

An Introduction to
Anglicanism,
Baptism,
& Eucharist



What is Anglicanism?

“Anglicanism is a worldwide body of Christians responding to God’s revelation through Jesus Christ. Anglicanism brings together the authority of the Bible, the historic faith, and the beauty of structured prayer. It is rooted in tradition, yet contemporary in practice. It is united in substance, yet diverse in expression. We are a global family living out our faith in local communities.”

—The Anglican Church in North America

What do Anglicans believe?

We emphasize first those essential beliefs that have united Christians in all places at all times. Anglicans hold the Bible to be our primary source of authority, and we also stand with the historic church in accepting the summary of this Biblical faith as expressed in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. For a more recent summary of our historic Christian faith, see the Jerusalem Declaration (gafcon.org/about/jerusalem-statement).

Baptism

Members of Church of the Lamb aren’t required to agree to the practice of infant baptism. But we do think it’s important that our members understand this practice is based on a historic reading of the Scriptures and the practices of Christians throughout Church history. Here’s a brief explanation for why we baptize infants and children at Church of the Lamb.

History

A quick survey of Church history will show that the practice of infant baptism is undeniable from the third century onward. The evidence is slightly less certain during the first two centuries AD; however, the most likely reading of this evidence is that infant baptism was practiced from the beginning of the church. The Christian faith was passed directly from the Apostle John to Polycarp, then to Irenaeus, then to Hippolytus, who baptized infants in AD 215. If Hippolytus's baptismal practices were innovative, there should be some evidence of it in the historical record, but there is none. If infant baptism was the standard practice of Christians at least from AD 215, if not from the beginning, then what did they understand it to mean? After all, baptism today symbolizes different things to different people. For some, it is a kind of "stamp of salvation," guaranteeing a person's eternal security. For others, it is a kind of public testimony, a way of declaring one's commitment to Christianity. Over the centuries, these and many other varied and conflicting meanings have developed.

Scripture

From what we can tell from the Scriptures and other historical evidence, baptism in the New Testament era was an outward sign of inclusion into the Christian community. For example, see Acts 2:41, in which baptism signified being counted among the Christians. In other words, baptism demonstrated membership. It signified among Christians what circumcision did among Jews: inclusion among God's people (Cf. Colossians 2:11-12).

In the Old Testament, circumcision was for infants and children as well as adults. Abraham was circumcised, and his children, and all Hebrew children after that (Genesis 17:12; 19:11). When Christians began practicing baptism as their symbol of inclusion, it is reasonable to assume that they followed the Hebrew tradition, as they did in so many other things, and baptized the infants and children of believing Christian parents. The New Testament never teaches otherwise. Of the ten baptisms mentioned in the New Testament, five are of individual converts to Christianity, and five include families, or “households.” We are never told the ages of those in the household, but it is highly unlikely that all five ancient families contained only children over the age of, say, twelve years old.

Sadly, sometimes people within the Christian community reject the Christian faith, whether in word or by deed. This was true also of Jews in the Old Testament. The command to “circumcise your hearts” was repeated by the prophets (Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4) as a way of exhorting the Jews to make their inward spiritual life consistent with the outward sign. As with the Israelites, so also today there are those in the Church who have the sign of baptism but lack an inward reality of Christian faith.

At different times throughout the history of the church, there have been various attempts to resolve this problem. At one point, in the early church it became common to delay baptism until one’s deathbed, so that there was no time for post-baptismal backsliding. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, some Protestants began to delay baptism until such time as a person is able to make a “mature” profession of faith, subject to the prevailing definition of maturity.

But delaying baptism tends to cause more problems than it solves. There are still those who abandon the faith after adult baptism. Meanwhile, the people of God misunderstand the meaning of baptism as a corporate sign in the New Testament. This leads to increasing individualism and undermines Christian community.

At Church of the Lamb

At Church of the Lamb, we believe it is important that our families raise their children in such a way that they never know a day apart from Christ. This means that we teach them to pray, worship, study, sacrifice, serve, and witness as Christians from birth. We treat them as real Christians, and expect them to live as such.

We baptize children upon the profession of faith of their parents, a promise that they will be raised in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. Likewise, we admit them to the Lord's table.

The difficulty of objectifying true conversion lies in the fact that we are becoming more converted all the time. The same goes for Christian children. A believer at age five has a much more robust faith than a believer at age two. Likewise, a believer at age ten in comparison with a five year old. Likewise a thirty something in comparison to a teenager. If this is the case for all of us for the rest of our lives, is there any good reason why we should delay baptism for those who are growing in Christ day by day?

Eucharist

The Lord's Supper is for the Lord's Children

It is a meal in celebration of the redemption he has won for us. All those to whom this salvation belongs are appropriate guests at the Lord's Table. Participation in the Lord's Supper is participation in Christ. To deny this meal to those who participate in Christ is a travesty of the one body in which we all share. Our covenant children are members of Christ's body and share in Christ. They should therefore share in the one bread and drink of the same cup of blessing which we drink. However this is not to suggest that the warnings [of] 1 Corinthians 11:27–30 have no relevance for children. Participants in the covenant meal are required to be in covenantal fellowship, and that covenantal fellowship is evidenced, through God's grace, by covenantal obedience. Yet it is a mistake to judge the faithfulness of an individual solely in terms of mature self-understanding or an articulate profession of faith. Evidence of covenant standing is not correlative to one's age. An understanding appropriate to the age, however, does not necessarily imply that children have the ability to articulate the meaning of the sacrament in adult thought forms.

Conversely, an inability to give an articulate explanation of the relationship a child sustains to his or her parents does not mean that they have an incorrect understanding of their relationship to them. There is much that may be deficient about our own understanding of the Lord's Supper, as indeed there was for the twelve apostles who first took of it with their Master. Yet the immaturity of their

understanding did not prevent their participation in that Supper. The importance of Paul's warnings, however, is whether or not the child is remaining faithful to the covenant in which he or she stands. To deny them the Lord's Supper is to effectively discipline them in the same way we would do a covenant breaker. Their exclusion is tantamount to identifying them with the world, unworthy to eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord. Yet our children belong to God, by the sure promise of his Word signed and sealed in baptism. Let us then feed them with the blessing of Christ, and teach them through the Supper that the privilege of union and communion with Christ belongs to them. The Lord's Supper is for the Lord's Children.

(Bishop Glenn Davies, "The Lord's Supper for the Lord's Children," *Reformed Theological Review* 50.1 (1991) 12-20.)



Church
of the Lamb