

WHAT'S INSIDE



OBEDIENCE AND UNITY

Tania Watson considers why believer's baptism has been a foundational practice of the churches in "Obedience and Unity".



THE SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES

Like other key moments in his life, Amit Khaira's baptism was marked by music, in "The Soundtrack of our Lives".



DEEP ARE THE WATERS

Dennis Ryle looks back on how death and resurrection repeats itself in his daily walk with Christ in, "Deep are the Waters".



SLOW CONVERSION

In "Slow Conversion", Michael O'Neil considers baptism in the context of a lifelong process of formation and obedience.



THE AGE OF BAPTISM

Kylie Hofer considers if there is a right age or time to get baptised in "The Age of Baptism".



BURSTING THE BUBBLE

Mark Pomery shares how Elevate aims to make baptism accessible in "Bursting the Bubble".



WHEN DOES A NEW LIFE WITH CHRIST START?

In "When does a new life with Christ start?", Molly Lewin asks what kind of culture are our churches creating around baptism.



CHANGING THE WORLD

Peter Barney unpacks the ways baptism both separates us, as well as calls us to live in community in "Changing the World".



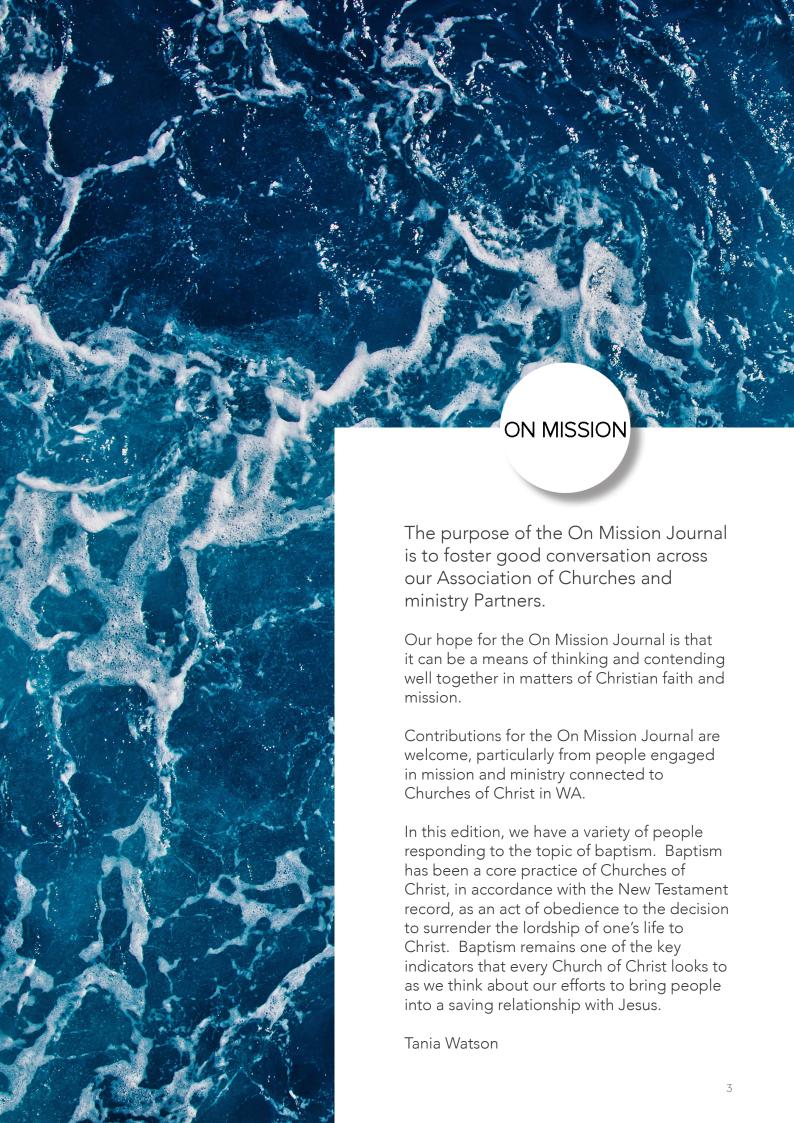
WHAT MATTERS MOST

Terry Nightingale reflects on love and unity in "What Matters Most".



ENGRAFTED INTO HIS STORY

Dave Ryder shares how baptism is an opportunity to retell God's story, in "Engrafted into His Story".



OBEDIENCE AND UNITY

Tania Watson

"WE WERE BURIED THEREFORE WITH HIM BY BAPTISM INTO DEATH, IN ORDER THAT, JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MIGHT WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE."

ROMANS 6:4

Dead to sin. Life in Christ. Through baptism we enter into the drama that is Christ's own death, burial and resurrection. We walk into the waters, conscious that sin is a natural born state that forever binds us to sin and death. We place our bodies into the hands of another: one who will conduct us through immersion into water and up and out into the world again. We emerge, anticipating with each step, the new life in Christ that is eternally ours to explore and enjoy.

In the Church of Christ tradition, the believer's baptism has been a foundational practice of the churches. There are two reasons. Firstly, having confessed faith in Jesus Christ, one demonstrates that confession through baptism is an act of obedience: the outward sign of the inward change. Secondly, baptism is an action that signifies our unity as disciples. We have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:6). It is into this 'oneness' that Christ gifts the Church with different yet complementary gifts, all designed to nourish and foster maturity in the love and way of Christ.

In the imagination of the Apostle Paul, baptism represented the discarding of the old self and its futile ways to the embracing of the Christ-life and its flourishing ways. In a masterful way, Paul places two ways of life that, when set side by side, prove that there really is nothing to compare. So it is

an unattractive thing indeed, when we forget who we are in Christ and forget our baptism.

I really appreciate the way that Paul talks to us through the transition of Ephesians 4 and 5. Paul knows how quickly and easily we can lose our way and so he gently reminds us that we are forgiven, and as forgiven ones, we imitate Christ in his love and forgiveness to others. Forgiveness. What can seem impossible or incomplete for the world, is possible and complete through Christ. His death and resurrection proves that for us. Our baptism demonstrates this to us.

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2).



About the Author

Tania Watson

Tania Watson is the Executive Minister for Churches of Christ in WA

THE SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES

Amit Khaira



Music provides the rhythm by which I live my life. When in primary school, I remember my parents buying me a Phillips cassette and CD player. Paul Simon's 1986 Graceland album was played that night. My love for music only grew.

High school in the 90's commenced with the MC Hammer vs Vanilla Ice battle, a race war of a different kind. I then moved on from cornrows and braids, embracing the alternative music scene. Many lunch breaks were spent eating fried rice and learning Nothing Else Matters by Metallica on my acoustic.

These days, an ideal evening is one spent in front of the fire with a hot cup of traditional chai, a good book and a playlist from Spotify in the background.

Another pivotal moment marked by music was the lead up to my baptism. I was raised in a devout Hindu family and watched my mother battle depression and anxiety after moving from Singapore to Perth. By supernatural intervention, my mother became a disciple of Jesus Christ and, from that point, nothing was ever the same. A complete transformation took place. Soon after we started attending our local church, one Sunday night I remember running to the front before the minister had finished his sermon, declaring that I wanted Jesus for myself and to be baptised.

The church I attended required people to complete a discipleship course prior to baptism. I was too young to do the course. This did not deter me. The next Sunday I was down the front again. The minister then introduced me to a gentleman from the church who would take me through the multiweek course. I finished the curriculum within a fortnight and not long after, my sister and I were both baptised.

During this time, there was a song played regularly through our services. Written in 1896 by Judson Wheeler Van DeVenter, "I Surrender All" captured all my thoughts and emotions and became a prayer for me as a ten-year-old, captivated by the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives and bring healing, hope and restoration, just as I had witnessed with my mother. "All to Jesus I surrender" is the first line of all five verses and the chorus statement of "I surrender all" is repeated three times over. There I stood, week after week, arms raised high as an act of surrender.

This classic hymn became a prayer of recognition, repentance and commitment for me. Recognition of how the things of this world will not satisfy us and how, in our broken state, we are in need of Jesus. It is repentance by way of surrender. We must "surrender humbly at His feet and bow". It is a commitment to loving and trusting Him, living in His presence daily and giving all of ourselves to Him.

The place of baptism within the Christian tradition has often been debated. The early church fathers Irenaeus¹, Origen², Tertullian³ and Ambrose⁴ all advocated that baptism was necessary for salvation. We then have Clement of Rome⁵, Polycarp⁶ and Marius Victorinus⁷ who advocated that it is not. Reformed theologian Zwingli viewed baptism essentially the same way as the Old Testament Israelites viewed circumcision⁸. Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century rejected the idea that baptism should be connected with Old Testament circumcision⁹. Moltmann saw baptism as a free response to the call of being a disciple of Jesus Christ¹⁰ and on it goes.

For me, at the age of ten, the desire to be baptised by full-immersion was, simply put, to publicly declare all that was happening within me. An external expression of an internal transformation. This is what I understand baptism to be.

WITH THE ARRIVAL OF JESUS. THE MESSIAH. THAT FATEFUL DILEMMA IS RESOLVED. THOSE WHO ENTER INTO CHRIST'S BEING-HERE-FOR-US NO LONGER HAVE TO LIVE UNDER A CONTINUOUS. LOW-LYING BLACK CLOUD. A NEW POWER IS IN OPERATION, THE SPIRIT OF LIFE IN CHRIST. LIKE A STRONG WIND. HAS MAGNIFICENTLY CLEARED THE AIR. FREEING YOU FROM A FATED LIFETIME OF BRUTAL TYRANNY AT THE HANDS OF SIN AND DEATH. 11

As we continue on this journey of life, may your soundtrack be one of surrender to Him in whom no condemnation is found. The one who gave his life for you and me, conquered sin and death and now intercedes at the right hand of the Father on our behalf calls us to a posture of surrender. May we all find healing, hope and restoration in Him as we embrace this posture. Amen.

About the Author

Amit Khaira

Amit serves as the Director of the Catalyst Program with Stirling Theological College, Leadership Developer with Youth Vision WA and Scholarship Coordinator with Initiate Australia.

1 Fragment, 34, A.D. 190 Origen, Commentary on Romans, 5:9

³On Baptism, 12:1, A.D. 203

⁴On Abraham 2:11:79-84

⁵The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Chapter 32

⁶Epistle to the Philippians, 1, 5, 8

⁷Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New testament VI:

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians p. 39 ⁸Riggs, John W. (2002). Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: A Historical and Practical Theology. Louisville, KY: Westminster John

Knox p.25 Fesko, J. V. (2013) [2010]. Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed

Perspective on Baptism p.159 10 Hunsinger, George; Moore-Keish, Martha L. (2015). "Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Protestant Sacramental Theology"

¹¹Romans 8:1-2 in The Message translation



Dennis Ryle

The symbolism of death and resurrection that is closely associated with the topic of baptism has never been lost on me.

As an aqua phobic 12-year-old, I approached my looming baptism at the Albert Park (SA) Church of Christ with dread. I had been to instruction after a declaration of faith. My propositional pre-adolescent mind knew all the good reasons to be obedient to Christ in the act of baptism. Something deeper was tugging however. I had a Rubicon to cross an irreversible decision to enact. After a near drowning incident some years earlier the notion of "dying to self, rising in Christ" was not merely symbolic, it was true sacrament! The proposition of putting myself in someone else's hands - to let them push me under the water was a matter of considerable concern! I was sure I was looking again at a watery grave as I tiptoed from the dressing room to the waiting congregation. It must have been comical to witness my scrawny legs flying above the baptistry lip when my burly minister thrust me under the deep - the crusty elder pronouncing his benediction to my bewildered ears as I stood dripping in the ante-room, "Behold, you are now the Bride of Christ!"

My experience of baptism has returned on each occasion I have needed to make a life altering decision, some in concert with my wife, Jenny. My call to train for ministry was studiously avoided over the next few years. Jonah-like, I fled to the refuge of retailing and ended up on service and warranty for small electrical goods. A lot of my work in that section was distinctively pastoral, and I finally had to acknowledge that if this was my vocation, I better swallow my fear of the unknown and equip myself properly, which in my situation meant leaving the security of home and living interstate on a slim budget. Baptism again! Employment, marriage, adoption of a child, moving from one state to another, even retirement. Each had me revisiting my baptism. Each involved a "little death" in order that something new may be born, something that made room for even further growth into the stature of Christ. I don't mind admitting that anxiety and dread have often been a precursor to most of these events. But once one plunges forth, one discovers the courage that enhances and fulfils.

Over the years of baptising others, the ghost of that trepidation has never quite left me as I have moved down the tiled steps into those tepid waters. In the early years, I wore fisherman's waders covered in a white smock a kind of barrier to those threatening waters. I can't remember when I discarded the waders for shorts and a shirt. I did discover that at some indefinable point the dread of water evaporated and turned to exhilaration in relation to each person's experience of their baptism. Perhaps fear takes its own time to die in order for courage to emerge, but courage begins with the confrontation of that fear. And for each person, baptism marks the beginning of a journey where the old will cling as long as it can while the new receives nurture and then grows and matures. But the new begins right in the face of the old!

In later years, I have been inspired by the work of Alexander Shaia, a devout Marionite anthropologist who points to the four-armed crucifix shape of ancient baptistries uncovered in the Middle East. His lifelong work has identified a link with the four gospels and the pathways that include the continuous journey of baptismal transformation for each disciple of Christ – embracing change (Matthew), enduring suffering (Mark), celebrating union (John), and serving with maturity (Luke).

So yes, baptism is a once and for all affair. And yes, it repeats itself over and over again in our daily walk with Christ.



About the Author

Dennis Ryle

Dennis attends Encounter Church having recently retired from 45 years of pastoral ministry. He continues his work in Spiritual Direction through the Dayspring Community as well as continuing to serve on several church and community committees and boards.

SLOW CONVERSION

Michael O'Neil

In his recent study of the rise of Christianity in the pagan context of the Roman Empire Alan Kreider notes that,

Sometime in the second century
Christians decided to slow the process
of conversion down by insisting that their
converts embody change that reflected
the teaching and character of Jesus. They
insisted on this in part because of what
the Jesus whom they worshiped had
said, but also because they discovered
that embodied change was essential
to Christians' witness. If people talked
like Christians but behaved like pagans,
pagans would not become Christians, and
the church would not remain Christian.¹



This 'slowing' of conversion took the form of the catechumenate, a process of formation that might take up to three years, and which led to baptism. Those expressing an interest in Christianity could not simply attend church, especially in those periods when persecution threatened. Rather, their progress toward baptism involved passing through several stages in which they began to order their lives in accordance with the way of Jesus, forming what Kreider has termed a 'new habitus'—a way of life rooted in a host of biblical passages and especially in the teachings of Jesus, that over time and with practice, became embodied and habitual.² Becoming a Christian was not merely a decision to 'accept Christ,' nor simply an acceptance of Christian doctrine. Rather, it was to embrace a whole new way of living that dealt with everyday issues such as truthfulness, sexual fidelity, provision, and burial. And at the heart of this habitus was worship.³

[Justin Martyr] presents the Christians' lifestyle as a kind of counter-habitus to the lifestyle of the empire's non-Christian inhabitants. Justin sees the Romans' life as a habitus of un-freedom, characterized by addictive practices in four primal areas: sexual ethics, marred by fornication; the occult, trapped by magical arts; wealth and possessions, distorted by competitive acquisitiveness; and violence and xenophobia, filled with hatred and murder toward people of different tribes and customs. ... Having been 'persuaded,' Christians have renounced their old habitus and entered an alternative, lifegiving habitus in each of the four areas: in sex, continence; in place of magic, dedication to God; in wealth, 'bringing what we have into a common fund and sharing with everyone in need'; in violence and xenophobia, 'living together and praying for our enemies, and trying to persuade those who unjustly hate us.' ... The teachings of Christ are at the heart of the Christians' counter-habitus, and they must be embodied...4

It is possible to question some aspects of this ancient practice. Does it require an attitude of behave-believe-belong so at odds with contemporary ethos of belongbelieve-behave?⁵ Does it imply a theology and practice of works rather than grace, since one must 'qualify' for baptism? Is it better, as Ben Witherington suggests, to view baptism as enrolling in the school of Christ rather than graduating from it?⁶ Are not discipleship and sanctification a lifelong process of formation and obedience? Despite these questions, however, it does appear that Kreider's contention remains: the early church was enabled in the midst of a hostile pagan environment not merely to survive but to grow—exponentially, at least in part, due to their practices of 'slow conversion.'

The idea of slow conversion contrasts with much contemporary evangelical practice. Decisively influenced by nineteenthcentury revivalism, conversion has become an intensely individual and emotional experience, propositional and transactional; a singular event quickly accomplished, complete in and of itself, comprised of the individual's decision, and issuing in eternal salvation.⁷ There is no doubt, of course, that numerous people have come to Christ in modern evangelicalism through a revivalist approach to ministry and conversion. Nevertheless, evangelicalism has been often critiqued for its 'shallow' spirituality, 8 or its truncated gospel.⁹ It is not at all unusual for those professing 'to be saved' to hold attitudes or to embrace lifestyles at odds with the way and teaching of Jesus. The problem with this is that a church without depth will have little staying power, let alone transformational power, especially in a culture resistant to the gospel.

If the idea of slowing conversion has validity, how might churches begin to think through the means of accomplishing this? One practice from the ancient church which could be adopted today is the assigning of a sponsor or mentor for each new or potential convert, a mature believer who will be friend

and accompany the beginner on their journey toward full conversion, helping them learn and grow, and speaking for them in the baptismal process. Second, since baptism has to do with repentance (Acts 2:38) and with the death of the old self (Romans 6:3-4), it is appropriate to ensure that baptismal candidates have thought deeply and honestly about what repentance will mean for them in their own life, and have begun taking steps in accordance with their faith and repentance. In this respect, preparation for baptism is ethical as much or even more than it is doctrinal, although I would also insist that knowing the triune God into whose name we are being baptised, is also crucial. We do a great disservice both to the candidate and to the church as a whole if we baptise new believers without a firm sense of what it is they are participating in and committing to.

As a part of this instruction, a clear vision of the 'new habitus'—the fullness of the Christian life—is essential. It is possible that the dimensions or emphases of this habitus might change to some degree according to the cultural context in which one is ministering. Nonetheless, the early church's concern with sexual righteousness, non-participation in violence or the hatred of others, and generous use of one's financial resources to alleviate the need of the poor are still clearly relevant today. Finally, to become a believer, to be baptised, is not merely a private or individual act, but induction into a community, into an ongoing story that commenced long before we came along, and into an ethos and a mission—a participation in the redemptive mission of healing and reconciliation exemplified in the life and death of Jesus Christ and committed to the church in his name. When a new believer is baptised in(to) the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit they are signifying that their whole life and identity has been decisively changed. They are no longer who they were, and their life is no longer their own, but his 'who died for them and rose again' (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The great church father Tertullian once said that 'Christians are made, not born.'10 The formation of saints is slow and patient work calling for a grounded community and saintly mentors, as well as a robust theology of conversion and its associated practices. In such a theology believer's baptism is not merely a step along the way, but the definitive step whereby one's breach with the past is enacted by one's whole-of-life allegiance to a new Lord, a new community, and a new way of being in the world. This is slow conversion, a slow work that is utterly necessary if the church is to bear witness fruitfully to the Lordship and kingdom of Christ in these and the coming days. 11



About the Author

Michael O'Neil

Michael O'Neil teaches Christian Thought and History at Vose Seminary. He attends Living Grace Dianella where his wife Monica is the senior minister.

Alan Kreider, The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 176.

²lbid., 165–66.

³Ibid., 142.

⁴Ibid., 143–44.

⁵See Brian S. Harris, "From 'Behave, Believe, Belong' to 'Belong, Believe, Behave'—A Missional Journey for the 21st Century," in Text & Task: Scripture & Mission, ed. Michael Parsons (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 204-217.

⁶Ben Witherington III, Troubled Waters: Rethinking the Theology of Baptism (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 125-126.

⁷Bill J. Leonard, The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future (Waco: Baylor, 2010), 86, 94.

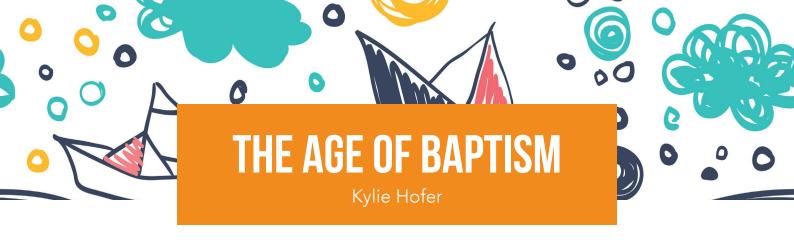
⁸See Alister E. McGrath, Spirituality in an Age of Change: Rediscovering the Spirit of the Reformers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 9.

Zondervan, 1994), 9.

See Scot McKnight, The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 24, 62.

Kreider, The Patient Ferment, 134. Kreider is citing Tertullian, Apology 18.4. See Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, ed. Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 3: Tertullian (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1885; reprint, 1994), 46.

11For a longer discussion of this theme see Michael D. O'Neil, "'For as Many of You as Were Baptised into Christ Have Clothed Yourself with Christ': Baptism, Baptists, and the Renewal of the Church" Pacific Journal of Theological Research, Vol. 14.1 (May 2019), 13-22. See http://www.baptistresearch.org.nz/the-pacific-journal-of-theological-research.html



There is something special about the act of publicly declaring your faith through the waters of baptism. About standing up in front of people, and sharing that you believe in Jesus, and choose to live for Him. I remember being so afraid to get baptised. I knew I was a part of God's family, I knew I was forgiven, in fact people knew that I loved Jesus. So, what makes baptism so important? Why do it? And how do we know when the time is right?

As a family's minister these are some of the questions I hear often. The idea of baptism for kids, is closely tied to the questions of salvation.

Kids can be so inquisitive, and they love to ask questions. I'm sure you may identify with me in that there are sometimes so many questions that we wish we could hit the mute button for a little while! However, when it comes to salvation, the greatest thing we can do is to listen and respond to the questions they are asking, in a way that they will understand. It's best not to rush this process because of our own excitement. Rather be ready and willing to lead a child to Jesus.

Kids are capable of accepting Jesus, and the gift of salvation in a real way. I remember making a very real decision at a church family camp when I was seven years old. But accepting Jesus isn't like getting a ticket to a concert, and you're in. Rather it's an ongoing daily choice to live for Him. Children will grow in their faith as they grow in age, developmentally, in understanding and in wisdom. I also remember deciding when I was nine, and again when I was twelve and, well, you get the idea. As we grow, our level of understanding and commitment grows as well.

Why get baptised? It's an act of acceptance, of obedience, and submission to God. It's a response we take when we accept the gracious gift Jesus Christ offers us all. It's a symbol that we are on His team. An opportunity to declare it in front of our friends, our family and our church family.

When is the right time? There is no right age or right time to get baptised. It's a personal thing, because our relationship with Christ is personal. It will be different for each person. But I do believe that we should be baptised when we are willing to commit our all to Jesus. When we're willing to accept His loving gift of forgiveness and His leading in our lives, submitting our decisions to Him daily. This doesn't mean that we'll never sin again, but that we are conscious of our need for Jesus to be Lord of our lives.

One of the last baptisms we celebrated at our church was that of an eleven year old girl. She invited her school friends, her teachers, her family, anyone who was willing to come. She couldn't wait to declare Jesus as her Lord and saviour for all to see. For me, I was petrified of getting up in front of people to get baptised. But when I was 15 I knew without a doubt that this was a step the Holy Spirit was prompting me to take. There is something special about baptism. This act of acceptance, obedience, and submission to God is an amazing step in our journey and a beautiful witness to others, no matter how old you are.



About the Author **Kylie Hofer**

Kylie Hofer is the Families Minister at Warnbro Community Church.

12

BURSTING THE BUBBLE

Mark Pomery



When I think about baptism my mind gravitates to whether aliens exist and, if they are, whether they are likely to visit earth some day and, if they do visit, will they speak our language ... or at least understand us.

'Coz, that's how it is for unchurched people when they enter the Church-osphere, with our Christianese, men greeting other men with a 'holy hug', and our unique cache of customs and traditions ... almost all of which make little or no sense to those who have previously existed outside the Church bubble.

As a church leader, I'm aware that any discourse about baptism is essentially redundant if the action isn't accessible, so that's become our starting point at Elevate. How can we remove as many of the barriers to entry as possible so new people can take the plunge (pun intended).

While we haven't fully cracked the code, a couple of things that are working for us are:

CAST VISION REGULARLY

Every 4 - 6 weeks during our Live Experience (aka service) we take a minute to talk about baptism, as an opportunity to highlight that it's a thing (if you haven't seen it in the wild, you don't know it's a thing), underscore a 'Why', and point new people to the 'How'

MAKE TAKING NEXT STEPS OBVIOUS AND EASY

This is the 'How' ' i.e. If you wanna get baptised, here's the how (We use the Next Step feature in our Elevate Church AU App - it's obvious and easy)

CAPTURE THEIR STORY ON VIDEO

Rather than having the person being baptised stand on stage and tell their story, which in itself is a barrier to entry (it is well known that most people hate public speaking), and is only accessible to the people in the venue, we capture a video slice of their story. This also allows for editing and for their story to be broadcast digitally, which both reaches more people and elevates the idea of getting baptised.

SOME EXAMPLES ARE BELOW FOR YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT.









About the Author

Mark Pomery

Mark is the Senior Leader at Elevate Church and the author of two books.



As a youth pastor, I have had the privilege of baptising several young people and my personal theology of baptism has not drastically changed. I still believe that baptism should be open and available to all that decide to follow Christ - whether six or sixtysix years old. In Acts 2, the crowd gathered to hear the gospel message as preached by Peter. Many of the people were cut to the heart and asked Peter and the disciples how they should respond to this good news they had just heard. Peter's response is "repent and be baptised" (Acts 2:38). So simple yet profound. Peter didn't say "repent, attend church for 6 months, do a course about how to live your best Christian life, read x amount of the Bible and then, and only then, be baptised". Those early believers in Acts heard the gospel message, repented and were baptised all on the same day. The scripture says that about three thousand were baptised that day. Wow!

As I have conversations with young people, they often express that they aren't "ready" to be baptised. Upon further probing, it is often revealed that they actually do feel ready, but those around them are making them feel, often unintentionally, that they are or should not be. How do we view baptism as the 21st century church in Australia? Is it something that we attain once we are a "mature" Christian? Or is it the starting point for a new life with Christ?

Ultimately, the decision to be baptised is between a person and God. No-one should determine when another person is "ready" for baptism. However, what kind of culture are our churches creating around baptism? Are we encouraging people to come as they are – imperfect and broken – to the waters of baptism? Or are we unintentionally creating a culture that only "perfect" people can be baptised once they've got it all together? Baptism is a sacred and holy symbol of repentance and obedience, but that doesn't mean it needs to be complicated.

Young people, especially those who come from non-Christian families, are often motivated to be baptised as they feel it cements their place in the church family. Baptism allows the young person to say to the church, "I want to love Jesus and I am going to need your help". Baptism allows the church to respond, "We are also trying to love Jesus and we want to help you along the way". Throughout the New Testament, we see that baptism is the beginning of a new life with Christ. As young people make the decision to follow Christ, what better way to begin their new life with him than through baptism. Not only are we buried with Christ in baptism but, "as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4). This new life is one characterised not by sin but by "offering yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness" (Rom. 6:13).

We live in a culture that is largely void of the symbolic and the ceremonial. Baptism gives the chance for a young person who has decided to follow Christ to display this decision to their friends and family in a meaningful and sacred way. However, as we prepare young people for baptism, it is essential to emphasise that baptism is not a magical ceremony that suddenly makes life perfect. It is just the beginning. It is the beginning of a new life lived in Christ. The beginning of choosing daily to follow Christ's ways and resisting the temptation of sin. The beginning of dying daily to "self". However, it is also the beginning of a beautiful, wonderful and fulfilling life in the kingdom of God.



About the Author

Molly Lewin

Molly Lewin is the Youth & Young Adult's Pastor at Encounter Church in Wangara. She is also completing her Bachelor of Ministry at Vose Seminary.



This event separated Jesus as someone different from the world around him. As Christians we practice baptism as a symbol that we too can enter into this different community. It is a symbol of our death to living our lives by our own directions and desires, and birth of a new life in relationship with Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit. Baptism often represents the point in which we can gain membership into the Church, a fellowship of people who are strangers but are now directed by their relationship with Jesus.

Jesus' baptism also announced the beginning of Jesus' ministry on earth. He lived in a particular time in world history, as a Jew in the occupied lands of the all-conquering Roman Empire. From the event of his baptism, he gained followers. Jesus and his followers participated in activities and talked about change that threatened the political and religious leaders of the community. Jesus described his own purpose as fulfilling an understanding that God will restore the sight of the blind and set captives free. This was not metaphorical: he healed people from physical and mental sickness.

Jesus has weaved together a community that is set apart from the world. They are simultaneously called to live out their lives in their earthly community as like salt to flavour with goodness and hope. Sadly, Christians sometimes unpick this rich tapestry that Jesus has weaved. Often in the name of seeking simplicity and clarity we choose to emphasis the church as a group of people who are now separate from the world. Or we see the church as a club of good works, removing a calling for members to hand over their lives and allow Jesus to be king of their lives.

We live in a time where the call to seek simplicity is strong. It is tempting for us as church leaders to give into a call to simplify. However, I believe that our practices and sacraments (such as baptism) can help us

hold together what Jesus weaved. They do so because they remain largely unchanged from when they were practiced by Jesus and his first followers. We can hold our baptisms up and compare them to what we read in scripture. Do our baptism ceremonies carry elements of the calling out of the baptised from their world into the life of the church? Do we see people at our baptisms declaring that Jesus is now their king and that their lives are to be now directed by Jesus?

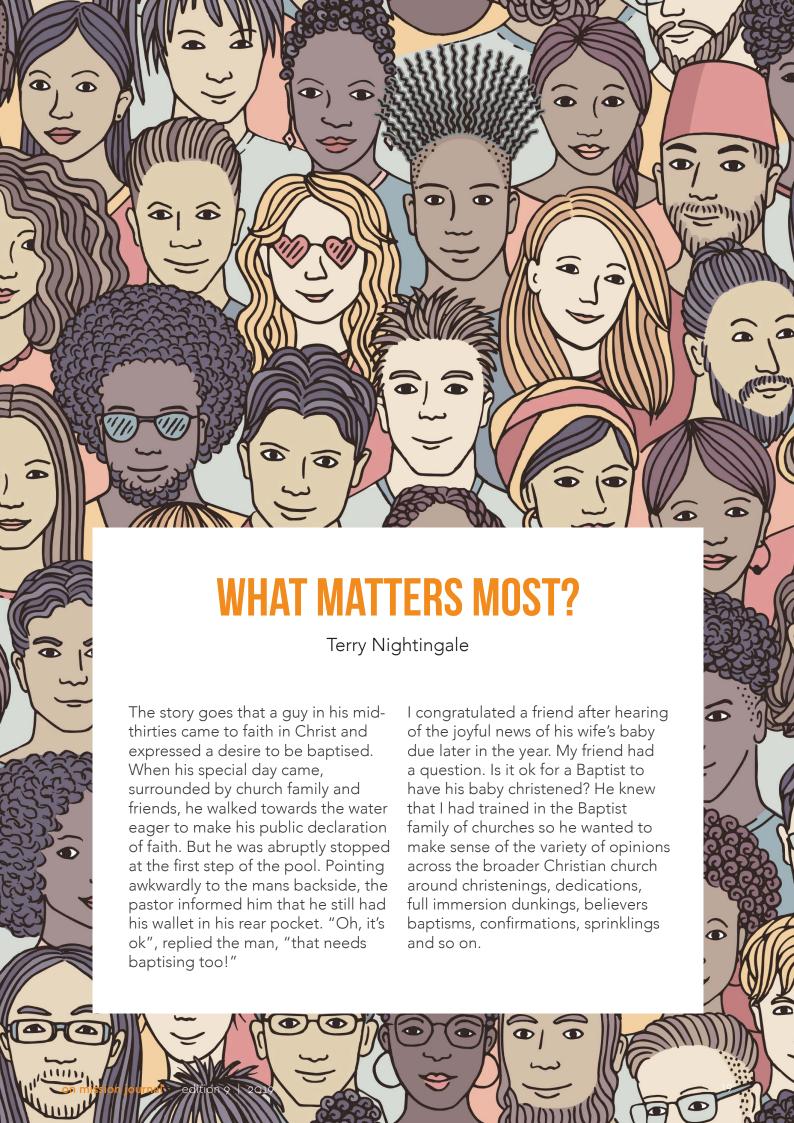
Do we take the opportunity at a baptism to remind each other of the work that was begun at Jesus' baptism, changing the world right where Jesus lived? Do our baptisms reminder us that we are to follow Jesus into the work of loving our community, being salt and light to them?



About the Author

Peter Barney

Peter is the COCWA Ministry and Mission Developer. You can find more writing by Peter at www.cocwa.org.au



I told him what I believed, but he already knew what I would say. We talked about references to baptism in the Gospels, the book of Acts, and Paul's letters. I argued the case for believer's baptism by full immersion, backed up with the relevant Scriptures. I knew that my friend also believed these things and so I thought the matter was settled.

But eventually, he told me that his wife's family would really appreciate a traditional christening ceremony. It turns out, what he was really asking was, 'does it matter'? Does it matter to God if we go through with something that we may not completely buy into theologically but will bind us together in prayer and unity for this new tiny miracle. I didn't know how to answer him.

When I started serving at Southern River just over a year ago, I was looking through our constitution and statement of faith and I was surprised to see that a person can become a member of our church regardless of whether they have been baptised in the way that I understood baptism. They can apply for membership if they "testify to exercising saving faith in Jesus Christ as Lord" and if can support the vision and values etc. But, no mention of the b-word.

A few months later we talked about this part of the constitution at a leadership team meeting and my church elders explained to me the reason for that decision. There have been and there will be people joining the church who love the Lord, have testified to saving faith and are fruitful in their Christian lives but their background has taught them a different interpretation of some the teachings of the Bible regarding baptism. We talked more but I found myself wondering at the end of the day, who am I to tell them they cannot serve the church in every way possible just because we might hold another view on this particular issue?

Now, don't get me wrong! Every person coming to faith through the ministry of Southern River Church of Christ will be enthusiastically encouraged into that pool (with or without accompanying wallet)

and there will be much rejoicing in the family every time. But maybe I am learning something about what unites us and what divides us. And perhaps my friend who is about to become a father is contemplating doing something very brave – to cross denominational barriers for an hour or two, looking for common ground for the sake of love and unity.

Having said all that, I don't want to minimize the power of a public declaration of faith when a new believer submits to the waters. 'Linda' came to faith in Jesus late last year and we baptised her a month or so later. The Scriptures had come alive to her but when she tried to pray out loud in small groups, she didn't always find it easy. She got tonguetied. Until the day of her baptism. Coming up from under the water she suddenly turned to me and told me she wanted to pray. Naturally I encouraged her to go for it and out of her mouth came the most beautiful heartfelt prayer I had heard in a long time.

So, what am I saying? I guess this: Let's be true to the Scriptures as they convince us of God's will. And let's believe that obedience to God's Word can literally change lives, like a tongue set free to pray or a man's finances placed under the lordship of Christ. But where interpretations (and testimonies) differ, let's do everything we can to seek unity.



About the Author

Terry Nightingale

Terry Nightingale is the pastor of Southern River Church of Christ.

ENGRAFTED INTO HIS STORY

Dave Ryder

An insatiable appetite for personal autonomy and freedom has left us with a deficiency in discovering real meaning in our worlds. Our world pursues a utopia which seems to exclude the transcendent, and it is this new world that we are trying to navigate.

The underlying issue resulting in a deficiency of meaning may be that we are story people who have been separated from a grand transcendent story.

Being story people goes beyond our generation, culture and era. This notion is not new, nor is it just the domain of a Christian worldview. I recently heard an interview with philosopher, author, historian and futurist, Yuval Noah Harari, who suggested that humans rule the world because of our innate ability to gather and cooperate around story.

Embedded in story is the possibility of discovering meaning. This is the place where we make sense of who we are, why we are here, where we are going and what we are experiencing.



What does this have to do with water baptism? Baptism has always served as a means of engrafting us into God's Story.

As a Senior Pastor I am challenged that every time I'm involved in water baptism, I have been given an opportunity to retell God's story and give place to where meaning can be discovered. In a world of competing narratives, water baptism provides this important opportunity.

We don't need to look far in the New Testament to hear of the significance of baptism. In Romans, Paul shares the profound fullness of what it means to go through the waters of baptism, linking it with themes of creation, exodus and exile through to New Creation achieved through the work of Christ including that exhilarating promise of Romans 6:4-

WE WERE THEREFORE BURIED WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM INTO DEATH IN ORDER THAT, JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD THROUGH THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MAY LIVE A NEW LIFE.

The New Testament bears witness to the significance of water baptism even before Paul came to see Jesus as Israel's promised Messiah.

From the first sentence of Mark's Gospel (Mk 1:1-3) there is an exciting declaration made via the prophets that God's story, and therefore God's promises, are still in play. This may mean little to us, but imagine the excitement and exhilaration when after 400 years of silence God's people hear that God is moving once again. How was this primarily observed? Well, through a strange prophet who was baptising so many people that he was known as the Baptiser.

John's baptism was significant to an Israel that was still in exile. Israel was under foreign domination, was awaiting God's promise of returning to the temple, was waiting for

their national renewal and waiting for the renewal of the rest of the world. They were waiting for God's Story to come to a satisfying conclusion.

John's baptism did a few things. It reminded Israel of God's story thus far. Passing through the waters of baptism was re-enacting passing through the waters of the Red Sea: the exodus event. It provided an opportunity to repent, and for a nation that knew they were still in exile, repentance made complete sense. It was also a baptism that brought an anticipation and expectation that God was going to fulfil His promise of a New Exodus. God's story was now coming to its climax. Water baptism has the power to move us from a historical vantage point of observing what God has done in the past to a present, personal position today. This sacrament which includes themes like repentance, forgiveness, new life and separation for service also brings with it the invitation and immense privilege to participate with our God as His Story continues.

God is still on the move; His Story and promises are still in play being outworked through His Church by the Holy Spirit. Water baptism engrafts us into God's Story - what He has done, What He is doing and what He continues to do.

Within God's story meaning abounds if we take the opportunity to discover and continually engraft ourselves to it.



About the Author

Dave Ryder

Dave has served as Senior Pastor of New Spring Church in Kelmscott for the past seven years.

Free Communications Support for churches

So you can effectively reach your community

COCWA churches may be eligible for free, flexible, ongoing communications support through a customised Communications Support Package. In a collaborative partnership with Helium Marketing, you can receive assistance across a range of communications activities, at the level you're comfortable.

Mix-and-match services

Effectively connect with your local area and make your community more aware of what you have to offer through:

- Graphic design for flyers, events, Sunday slides, etc.
- Proofing and editing articles, blog posts, and newsletters.
- Content creation for blogs, web pages, and flyers.
- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).
- Social media content creation.
- Website edits, maintenance, and troubleshooting.
- Coaching in backend website use, social media, or SEO.

9 helium



Get started

To apply please contact Tania Watson or Helium directly.

Helium

1800 435 684 hello@heliummarketing.agency www.heliummarketing.agency

COCWA

9471 8500 admin@cocwa.com.au www.cocwa.com.au

Who is Helium?

Helium Marketing has worked closely with COCWA for several years, including support with the On Mission Journal. As a Christian-business, they're tuned into unique church communication needs.

COCWA's role

This service is free for Member Churches and fully funded by COCWA. After an initial trial-period, COCWA will check-in to make sure the service is generating a positive outcome.

