

BAPTISM AT APCH

The Bible says that all professing Christians should be baptized (Matthew 28:18-20). Whether you've been following Jesus for a long time and never got baptized or are a new Christian, we would be honored to baptize you!

The American Protestant Church of The Hague (APCH), along with whole Christian church, recognizes baptism as the sacrament or ordinance by which God's people are formally received into the Christian church. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave this assurance and command to His church before His ascension into heaven:

“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.”

Therefore, we baptize in response to this command and recognized that “just as water washes away the dirt from our bodies, baptism reminds us that our sins are washed away with Christ's blood and that the Holy Spirit renews us and sets us apart to live a new life” (from the APCH statement of faith).

As an international church, APCH rejoices in God's gift to us of Christians from around the world and from diverse denominations and communions. As a result, this congregation has said that we will not let baptism divide us. Quite the contrary, Christian baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit unites us as people young and old, under the blessing and authority of Triune God. Therefore, we welcome and administer both “infant baptism” and “believer baptism” in the life of the church. We encourage our members to prayerfully and carefully discern their own understandings of the sacrament. This is often done in the context of the denominations or communions through which God has formed them. But then we ask them to hold their positions humbly, respecting other understandings held by brothers and sisters of the catholic (universal) church worshipping here.

A complete explanation for the biblical reasoning for each position is beyond the purpose of this page. However, we offer here a short summary of the biblical perspective on the two basic positions.

Believer's Baptism and Infant Dedication

Those in God's Church who practice “infant dedication” and “believer baptism” understand a passage like Acts 2:38 to be normative for all Christians: “Repent and be

baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” In this part of the Christian church, it is argued that infants and young children are, of course, not capable of repenting. Therefore, they should not be baptized. Therefore, these parents dedicate their children to the Lord, much like Hannah dedicated Samuel to God (1 Samuel 1:11) and Mary dedicated Jesus (Luke 2:22). The parents promise to raise their children in the way of Christian discipleship so that, they pray, one day their children will repent of their sins, confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, be baptized as believers, and grow as life-long disciples of Jesus.

Consistent with this understanding of baptism, here at APCH we offer “infant or child dedication” for those who desire this. Then, when youth or adults come to the point of repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we offer believer baptism.

Infant Baptism and Confirmation/Profession of Faith

Those in God’s church who practice “infant baptism” and “confirmation” or “Profession of Faith” understand the Bible to indicate that God gives the sacramental sign of welcome into God’s covenant community to all who enter in, whether by birth or by faith in Christ as new believers. In this part of the Christian church, it is argued that God formed a covenant community beginning with Abraham and Sarah, and commanded that infant boys be circumcised as a sign that they were received by God as part of God’s community (Genesis 17:1-14). As New Testament Christians, we continue to be children of God’s covenant community in Abraham (Galatians 3:26-29). Therefore, the Christians see that their infant children, and all who enter the Christian church, should receive the sign of the covenant, which in the New Testament is now baptism. With this understanding of God’s covenant, passages like Acts 2:38-39 and Acts 16:33 are important testimonies of God’s salvation sign for infants and believers alike.

Sometimes people wrongly think that “infant baptism” assures the children of salvation, no matter what kind of life they lead. It does not. Rather, it is understood as a sign and seal from the Triune God that the child is welcomed into God’s covenant family, is offered the fullness of God’s promises, and will grow to one day profess faith, or be confirmed as a believer, in the faith in which they have been nurtured. At that point, they profess faith in Christ for salvation, a salvation promised by God in their baptism and now “confirmed” in their own expression of faith.

Consistent with this understanding of baptism, here at APCH we also offer “infant baptism.” At the age of faith, when the youth or adult expresses a desire to affirm the

faith that they have been nurtured in, we offer “confirmation” or “profession of faith” for those who desire this.

The Mode of Baptism

The APCH constitution says the following: “The Sacrament of Baptism – or, if so desired, Infant Dedication – shall be administered by the Pastor in an appropriate Christian mode approved by the denomination of the parents, guardian, or person to be baptized or dedicated.” Here, again, we at APCH want to practice freedom for parents and believing youth or adults to discern the mode of baptism. While God’s church has debated and divided over “immersion, pouring or sprinkling,” we again rejoice in the unity that God gives us all in Christ, whatever mode of water baptism is administered.

Therefore, as is the traditional practice of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches that practice infant baptism, we “sprinkle” (sometimes generously) infants with the baptismal waters of the sacrament. Young people and adults may choose the mode, whether it be a “sprinkling” in a worship service at APCH or a full immersion in the North Sea, often the early morning of Easter.

The Congregation and the Baptized

At APCH, the baptized infant or believer is never a believer all alone; the whole church rejoices and supports them in this. Therefore, at baptisms, the whole congregation promises to receive the infants and believers with joy and support them in our mutual life in Christ. In this, we rejoice to be God’s people together, worshipping God the Father, growing in the grace of the Lord Christ Jesus, and serving in the power of the Spirit.

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