

## **Baptizing and Dedicating Children**

In the diversity of the body of Christ at Hope, there are families that wish to have children baptized and others who prefer dedication. We appreciate that believers may have different views on this matter, and we yield to the motto of the EPC in this case: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

What is the difference between baptism and dedication?

The primary difference is that baptism is a sacrament and dedication an ordinance. A sacrament is understood to be something that originates with God and an ordinance is something that originates with human beings.

Baptism is a sacrament that demonstrates God's relationship toward us, and through the "washing with water" shows the nature of His salvation as he cleanses us from sin. As a sacrament, baptism like communion is dependent on faith, and it is important to know that salvation depends not on being baptized, but on one's personal faith in Christ. Baptism does not make someone a Christian, rather it is an outward sign of spiritual realities. In the case of infant baptism, the baptism is premised on the faith of the parents.

Dedication is an ordinance which is a special time of thanking God for a child, praying God's blessing upon the child and dedicating her/him to God. Such a dedication has precedent in the Bible where for instance, Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to God.

Which Should You Do?

This is a personal decision for parents. In thinking this through, some things you may wish to consider:

In infant baptism, emphasis is put on God as the one who brings a person to faith in Christ. It is recognizing God as the one who made a covenantal promise of salvation, and who is the one working in our lives, even as an infant, before we had any ability to believe on our own. So, when a child comes to receive Jesus through their own faith later on in life – they would not be baptized again, rather this would confirm the work that God had begun in the child's heart. Here, the person's now personal faith recognizes "that God was at work drawing my

heart to Him all along.” The specialness of the child’s personal faith would not mean he needs to be baptized again, rather that communion becomes the place where his relationship with God is expressed and experienced in a sacrament.

In dedication of a child, emphasis is put on the child as the one who will make his own decision for Christ later in life. When the child does make such a decision as a young person or adult, if they have an adequately mature understanding of their faith, it would then be appropriate to be baptized. At that point, the person may be baptized by immersion, or the sprinkling of water. Given that this person is older now, baptism by immersion may be a significant experience as the person goes under water and is raised from it. The symbolism is that when going under the water they have died to self and when raised, they are raised to new life in Christ.

In either case of baptizing or dedicating an infant, a matter of utmost importance is the personal faith of the parents. The child is being presented because the parents have a repentant and growing personal relationship with God through Jesus, and wish for their child to grow to have his/her own faith in Christ. In offering a child for baptism or dedication, it is important that parents have an understanding of several things they are acknowledging:

- That each of the parents has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- That each of them recommits to their marriage vows. This should not be taken lightly or superficially. The stability of a marriage is a highly important part of the development of children, and commitment to the marriage vows is an important way that parents model a God who keeps His promises, is loving, and faithful.
- That the child belongs to God. He made the child and gave him to us to love and raise. Understanding this, we may be better able to help our children become who God may intend for them to be, since it is sometimes our tendency to try to make them who we may wish for them to be.
- Neither baptism nor dedication is a saving act, rather a child will one day need to come to their own profession of personal faith in Jesus Christ.
- Parents can not make their children Christians. We should do all that we can to teach and model for them what life with Jesus is about. We should actively engage with them by praying with them, teaching them the Bible, and talking about our personal faith. But even with these things, only the Holy Spirit in a person’s heart brings conversion.

- Children need to not only be taught about God, but be shown a loving, lifelong relationship with Him. Sometimes it is easier to teach information to children than model for them a life of loving God. Both are needed, faith is both "caught and taught."

When parents present their children there are four solemn vows; three for the parents, one for the congregation:

1. Do you recommit yourself to Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?
2. Do you recommit yourself to one another and the marriage covenant you made on your wedding day?
3. Relying on God's grace, will you do all that you can to teach and model for your child what a personal relationship with Jesus Christ means, and will you do all that you can to teach them how to live life in this relationship with Him?

To the Congregation:

4. Do you commit yourselves to encourage (name of couple) as Christian parents, and will you do all that you can to model for and teach (name of child) what it means to live life in a committed relationship with Jesus?