

Why Wait? Is there a minimum age for baptism?

As a matter of policy, we do not set an age requirement. The Bible does not give us a precise age at which we should baptize children. All that we can biblically infer is that a child must be able to give a credible profession of faith. Therefore, we depend on the candidate's parents (or mentor) to discern when the young person is ready to begin the preparation process.

While we have not established a minimum age requirement for baptism, we recommend encouraging young people to wait until at least age 11 or 12 before beginning this process for several reasons. As parents consider a candidate's readiness to be baptized, there are four things we encourage you to wait for:

1. Wait for Understanding: Children can confess faith in Christ when they are very young but they will likely not be able to contemplate the significance of the baptism until they are older. It is important for children to understand the meaning of the ordinance and also have enough maturity to understand the significance of this act of obedience.
2. Wait for More Independent Thinking: It is not uncommon for those who were baptized during their pre-teen years to feel a need to be "re-baptized" when they are older. Memories of the first decade of our lives are often fuzzy at best. Even if we do remember a decision or an event like baptism, we usually cannot recall any reasoning behind the decision or event. Once a young person has the capacity for reasoning and more independent thinking, he is more likely to embrace the decisions and commitments he makes as his own. Therefore, it is reasonable that we refrain from baptizing a child until he is more likely to remember the experience and more fully embrace the commitment that is represented by this public declaration of faith. We want individuals to look back on this experience with the knowledge that it reflected a conscious and sincere resolve to follow the Lord on their own.
3. Wait for Significance: Encouraging a child to wait until he is more mature reinforces the significance of baptism. This is especially true in a "me-oriented" culture that reinforces a mistaken notion that "if you want it, you can have it and you can have it now". Our hope is that as a child waits, there will be a growing sense of anticipation as the candidate looks forward to following the Lord in the obedience of baptism. Such anticipation can add meaning and significance to the experience when the baptism eventually takes place.
4. Wait for Maturity: The process for preparing a young person for baptism is designed to instruct and encourage young people in their faith. It also is designed to help parents and church leadership discern the candidate's readiness for baptism, including an examination of the spiritual fruit in the candidate's life. As a result, most children younger than age 11 or 12 may lack the intellectual (understanding meaning and significance of baptism) and spiritual maturity (demonstrating fruits of faith and repentance) to satisfactorily complete the process. In addition, we see baptism as a potential experience in a young person's life that marks the "coming of age" – the time when a person puts "childhood" behind and picks up the mantle of maturity.