the baptismal act as it pictures for us the gospel realities that are true of all who repent and trust in Jesus' work on the cross. They bring us to consider afresh the grace that is ours because of him. Hallelujah, what a Savior!



Where are you currently at with Jesus? Are you still skeptical and keeping a "safe" distance from him? Or are you ready to go all in and take him as your Lord, Savior, and Treasure? If the former, why? What is holding you back? If the latter, wonderful! What accounts for this change in your heart? Why do you now desire to be baptized?

Upon reading this little booklet, which of the four layers meant the most to you and why?

What questions do you still have about baptism? How can we help?

Want More?

If you are wanting to engage the subject matter found in this booklet further, you might consider the following resources:

- *What Is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert
- *Core Christianity* by Michael Horton
- *Understanding Baptism* by Bobby Jamieson
- *The Walk* by Stephen Smallman

Need Help?

Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

What's Next?

If you are wanting to be baptized, you can let us know by either filling out a Connection Card⁶ or simply emailing us at info@mercyhillchurch.org. One of our leaders will meet with you to hear more of your story, discuss further the meaning of baptism in the Bible, and help you take this next step. How exciting!

If you've already been baptized and gone public with your faith in Jesus, we encourage you now to consider what it means to grow in your personal relationship with God. For this, check out the next step: *Walk the Sacred Path*. Find more info at the Next Steps Table on a Sunday or online at mercyhillchurch.org.

⁶ You can find the Connection Card online at <https://mercyhillchurch.churchcenter.com/people/forms/124506>.

Baptism is “going public” with your faith in Jesus. It's a declaration to the world that you are not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16)—even to you! It's being immersed into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). It's being brought into the very fellowship of the Trinity and family of God. It's a sign and seal of your participation in Christ. It's going down with him in his death and rising up with him in his resurrection life (Rom. 6:3-4). It's passing through the judgment waters of God by way of Jesus our Ark (1 Pet. 3:20-21). It's a picture of your new creation in him (2 Cor. 5:17). It's a big decision. And one certainly worth considering. This Next Steps Resource has been created to help you do just that!



Consider Jesus

For those skeptical or curious about Christianity and the claims of Jesus.



Be Baptized

For those ready to say yes to Jesus and "go public" with their faith.



Walk the Sacred Path

For those wanting to grow in their devotional lives (e.g. Bible reading, prayer).



Become a Member

For those interested in going all in with this local church and committing to "be the body" here and now together.



Join a Home Group

For those wanting to move towards community and live on mission for Jesus with others in the church.



Pursue Discipleship

For those interested in going deeper in their faith and growing more in the image of Christ.



Use Your Gifts

For those interested in identifying the gifts God has given them and using those gifts to serve in the church.



Spread the News

For those interested in evangelistic training and opportunities.



Serve the City

For those interested in getting their hands and feet dirty in love for others in our city and world.

Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.