

## MEANING OF THE SACRAMENTS

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BAPTIZED?

There are many meanings to the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism is universally regarded among Christians as the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ. It is the sacrament of entry into the communion of the Church. In baptism we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection. In the vows spoken and declarations of faith made, we die to what separates us from God and are raised to newness of life in Christ.

The water of baptism symbolizes the biblical waters of Creation, of the Flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt. It links us to the goodness of God's creation, and to the grace of God expressed in covenants with Noah and Israel. In His ministry, Jesus offered the gift of living water. Baptism is therefore also the sign and seal of God's grace and the new covenant in Christ.

For Israel in the Old Testament, the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's covenant people was circumcision. Baptism in the New Testament is the sign and symbol of inclusion in the Church. As an identifying mark, baptism signifies the faithfulness of God, the washing away of sin, the new birth by the Spirit, putting on the fresh garment of Christ, being sealed as God's own child by the Holy Spirit, adoption into God's family, and the resurrection of Christ.

The body of Christ is one, and Baptism is the bond of unity in Christ. As they are united with Christ through faith, the people of God are united with each other and with the church of every time and place through the sacrament of baptism.

God's faithfulness signified in Baptism is constant and sure, even when human faithfulness to God is not. Baptism is received only once for Baptism signifies the beginning of life in Christ, not its completion. God's faithfulness needs no renewal. Human faithfulness to God needs repeated renewal. Baptism calls for decision at every stage of life.

Bel Air Church recognizes and practices all modes of baptism: by sprinkling, the pouring of water, and by full immersion. Baptism is offered several times a year to adults on profession of their faith in Christ, and to the children of believing parents as a sign of their inclusion in the covenant of grace.

## MEANING OF THE SACRAMENTS (cont'd.)

### WHAT IS THE MEANING OF COMMUNION?

The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of eating and drinking in communion with the crucified and risen Christ. The Apostle Paul delivered to the Church the tradition he had received from the risen Lord, who commanded that his followers share the bread and cup as a remembrance and a showing forth of his death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). The New Testament describes the meal as a participation in Christ and with one another in the expectation of the Kingdom of God and as a foretaste of the messianic banquet. In Communion, we celebrate this meal in the real presence of Christ with thanksgiving, remembering the ongoing grace of God through the suffering Christ endured and His triumph over death.

The invitation to the Lord's Supper is extended to all who have put their faith in Christ, remembering that access to the Table is not a right conferred upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance,, and love. In preparing to receive Christ in this Sacrament, the believer is to confess sin and brokenness, to seek reconciliation with God and neighbor, and to trust in Jesus Christ for cleansing and renewal. Even one who doubts or whose trust is wavering may come to the Table in order to be assured of God's love and grace in Christ Jesus.