

BAPTISM SERVICE PLANNING GUIDE

Use this guide as a template to incorporate baptisms into a service or immediately following a worship service.

Find more Baptism Sunday resources at namb.net/baptismsunday.

Prepare

It is a significant moment in a new Christian's life when they decide to be baptized as a public profession of their faith in Christ. As their church family, we must ensure we celebrate their new life in Christ through baptism in a way that both honors the Lord and is a testimony to others. One of the ways you can do this is by incorporating baptism into a Sunday worship service. While this isn't the only time you can celebrate baptisms, having baptism as part of a Sunday service provides a powerful testimony of the saving activity of the Lord. It encourages the congregation to praise God for those who have come to know Christ. It is also a great way to share the gospel with people who have come to see their friend, neighbor and family member be baptized. Often, those that attend baptism services at the invitation of the one being baptized are not Christians and need to hear the gospel proclaimed.

As you begin to prepare for a Baptism Sunday, it would be helpful to preach a sermon on baptism and its significance in the life of a believer either on Baptism Sunday or on an earlier Sunday. We can't assume that people understand the meaning of baptism, so taking the time to make it clear through a Sunday morning message is important.

If you preach on baptism a month or so before Baptism Sunday, you can also use that day to invite people to commit to being baptized. After the message, simply ask those in attendance if they have not participated in a believer's baptism, as you described, to sign-up now to participate. You can offer this opportunity through a public invitation at the end of the service or through other means following the service.

However, you may want to preach on baptism on the day of Baptism Sunday. You can design Baptism Sunday as a harvest Sunday, preach on baptism, proclaim the gospel and invite people to put their faith in Christ for their salvation and be baptized. You may be asking, is this approach biblical? In the Bible, the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts Chapter 8 responds to the good news of Jesus and immediately says, "Look, there's water. What would keep me from being baptized?" And Philip baptizes him. A few chapters later, in Acts Chapter 16, we see the jailer was saved and baptized within the same hour. There are different opinions about whether churches should have spontaneous baptisms, but as you can see, evidence in the book of Acts supports this approach. If students and children respond during one of these services, we encourage you to please talk with their parents before allowing them to participate in baptism.

Also, these are options for planning a Baptism Sunday; we encourage you to pray and ask the Lord to provide you with wisdom on which approach would be best for your church to utilize.

Suggested Preparation Sequence:

Step 1: Decide on the date to call for a response of baptism in service and order supplies.

- Towels
- Shirts
- Shorts
- Hairdryer

Step 2: Decide where the baptism(s) will happen in the service. End of service? Between songs? After service? Inside or outside? Then prepare how to communicate the baptism invitation. (See example below.)

Week before the baptism service:

1. Review the plan with anyone who may be helping you with the service.
2. Send out necessary details to those planning to be baptized.
3. Announce during service that next Sunday's service will be a baptism service.
4. Have a conversation with each person planning to be baptized to ensure they understand the gospel and the purpose of baptism.

Day of the baptism service:

1. Set out supplies and prep changing rooms.
2. Pray for God to soften the hearts of those He's calling to repentance and baptism.
3. Call for a response during the sermon (see example below).
4. Ensure that every baptism candidate receives counsel with care and patience.
5. Record information for follow-up of anyone who comes forward (whether baptized or not).

A week after the baptism service:

Make a follow-up call to the individual(s) who were baptized. The primary purpose of the call is to help them with their next steps of discipleship.

Sample Invitation:

During the invitation, it's essential to recognize that not everyone in the congregation may understand the biblical nature and purpose of baptism. Offering a concise explanation of what's about to happen reinforces biblical teaching on baptism and calms the guest's fears or new believers who may have never seen a baptism before.

Template Explanation: "In just a moment, we will celebrate the baptism of those who have trusted Christ for salvation. Baptism is a picture of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, and a believer's new life in Christ. We are baptized as an act of obedience to Jesus Christ and as a public proclamation of our faith. Baptism does not wash away sin, nor does baptism save us. It is an outward sign or symbol of the inward work that Christ has completed in us as new believers in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Every baptism is a celebration of salvation. Today, we celebrate His saving work in the lives of those who are being baptized."

If you are calling for those present who have professed Jesus is Lord but who haven't been baptized to join the baptism spontaneously, you might add the following:

"If you have placed your faith in Christ for salvation but have not been baptized, we want to allow you the opportunity to be baptized today as well. Please join us by meeting our (pastor, counselor, staff) at (location). We have a new change of clothes you can wear to be baptized."

Anticipate the excuses people make for not getting baptized.

Taking a few minutes to walk through the answers to these objections not only gives the person who needs to be baptized time to consider their decision but also equips your congregation to have a conversation about baptism with their friends.

The following are a few of the more common objections to baptism, along with a possible response:

- **Objection:** "I'm not ready"
 - **Possible response:** If you have trusted Christ for salvation, you are ready. Baptism is only the public profession of the inward reality, declaring to everyone watching, "I know that I'm a sinner and need Jesus. I'm ready to proclaim that He is my Savior publicly." If you say you've trusted in Christ as your Savior, then you have done all that is needed to be ready to go public with that profession through baptism.
- **Objection:** "It's not that important..."
 - **Possible response:** Since baptism is an act of obedience to God, it is important. A willingness to obey God's command to be baptized is one of our first steps of obedience; by being obedient in the act of baptism, you are taking the first step in living out every area of your life in obedience to Jesus.
- **Objection:** "I was baptized as a baby."
 - **Possible response:** Baptism as a baby is not a profession of your faith but a profession of your parents' faith. And praise God for that! But you need to profess your faith, which is why the Bible consistently presents baptism as a decision you make. Your parents may have baptized you as a baby, but a believer's baptism is your opportunity to declare your faith in Jesus!
- **Objection:** "But I don't have a change of clothes!"
 - **Possible response:** Don't worry; we have them for you! We've got all sizes, dark-colored T-shirts, towels and hairdryers. We thought of everything to allow you to take this step of faith.

Material adapted from and courtesy of J.D. Greear and The Summit Church.