

PREPARING FOR BAPTISM

If you are thinking about getting baptised, these notes will help you to fully understand both the significance of the event and the practicalities involved in the service.

If, having read this, you would like to get baptised, please contact Becky Stamps, becky@birminghamvineyard.com

Who can get baptised?

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward truth: that we have 'died' to our old life and decided to trust and follow Jesus. Faith is an invisible, intangible thing that needs to be expressed in action. We can show people what they cannot see: that our faith is in Jesus Christ. This is a simple but very important principle that is stressed again and again in the New Testament. *We must become a follower of Christ before we can think about being baptised.*

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved... Mark 16:15-16

While you do not have to have been baptised to worship or serve as part of Birmingham Vineyard, *we do only baptise people who have been members of our community for at least few months.* This is because we want everyone who is being baptised to be known and supported. Baptism is an important spiritual marker but it does not make us Christians or automatically members of a worshipping community. Our hope is that baptism will be one step in your journey with Jesus and that your time at Vineyard will be one where you grow and thrive in your faith. If you are not part of a small group, have not attended more than a few Sunday meetings and have not gone through either Alpha or another course with us (such as Rooted) we will probably ask that you wait to be baptised until you are certain that our community is the right place for you.

...and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised. Acts 18:8

Finally, although baptism is often linked with salvation, the Bible never suggests that we can experience a spiritual change of heart by being baptised. A person is not baptised to make them a Christian or to try to deal with a specific sin or issue in their life; rather, it is to show that they are already a Christian

and Jesus is already at work in them. This does not mean you have to be perfect (by any means!) but *if there is considerable sin in your life that you are unwilling or unable to let go of*, we may (in consultation with your small group leaders) ask you to wait until you have had some time to work through these things before you take the step of baptism.

Considering carefully

When we baptise people we ask them the following three questions:

- Do you confess Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour?
- Do you turn away from everything you know to be wrong or sinful?
- Do you promise to follow Jesus Christ all the days of your life?

If you are unable to honestly answer 'yes' to all of these questions, then please speak to your small group leader or to another member of the team before putting yourself forward for baptism.

Why get baptised?

In baptism, we identify with Jesus in his three great acts that made us alive to God: his death, his burial and his resurrection. Paul sums up the Christian message by linking these all together.

Christ died for our sins... he was buried... He was raised on the third day... 1 Corinthians 15:3,4

INTO THE WATER: DEATH

As we go down into the water, we are saying in effect, that just as Jesus Christ died for our sin on the cross, so we have died to sin in our lives. Following Jesus is about laying down our lives so we can come alive to God's purpose for us.

...count yourselves as dead to sin...

Romans 6:11

UNDER THE WATER: BURIAL

A dead person must be buried. Just as Jesus was buried in the tomb, so when we are lowered beneath the water our past lives are regarded as being over, put out of sight.

[we are] buried with him through baptism

Romans 6:4

OUT OF THE WATER: RESURRECTION

Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God. We are lifted from the water to live a new, distinctive life in Jesus.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20

PREPARING FOR THE DAY

Preparing spiritually

Baptism is often a very special moment for a follower of Jesus, when they get to make a public declaration of their faith in front of their family and community by doing something Jesus himself did at the beginning of his earthly ministry.

In the weeks leading up to your baptism, you could read slowly through one of the Gospels, or follow a devotional plan to connect you afresh with Jesus and what he has done for you. There are several devotionals on apps like YouVersion that might help you, including one which is specifically for people preparing for baptism.

It's also wise to consider asking other people to pray for you in the run-up to your baptism – perhaps your family, members of your small group, or others you can trust and who love you and Jesus. Be specific and as honest as you can in your prayer requests: for courage to tell your story (or just for being onstage!), for any unbelieving friends or family to come along, or for anything else that's on your mind.

Inviting people along

Your baptism is a wonderful opportunity to invite everyone you know along to celebrate with you and to see something of your faith. Your family, friends, colleagues, are all welcome to come along to church at any time, but especially at your baptism. You may be surprised at how many people will be interested in your story, respect your decision and want to support you! *Please let us know (at least roughly!) how many guests you expect to bring along to your baptism, so we can prepare the welcome team and reserve seating for them with a good view of the baptistery.*

Making an ace baptism video

People love listening to personal stories and there is nothing as special as hearing how Jesus has worked wonderfully in a person's life. Telling your story will help to encourage others and show that God is personal and works uniquely in every individual.

As Big Church is a large space and can be daunting (especially on a day when you may have lots of friends coming and things going through your mind!), we ask baptism candidates to make short videos of their story or 'testimony' so we can show them during the service. We'll arrange a time to film this with you in the weeks before your baptism, usually at our office building (our City Centre site).

Your video will last 2-3 minutes. In order for it to be as good as it can, you will find it helpful to write some notes for yourself beforehand, detailing what you want to say.

When you are preparing your story, you are essentially answering these three questions:

1. What was my life like before I met Jesus?
2. How did I meet Jesus and what happened next?
3. What is my life like now?

Your small group leaders or a Christian friend can help you prepare your story if you want them to. Remember, your story is special and unique to you, a 'testimony' or witness to how God has worked in your life, so you can tell it with confidence.

For each section, one or two highlights that illustrate the most important aspects for you are more than enough. If there are topics you want covered sensitively (for instance, a negative experience with someone who may be in the room when you get baptised) discuss this with Mike before filming so that he can help you shape the story well and make sure the edited piece reflects what you really want to say.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE ACTUAL SERVICE?

Who will baptise me?

One of our leadership team will be in the water to baptise you and to ask you the baptism questions (see previous page). For safety, we like to have two people in the water with each baptism candidate. If you would like to ask someone else to be in the water with you, perhaps someone who has been significant in your story of coming to know Jesus, we are happy for them to help baptise you. *We will need to know who they are before the day, and they will need to bring a change of clothes and a towel (as will you!).*

If you are asking someone to baptise you who isn't a member for BV staff, please make sure they get a copy of the separate document *Baptising someone at Birmingham Vineyard*.

If you don't have someone to ask, one of our staff team or leaders will be very happy to baptise you.

You may also like to have someone meet you from the pool with your towel - alternatively, you can leave it at the side of the stage to pick up.

What do I wear?

Please do not wear white clothing, as it becomes transparent when wet! Women are usually best off wearing a swimsuit under their normal clothing. Trousers, leggings or shorts and a dark-coloured t-shirt work well: skirts have a tendency to float. Men are best not to wear tight swim shorts, instead wearing loose trousers or shorts and a dark-coloured t-shirt. You can wear flip-flops or just go barefoot, and you'll need a towel and a change of clothes. There are changing rooms round the back of the stage at the venue so you'll have privacy and space to change afterwards.

When should I arrive?

We usually do baptisms at our Big Church services, as these are times when all our sites and services come together and celebrate what God has been doing.

These services start at 3:30pm, however you should aim to arrive just before 3pm. At 3pm, there will be a tour of the building for baptism candidates and time to drop off your change of clothes in the changing rooms. Around 3:15 you will be able to re-join your guests for a quick tea or coffee before the service starts. The baptisms are normally at the end of the service, at around 4:30pm, but you will be given a running order on the day, which will be as accurate as possible.

What should I do in the pool?

The water is 'ambient', warm enough to be comfortable for a few minutes. You, and the person baptising you, will come up to the front when asked to do so by the service leader and stand to the left of the stage (as you look at it). If you stand in the order you'll be baptised in, that makes it easier. Each person's video will be played before their baptism: when your video starts, move with your extra person across the stage and down the steps into the water. People will probably clap and cheer after your video is done: when they've stopped, the team member baptising you will ask you the three questions above. Please answer 'yes' in a clear voice into the microphone.

Please stand about $\frac{3}{4}$ the way towards the far end of the pool (far enough that you don't hit your head as you go backwards). Place your hands across your chest: this keeps your centre of gravity in the right place to easily bring you back up. If you want to, you can hold your nose closed. Those baptising you will then place one hand on your crossed arms and one hand on your back, gently pushing you back into the water and up again. It is an unusual feeling to be taken underwater by other people, and it can feel strange. Please relax at this point and let the people baptising you gently push you under and bring you up again – this won't take more than a second or two.

Once you are done, you (and your other person if you have one) can walk up the steps at the opposite end to the one you came in by, along the mats by the drum booth, off the stage and round into the changing areas.

What next?

If you would like to be baptised, please speak to your small group leader, or contact the Birmingham Vineyard office, 0121 6221230 or email Becky Stamps, becky@birminghamvineyard.com

BAPTISM CHECKLIST

- I can answer 'yes' to all three baptism questions
- I consider myself to be part of the community at Birmingham Vineyard
- I've let the office know that I want to be baptised
- I've arranged a time to video my testimony
- I've invited all the friends, family colleague and neighbours I can
- I know who is baptising me (including any friends I've asked)
- I've asked the office/Becky to reserve a number of seats for my guests if necessary
- I've packed a towel and a change of clothes

Have fun and enjoy your baptism!

