

Key Stage 4

Baptism (Practices)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Understand** the symbolic purpose and origins of Christian baptism.
- **Understand** the debate surrounding infant and adult baptism, focusing on the Baptist Church.
- **Reflect on** the institutional value of baptism, as well as its spiritual significance.

PRIOR LEARNING

Students will consider the arguments surrounding infant baptism so this lesson would work best coming after an introductory lesson to the topic of baptism.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1: BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE

LESSON CONTENT

- Give students in small groups or pairs just one minute to brainstorm everything they know about Christian baptism. Share answers.
- Read the first Bible passage (John 3) on p. 4 and answer questions around the edges.

Ask students to suggest what the idea of 'birth in water' signifies in this passage.

Do students think baptism was something Jesus developed? Teach that in fact it was a widespread practice to symbolise commitment, spiritual cleansing and spiritual rebirth.

- Read the passage at the bottom of p. 4 (Matthew 3) and answer the questions.

Ask students if this passage happens chronologically before or after the above passage from John. (It happens before.) Ensure students can identify who baptises Jesus – a man called John the Baptist.

Explain that John the Baptist led a Jewish messianic movement. He was already teaching that a messiah will come, and baptism represented his followers cleaning themselves in preparation. After his own baptism Jesus recommends such a procedure to Nicodemus in John, implying that through being symbolically reborn humans can prepare themselves for God.

2: DISSENT

LESSON CONTENT

- a. Ask the class why, if Jesus was baptised as an adult, Christians baptise babies? Gather suggestions. Do the class think infant baptism is in the Bible? (Teacher notes: it is not in the Bible.)

Explain that a group of Christians called the Anabaptists refused to engage in infant baptisms during the Reformation. Why do students think this is the case? (Teacher notes: it is not in the Bible.)

Teach that during the Reformation period, arguments surrounding baptism raged. Some, such as the Anabaptists, argued that ‘Christendom had been in error since at least the second century’ (Ryrie 2017). Other reformers, including Luther and Calvin, felt that infant baptism was essential, even if not in the Bible. Without it, ‘the church would simply fall apart’ (Marshall 2009).

Extension: display these two quotations. They reflect the serious nature of the challenge to infant baptism, as well as the significance of infant baptism.

- b. Look at images of modern Baptist churches with baptisteries; a pool of water for full submersion of someone who is to be baptised. Find clips on YouTube of this modern Baptist practice. Ask students to suggest reasons why Baptists do not engage in infant baptism. Explain that all biblical examples of baptism are of adults making a commitment of their own.

NB: students might ask about Anabaptists, studied in other lessons in this series. Although they also reject infant baptism, they are not the ancestors of the Baptist Church. Originally the group who became known as Baptists were called Separatists. The Anabaptists splintered into smaller groups which still exist in Europe and the US, such as the Amish and Mennonites.

Ryrie, A. (2017), *Protestants: The Faith that Made the Modern World* (London: Viking).

Marshall, P. (2009), *The Reformation: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

3: BAPTISM AS INITIATION

LESSON CONTENT

- a. Show images of various churches conducting infant baptisms, such as Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican. As a class, collate a list of the ways infant baptism keeps the Church community together, even if it is not biblical. For example, it brings children into the church, offers support to new parents, celebrates a new baby, etc.
- b. Discuss whether infant baptism is more useful to the Church than the recipients. Ask students to discuss how far baptism offers the Church a means of ensuring membership, rather than as something which is spiritually meaningful to a baby or small child.
- c. Teach that two churches who do not practice infant baptism, the Baptist and Pentecostal churches, nevertheless conduct services to dedicate a child to God and the community. Ask the class how an infant dedication differs from baptism. (Does not require the child's conscious commitment.)

Give pairs two minutes to discuss why the Pentecostal and Baptist churches will still have infant dedications. Listen to various answers.

Discuss as a class how far **infant** baptism maintains church institutions, how far it provides support for parents of new babies and how far it supports the child's spiritual journey. Ask pairs to sketch a pie chart, expressing the purpose of each of these categories as a slice of the pie. Ask pairs to explain how they have sized their slices.

Extension: let students add any other purposes for infant baptism.

Baptism in the Bible

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.’

Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’

‘How can someone be born when they are old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’

Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.’

John 3:1-6

What religion was Nicodemus?

What did Nicodemus want to know about Jesus?

What does Jesus say is required in order to ‘see the kingdom of God’?

How does Jesus describe being ‘born again’?

The Baptism of Jesus

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?’

Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.’ Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’

Matthew 3:13-17

Who did Jesus ask to baptise him?

Why do you think John was reluctant?

On what grounds did Jesus insist?

List the 3 things that happened as soon as Jesus had been baptised:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Baptism in the specs

<p>AQA Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of sacrament. • The sacrament of baptism and its significance for Christians, infant and believers’ baptism, different beliefs about infant baptism. 	<p>WJEC Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse beliefs regarding sacraments. • The role, meaning and celebration of baptism, John 3:3-6. • Diverse interpretations of baptism with reference to the beliefs of the Catholic and Protestant churches. 	<p>Edexcel A & B</p> <p>The role of the sacraments in Christian life and their practice in two denominations: the role of the sacraments/ordinance as a whole; the nature and importance of the meaning and celebration of baptism in at least two denominations, including reference to the 39 Articles XXV-XXXVI; divergent Christian attitudes towards the use and number of sacraments in Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions.</p>
<p>OCR Practices</p> <p>The role and meaning of the sacraments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of baptism in the life of a Christian. • Common and divergent attitudes towards the practice and meaning of baptism. • Common and divergent attitudes towards the Sacraments, including which practices are considered by different Christian denominations to be a sacrament. • Different interpretations and emphases given to sources of wisdom and authority. 		<p>OCR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 3:13-17