



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

What are the practices for remembering and affirming baptism?

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.

We are baptized once, but every Sunday, we are reminded of our baptism. Every day we live out our baptismal callings. To quote Luther's frequently asked question, "what does this mean?" What does it mean to "remember baptism?" How does this differ from Affirmation of Baptism?

Remembering Baptism

Background

We remember baptism in our daily life and in our worship life. This entry will focus on the second dimension, remembering baptism in worship. For more on baptism and daily life, see the resource list below.

In the *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Christian Life*, the authors lift up the centrality of baptism in worship:

As an expression of its central place in the life of the Christian community, baptism has a natural home within the pattern of the assembly's worship. Because we understand baptism as the wellspring of Christian living, we can see significant parallels between the celebration of baptism and the pattern for Christian Worship" (p. 49).

By meeting together as an assembly of believers, we are, in a very real sense, remembering our baptism. What are some specific opportunities for such remembrance? We'll consider this by looking at the four parts of the worship service: Gathering, Word, Meal and Sending.

Practice: Baptism in the Pattern of Worship

Gathering

- **Confession and Forgiveness.** This option for gathering is centered in our baptism, in dying to sin and being made alive in Christ. "Absolution is a speaking and hearing of the Word of God and a return to Baptism" (*The*

Use of the Means of Grace, Application 12A). The presiding minister may lead this element from the font, making visible its baptismal resonance.

- **Thanksgiving for Baptism.** An alternative option especially suited to the Easter season. (See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 97; *Leaders Desk edition*, p. 18)

Word

- **Preaching and song.** Pastors and musicians wisely make connections between scripture and our baptismal life through the words we hear and sing.
- **Apostles' or Nicene Creed.** We declare the faith begun in our baptism through the reciting of the creed.
- **Prayers of Intercession** These prayers include petitions for the recently baptized or those to be baptized. When we pray for others, we are living out our baptism as a community in Christ.

Meal

- Baptism leads 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).
- Since Communion is given to the baptized, some congregations have the practice of communing infants and young children. (See [“At what age do congregation members receive their First Communion?”](#))

Sending

- The sending rite links our baptism in worship to baptism in our daily life. In baptism, we are welcomed to join the assembly in “bearing God’s creative and redeeming word to the world” (Holy Baptism, ELW p. 231). Announcing the dismissal from the font visibly connects worship with our Christian witness.
- The Affirmation of Christian Vocation (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 84; *Leaders’ Desk Edition*, p. 155) sends us forth from worship with a renewed sense of call to Christ’s mission (See *The Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 52). This document on word and sacramental practices continues:

Baptism and baptismal catechesis join the baptized to the mission of Christ...In the teaching and practice of congregations, the missional intentions for the means of grace needs to be recalled. By God’s gift, the Word and the sacraments are set in the midst of the world, for the life of the world (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, 51A/B).

For baptismal echoes at other times and in other occasions, see *The Christian Life* (pp. 35-40).

Practice: Signs and Symbols

Remembering our baptism is a multi-sensory experience. Consider the following aspects of baptismal remembrance in worship.

Placement of the font

- When the font is in a prominent location where it can be seen and gathered around, we have a tangible sign of baptism's centrality. "A baptismal font filled with water, placed in the assembly's worship space, symbolizes the centrality of this sacrament for faith and life (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 27). Such prominent locations include the entrance to the nave or in the front of the worship space.

Use of water at the font

- When the font is regularly kept filled with water, the assembly cannot only see the water (and hear it if the font is designed with running water), they can touch this water upon entering or leaving the worship space or at other times.

Sprinkling

- Sprinkling with water (also called asperges) often accompanies a Thanksgiving for Baptism (see ELW p. 97) or an Affirmation of Baptism (ELW p. 234). Usually during the singing of a hymn or song, the Presiding minister moves through the assembly, sprinkling water with an evergreen branch or special sprinkler called an [aspergillum](#). An assisting minister or acolyte holds a bowl of water and moves through the assembly with the presider. It is helpful for the Presiding Minister to sprinkle the water using the whole arm in an arc-like movement rather than just flicking the wrist. In this manner, large groups of people can feel the touch of the water at the same time.

The Sign of the cross

- Tracing the sign of the cross on our bodies, either with water or without, is a tangible reminder of being baptized. (See ["Why do Lutherans make the sign of the cross?"](#)).

The wearing of an Alb

- Though perhaps not readily thought of as a visual reminder of baptism, the wearing of the alb by worship leaders reminds us of our baptism. As a white garment is typically worn or given to the newly baptized, the white alb regularly reminds us of being clothed in Christ in baptism. (See ["What are vestments and paraments and Why are they used?"](#))
- When we gather for worship as an assembly, we do so as those washed and welcomed into Christ's body, the Church. Yet there are also times for a more formal remembrance of baptism, the rite of Affirmation of Baptism.

Affirmation of Baptism

Background

Affirmation of Baptism refers to a specific rite used in assembly worship. (See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 234; *Leader's Edition*, p.31). *The Use of the Means of Grace*, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's set of priorities for the practices of word and sacrament states:

The public rite for Affirmation of Baptism may be used at many times in the life of a baptized Christian. It is especially appropriate at Confirmation and at times of reception or restoration into membership (Principle 30).

Practice

Affirmation of Baptism is a "service designed to address a number of needs...and flexible enough to be used in a variety of circumstances" (*The Christian Life*, p. 97). What are some of these circumstances?

Occasions for Affirmation of Baptism¹

- **Confirmation**
- This is the most well known and widely practiced. For a concise history of the rite of confirmation and its inextricable links to baptism, see *The Christian Life: Baptism and Life Passages* in Resources.
- **Welcoming New Members/Transfer** (See *Occasional Services for the Assembly*). If a new member is not baptized, the Welcome to Baptism rite (ELW, p. 232) is appropriate.
- **Anniversary of a Congregation**
- **On Baptismal Festivals** ([See "What are baptismal festivals?"](#))
- When an assembly has no candidates to present for baptism on a scheduled baptismal festival date, the entire assembly can celebrate its baptismal identity with this rite.
- **Other times of congregational transition or renewal**

It is not advised to use the rite of Holy Baptism and the Affirmation of Baptism in the same service, simply due to the length and complexity of such a service. However, some instances may call for this combination. *Occasional Services for the Assembly* includes Holy Baptism with Affirmation of Baptism (pp. 75-81).

RESOURCES

[Frequently Asked Questions:](#)

- ☞ How can the centrality of baptism be renewed?
- ☞ What are baptismal festivals?
- ☞ At what age do congregation members receive their First Communion?
- ☞ Why do Lutherans make the sign of the cross?
- ☞ What are vestments and paraments and Why are they used?

¹ For thorough notes on the rite, see Bushkofsky, Dennis and Craig Satterlee. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Christian Life, Baptism and Life Passages*. (p. 116-121).

[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)
- 🎥 *These Things Matter: Word, Baptism, Communion.* Division for Congregational Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 1999. Video on sacramental practices.

[Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:](#)

- 📖 Burke, Suzanne and Martin Seltz, eds., *Worship Matters: An Introduction to Worship* Augsburg Fortress, 2012. (Leader edition and Participant edition also available separately).
- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Leaders Desk Edition.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Occasional Services for the Assembly.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.
- 📖 Bushkofsky, Dennis and Craig Satterlee. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Christian Life, Baptism and Life Passages.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- 📖 Lathrop, Gordon W. *Central Things: Worship in Word and Sacrament.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.
- 📖 Schnekloth, Clint. *Washed and Welcome: A Baptism Sourcebook.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010. This book is part of the Washed and Welcome series available from Augsburg Fortress.
- 📖 Torvend, Samuel. *Flowing Water, Uncommon Birth: Christian Baptism in a Post-Christian Culture.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011.

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