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**an explanation of
BELIEVER'S
BAPTISM**

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an explanation of BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

– MATTHEW 28:18-20

Thank you for considering believer's baptism. As you have read, it is an important step of obedience for the believer. In addition, it normally marks a very significant step forward in one's commitment to and relationship with Jesus. If you decide to be baptized, it is our prayer that Christ will use this event in your life to draw you even closer to Himself. ■

5. Practical Instructions for Baptismal Participants

Those being baptized will meet with one of the pastoral staff on the day of the baptism to walk through the procedure. If the baptism is during a worship service, it typically occurs near the beginning. Here's what you need to know:

- You do not have to prepare a speech or testimony. You will be asked two questions, something like: "Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ? Is it your desire to follow Him with your whole heart?" An answer as simple as "yes" will do.
- We encourage you to give a few words of testimony if you would like to do so. Perhaps a favorite Bible verse is all you want to share. Maybe you would like to briefly share how and when you came to faith in Christ. Maybe there are a few people you would like to thank. Keep it simple. Please write down what you would like to say so you don't ramble. Limit yourself to two minutes or less.
- Children: We will provide you with further tools to help you.
- Make a list of those people whom you would like to invite to witness your baptism and ask them to come on the decided date.
- **Attire:** Each of you will be provided a dark colored baptism t-shirt for you to be baptized in and for you to keep to commemorate this significant step in your life. We ask your cooperation in the following ways to make sure there are no distractions:
 - **Guys:** slacks (not jeans) or longer shorts are appropriate; a shirt to wear under the t-shirt we provide is appropriate; barefoot or water shoes are fine as well
 - **Gals:** slacks or longer shorts are appropriate; a shirt to wear under the t-shirt we provide is appropriate; attention to undergarments is advised; barefoot or water shoes are fine, too
 - **All:** bring a plastic bag for wet clothing, a set of dry clothes, a towel, and any other personal aids (hair dryer, etc) to assist you. You may want to remove jewelry.

Water baptism is one of the two ceremonies given to us by Jesus to be practiced by His followers (the other being the Lord's Supper). It is essential that we clearly understand and practice water baptism. Of course, if you have further questions or need more clarification, please talk to one of our pastoral staff. Depending upon one's background, the what, why and who of baptism can be quite confusing.

1. Meaning, Mode and Significance of Baptism

The Greek word *baptizo* (baptize) can be translated dip, immerse, wash, sink, drench or overwhelm. (Greek Lexicon: Walter Bauer, p. 131). The New Testament does not say exactly how baptism was to be done, but it clearly implies that immersion was what was practiced. John the Baptist baptized in the Jordan River. Acts 8:38 says that, "they both went down into the water...and he baptized him." While the significance of baptism is more important than the way in which it is done, we believe that immersion best defines the meaning of the word and that it also best illustrates the significance of this ceremony.

The theological significance of baptism can be explained as an act of "identification with someone, some group, some message or some event."¹ Those who were baptized by John the Baptist were identifying with the person of John and his message. They were saying, "Yes, I agree with John, and want to be identified with that message." When people are baptized in the name of Jesus, they are saying, "Yes, I believe in Jesus and want to be identified with the Person, message and people (the church) of Jesus Christ." So, baptism is an act by which the believer publicly declares he/she is a follower of Jesus Christ. It is a public declaration of allegiance, a public identification with Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). This is why we call water baptism "Believer's Baptism."

2. Why should I be baptized?

- The simplest answer is that Jesus commanded that His followers are to be baptized (Matthew 28:18-20). We are commissioned to make disciples and we are to baptize them. This simple act of obedience publicly declares the believer's faith in Christ which is, again, why we call it believer's baptism. The New Testament indicates that baptism took place soon after believing (Acts 2, 8, 10, 16).
- Just as Jesus humbled Himself to publicly identify with us at His baptism, so we too are called to humble ourselves to demonstrate our identification with Him (Matthew 3:13-17; Philippians 2:3-9). It declares our surrender to the lordship of Christ. Surrender is always humbling. This humbling aspect is typically what hinders a believer from going public with believer's baptism.
- Being baptized is not difficult. It has nothing to do with "being good enough." It requires nothing but simple faith in Christ and obedience to Him.

3. Who Is To Be Baptized?

- It is essential that we clearly understand that baptism does not provide eternal salvation for anyone (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We are not baptized to obtain salvation, but rather because we have made the decision to trust Jesus as our Savior. In other words, every person in Scripture who was baptized was one who had already believed in Jesus (see Acts 8:12, 35-38; 9:1-18; 10:42-48; 16:14-15, 28-34; 18:8). When one believed in Jesus he/she was baptized as an outward symbol of his/her belief—as a means of identification. Therefore, those who are to be baptized are believers.
- So the New Testament pattern is: hear → believe → baptize.
- We do not baptize infants here at Oakwood because we believe the Bible teaches believer's baptism. Infants are not old enough to understand what is being done to them. Believer's baptism is for those who are old enough to understandably express their faith in Christ, and who also understand the significance of baptism.

- Children may be baptized as long as they can simply and clearly express their faith and the significance of baptism. Don't push your child(ren) to be baptized. Let God work on their hearts. Mom & Dad, when your children see baptisms, they will ask you questions. The youngest ones may do so as early as third or fourth grade. It is your job to help clarify salvation and baptism for them. We don't want to baptize them if they do not really understand these matters lest we confuse them for years to come. We can help you, but it is your responsibility and your privilege to clarify these truths for your children.

To be baptized you must:

- Trust Jesus as your personal Savior (not just know about Jesus).
- Understand the biblical reasons for baptism, as stated above.
- One's present lifestyle should be consistent with such faith and commitment. This is not implying that "perfection" or "maturity" in Christ is required for baptism. In the early church, most were baptized at the very time of salvation. But if one's heart and actions are not reflecting faith and commitment, perhaps it is not the right time for baptism.

4. Procedure for Baptism at Oakwood

- If you desire to be baptized, please notify one of the pastoral staff or the church office.
- One of the pastoral staff will contact you to set up a relaxed baptismal interview which will include a friendly discussion regarding:
 - your faith in Jesus for salvation.
 - your understanding of baptism.
 - in which of the worship services you desire to be baptized.

Note: Parents are encouraged to witness their child's interview.