

The Difference Between Child Dedication and Baptism

Real Life Ministries is comprised of people from various church backgrounds and traditions. For this reason we want to be sure that your questions regarding the difference between child dedication and baptism are well explained.

DEDICATION

Child dedication is truly a parent commitment service. It's the parent's promise to offer their child to the Lord and to dedicate themselves to rearing their child for the glory of God.

OUR GOAL IS TO:

- Help parents recognize that they are stewards of God's gift of children.
- Facilitate the parent's verbal commitment to raise their child in a Christian environment.
- Challenge parents to be examples in service and worship for their children.
- Assist parents in laying a firm foundation of learning about God and an example of the power of salvation for their child.

Parents cannot decide their child's salvation. Each person must make the decision to have a personal relationship with Christ. When children are old enough to understand the concept of sin and the responsibility for that sin, then they are ready to make the decision to accept Christ as their personal savior and assure eternal salvation. Parents must however, lay a foundation through teaching and example that will help children to make that decision at the right time. The same is true of marriage. We cannot decide when or if our children will marry and we cannot guarantee them a happy marriage. But through positive example, we can lay a foundation for making good decisions when the time comes. Dedication is not baptism. It is not a sacrament of any kind. It does not impart salvation on the child. Dedication is the parent's commitment to God to raise the child in His ways.

Real Life Ministries dedicates children because we read in Luke 2:22-25 that as a baby, his parents dedicated Jesus. In Mark 10:16 we see Jesus bestowing blessings on the children. The Dedication ceremony is a time to publicly make that commitment to pray for the child, love the child and guide the child toward a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

BAPTISM

The Bible tells us in Acts 8:12 and 13 that all believers are to be baptized. Jesus asks us to be baptized and modeled this to us by being baptized as an adult. Real Life Ministries does not baptize children until they are old enough to articulate their understanding and belief. The Bible tells us that baptism is a symbol of Christ's burial and resurrection. It is a symbol of new life in Christ -- a symbol that tells others that you are a believer. Much like a wedding ring, it shows to the world around whose we are and to whom we are committed.

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Romans 6:4 NIV

People often ask what happens if a baby or young child dies. A baby does not need to be baptized to go to heaven. A child is under God's spiritual care until old enough to make a decision for Christ. Salvation is guaranteed to children who die before the age of accountability. This is based on the nature of God as revealed through Christ. The child has not yet come to the age when he can accept or reject Christ. Therefore, Christ's atonement covers all who die before reaching the age of accountability.

