



SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELIZABETHVILLE, PA

**POLICY FOR THE
SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM**

Baptism is a special gift from God given to the church to be administered and passed down through the ages as a sign of God's love and forgiveness. It is a lifelong gift that not only assures us of our salvation; but it also functions **every day** of our life.

As a gift, its value is appreciated more and more as we practice and are reminded of God's amazing grace.

Couples who wish to have their baby baptized along with children and adults of all ages are required to meet with the pastor and attend a baptism class before the baptism.

Baptisms are a significant milestone in the lives of adults, parents, and children. We are pleased to be a welcoming home and community to all of God's children, no matter what age.

If you are interested in having a baptism at Salem Lutheran, simply contact the pastor and he will meet with you beforehand to discuss the sacrament and what to expect. The pastor is more than willing to help you with any questions or concerns you may have about baptism.

Baptism is the time when a person receives a sign of God's promise of salvation. Martin Luther, forebear of the Lutheran Church, often relied on his baptism for comfort in times of crisis, doubt or danger. When he remembered his baptism, he knew that no force on heaven or earth—not even his own disobedience to God—could separate him from God, and so he had nothing to fear.

Baptism also marks the beginning of a person's membership in the Church, and in our congregation. If you have been baptized at any point in your life, whether you actively attend church or not, you are a member of God's family, and are eligible to become a member of our congregation.

If you have not been baptized, then we are happy to accept you as a member through the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Infant Baptism

Most commonly in the Lutheran church, new members are baptized as infants. Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism, *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel..."* We believe that baptism is entirely God's work—it is not dependent on our belief, on our acceptance of Jesus or God's truth, or on our choosing to follow Christ. For this reason, we prefer to baptize people as infants, since infants are completely dependent on their parents to love them and give them everything they need to live, just as we are dependent upon God. Because infants are helpless and dependent on their parents, we ask parents to make several promises to their child in the presence of the assembly:



- ✦ To live among God's faithful people
- ✦ To bring them to hear the word and participate in the Lord's Supper
- ✦ To place in their hands the holy scriptures
- ✦ To teach them the Lord's Prayer, the creed and the ten commandments

However, **our participation** in God's promise is **necessary** for discipleship. For this reason, when children are old enough to understand and make their own decisions, they affirm their baptism in a public ceremony called confirmation, where they take the promises their parents made for them at baptism and make those promises for themselves.

Adult Baptism



In the Lutheran Church, we practice infant baptism, or the baptism of babies. This is because we believe that we come before God as children: there is nothing we can do or offer to God which makes us worthy or prepared for God's love. However, this does **not** mean that adults are not also baptized.

In the early Church, nearly all baptisms were adult baptisms, and were usually preceded by a period of instruction (called "catechesis," or teaching, the same root as the word "catechism.") **Baptism is a requirement to be a member of our congregation;** all church members have been baptized. Along with formally receiving the promise of God's salvation, baptism is also an initiation into the church.

If you are an adult who wishes to be baptized or if you have questions about baptism, please contact our pastor, who will be happy to talk with you and offer you support in your faith.

Private Baptism

For one reason or another, some people wish not to be baptized during regular Sunday worship and would like to schedule another time to receive the sacrament. Because baptism is the initiation into the Christian community, we believe it is vitally important for the community to be present. Just as you would not want to be married without the presence of the bride or the groom, you would not want to be received into the community without the community present! The sacrament of baptism is as much about the whole Christian Church and the community of the congregation as it is about the individual being baptized.

There are special circumstances when private baptism is appropriate. When a child is born in a hospital and there is some doubt as to whether she might survive, or if a person is ill at home and unable to come to church but wishes to receive baptism, pastors (or any baptized Christian) may baptize that person in good order and assure them of God's love and promise of salvation.

Re-Baptism

Some Christian religious traditions require baptism any time a person is received into a new congregation, feels as though it is required to purify their soul or renew their dedication to God. These are wonderful, joyous occasions of their own right and certainly worthy of community celebration. Since baptism is totally God's work, Lutherans believe that **only one baptism is sufficient** for God's purposes and the purposes of the Church; for this reason, in our creed we confess belief in "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins."

If you have already been baptized in any other tradition and wish to become a member, you are welcome without the requirement of being baptized again, as long as water was used and you were baptized in the name of the Triune God "Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If you have been baptized but feel called to renew your dedication to God, feel free to contact our pastors and we will work together to find a way to help you renew your commitment to God.