



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

Do Lutherans re-baptize former Mormons who are joining the congregation?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.

To answer this question, we need to address the following questions:

1. Should Lutherans re-baptize?
2. What do Mormons believe and practice regarding baptism?
3. What is the relationship between baptism and joining the congregation?

1. Should Lutherans rebaptize?

Lutherans are among those Christians who do not re-baptize. Rebaptism suggests that something needs to be repeated. For Lutherans, and for many other Christian churches as well, the promise of God in Christian Baptism is once for all and sufficient for anyone. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's statement *The Use of the Means of Grace* sets forth the priorities for this church in its practices of word and sacrament. On the matter of rebaptism:

A person is baptized once. Because of the unfailing nature of God's promise, and because of God's once-for-all action in Christ, Baptism is not repeated (Principal 16).

'Re-baptism' is to be avoided since it causes doubt, focusing attention on the always-failing adequacy of our action or our faith. Baptized persons who come to new depth of conviction in faith are invited to an Affirmation of Baptism in the life of the congregation (Application 16 B).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints presents one situation for considering the matter of rebaptism. In Luther's day, questions concerning the validity of Baptism usually related to the liturgical ingredients of the ceremony. Few groups claiming to be Christian but unrecognized by the church catholic were baptizing. In the Small Catechism, Luther identifies two chief parts in the sacrament: water and God's Word:

What is Baptism? Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead, it is water use according to God's command and connected with God's Word.

What then is this word of God? Where our Lord Christ says in Matthew 28, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."¹

Today, our questions about Baptism ask more than "Was water used?" and "Were the words 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' used?" When Christians baptize, they do so trusting that God will act to join the baptized to the life of the Holy Trinity—one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This faith is found where a genuine Christian Baptism has occurred. We believe we were baptized in the name of the Triune God. This leads to the next part of our question.

2. What do Mormons believe and practice regarding Baptism?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints does not hold the traditional Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity. Rather, it seems to treat each person of the Trinity as a separate deity. Because the faith of the church is different from Mormon teaching, whether or not Mormon baptism is a Christian Baptism is a valid question.

Outside the context of trinitarian life and teaching no Christian Baptism takes place, whatever liturgical formula may be used. *The Use of the Means of Grace*, Application 24D).

The last statement moves us beyond issues about the rite of Holy Baptism and points us to consider the teaching of the church and its faith in a trinitarian God. Although Mormons may use water—and lots of it—and while they may say "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," their teaching about the nature of God is substantially different from that of orthodox, creedal Christianity. Because the Mormon understanding of the Word of God is not the same as the Christian understanding, it is correct to say that Christian Baptism has not taken place. A former Mormon joining an ELCA congregation may be offered Christian Baptism (not rebaptism).

To offer Christian Baptism rather than rebaptism poses a difficult pastoral question. If a former Mormon is anxious to embrace orthodox Christian teaching and practice and is looking to make a radical break from former memberships, then the invitation to Christian Baptism is likely to be welcomed. On the other hand, former Mormons seeking to maintain continuity with Mormonism may see the suggestion that they are not baptized or have not been Christian as an attack on who they have understood themselves to be. Finding a way to welcome former Mormons who are not ready for a complete break with their past fellowship may require gentle and wise pastoral care.

There may be occasions when people are uncertain about whether or not they have been baptized. Pastors, after supportive conversation and discernment, may choose to proceed with the baptism. The practice of this church and its congregations needs to incorporate the person into the community and its ongoing catechesis and to proclaim the sure grace of God in Christ, avoiding any sense of Baptism being repeated. *The Use of the Means of Grace*, application 16C).

¹ Luther, Martin. "The Small Catechism" in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, © 2000, Fortress Press (p. 359). This is reprinted in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pg. 1164.

3. What is the relationship between Baptism and joining the congregation?

The third issue raised by this question has to do with Baptism and membership in a Lutheran congregation. Baptism marks the relationship between individuals, the church universal, and a particular congregation.

In Baptism people become members not only of the Church universal but also of a particular congregation. Therefore all baptisms are entered into the permanent records of the congregation and certificates are issued at the time of the administration of the sacrament (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 29).

We understand that the local worshipping community is where the sacramental life of this church is most regularly experienced.

Candidates for Holy Baptism, sponsors, and an ordained minister called by the Church gather together with the congregation for the celebration of Baptism within the corporate worship of the Church. (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 21)

Baptism also welcomes the baptized person to Holy Communion.

Admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized (*The Use of the Means of Grace* Principle 37).

Preparing persons to join the congregation who are coming from other faith traditions means carefully instructing them in the sacrament.

RESOURCES

[Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website:](#)

- ☞ *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997. (Available in English and Spanish)
- ☞ *Principles for Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available in English and Spanish)

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