Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

You will have witnessed two types of baptism in this church. With the first, an adult professed faith and was then baptized. And this is the typical pattern that we see in the New Testament; people hear the preaching of the gospel, they respond by professing faith in the Lord Jesus, and they are baptized, because baptism is the sign of belonging to the covenant community.

So for want of a better word, we can call this type of baptism ordinary or normal baptism. But then we have to ask: What about their children? Should the children of believers also be baptized? And that is the other category of baptism that we want to think about this afternoon – the children of believers. And this is the other type of baptism that you will have seen in this church.

And we do this because, as we read in Answer 27, we believe that infants should also be baptized. The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it like this: “Not only those who personally profess faith in and obedience to Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized.”

But as we all know, there are many brothers and sisters in the wider Christian world who disagree with this teaching. So why, biblically, are we to baptize the children of believers? That is what we will consider together today. And this will be a topical sermon. We don’t have one Bible passage to work through, which is our usual sermon practice; we will consider several Bible passages and verses. And in terms of the structure of this sermon, I have borrowed from an article about the baptism of the children of believers written by Pastor Jason Van Bemmel. So we will begin with **One Foundational Truth about Baptism**, which we and our Baptist friends all agree on. And then we will consider **Seven Reasons Why We Ought to Baptize the Children of Believers**.

1. So first of all, **One Foundational Truth about Baptism**:And this foundational truth is that **the water of baptism does not save anyone**.
   1. If it did, we would go round and just try and baptize as many people as possible ☺ So what does save a person? Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; “*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved*,” said Paul to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16.
   2. Question and Answer 72 explains that the water of baptism does not wash away our sins; it is the blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit that cleanses us from all sins. And we call this ‘Spirit baptism.’ And it happens at the exact moment that someone believes.
   3. So in the case of an adult, here is the moment that they come to faith in Christ; this is their Spirit baptism. And this is what saved them. Sometime later they are baptized with water – maybe hours or days or weeks or even months later. That is when they receive the sign of what happened back then.
   4. And we believe it can happen the other way also with the children of believers; that they can receive the sign of water baptism as an infant and later on they can believe in Christ and be washed by His blood and His Spirit.
   5. But the key point here is that the water of baptism does not save anyone; we are saved only by faith in Christ.
2. So that brings us next to **seven Reasons Why We Ought to Baptize the Children of Believers**:
   1. And the **first** is that baptism is **the sign of belonging to the covenant community**, and the children of believers have always been included in the covenant community.
      1. Earlier we read from **Genesis 17**. There God said to Abraham, “*I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you*.” And the sign of belonging in this covenant was circumcision. So Abraham was to be circumcised, and all of the males in his household were to be circumcised, and any son that was born was to be circumcised on the eighth day.
      2. So turn with me to **Colossians 2:11-12**. There we read, “*In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead*.” And there is lots we could explore and explain here but the key point is the **connection or link** that Paul makes between circumcision and baptism. Circumcision was the Old Testament sign of belonging to the covenant community and baptism is the New Testament sign of belonging to the covenant community.
      3. Now, I want to make one other observation in connection with this point, which is really an argument from silence, but I think it is still worth mentioning. You will remember the time when the Apostle Peter was up on a rooftop and we are told that he became very hungry and he fell into a trance. And he saw a great sheet being lowered down from heaven and it had clean and unclean animals in it. And a voice said to Peter, “*Kill and eat*.” Now, Peter had been brought up from his youngest days to know that the law forbade eating anything unclean. So he said, “*By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean*.” And this happened three times! Well, the Lord used this vision to teach Peter that no food was unclean anymore, but even more importantly that Gentiles were now to be included among God’s covenant community. So this was a worldview changing moment for Peter and the new church. Things that had defined the way that they lived were changing. And this is why it took a vision, repeated three times, and then a Gentile called Cornelius believing and receiving the Holy Spirit for Peter to finally get it!
         1. And I want to suggest to you that if children were no longer to be included in God’s covenant community, it would have taken something equally mind-blowing to convince the Jews of this. That children were included in the covenant community was something so foundational to their whole concept of being God’s people, it would have taken something like Peter’s vision or some very specific and clear teaching to convince them that this was no longer the case. And we just don’t see anything like that in the New Testament.
      4. So baptism is **the sign of belonging to the covenant community**, and the children of believers have always been included in the covenant community.
   2. And the **second reason** why we ought to baptize the children of believers is closely related to the first. It is **the covenant promise in Acts 2:39**. Let’s turn there.
      1. Acts 2 is really the beginning of the New Testament church. The Apostles received the Holy Spirit and then Peter preached the Pentecost Day sermon. And after his sermon, in verse 37, the crowd said, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter replied, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*.”
      2. So too the adults standing there who had heard his sermon and who could understand, Peter said, “*Repent and be baptized*.” So again, that’s the ordinary or normal category of the baptized. They had heard and were able to repent and believe.
      3. But Peter’s next words were, “*For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself*.” So right there, at the very first baptism event, we read the same language as **Genesis 17** – “*you and your children*.” God delights to be a God to “*a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His Commandments*,” we read in **Exodus 20**. He loves to bring parents and their children and their children to saving faith in Christ, because that magnifies His covenant faithfulness. And nowhere in Scripture does God rescind or withdraw or pull back from His “*you and your children*” promise. In fact, it is repeated in the New Testament at the first baptism event.
      4. So as a sub-category of baptism, I believe that we can be confident that the children of those who believed that day were also baptized. And again, that did not mean they were all saved; they would have to put their faith in the Lord Jesus also.
   3. Well, the **third reason** why we ought to baptize the children of believers comes from our earlier **Luke 18** reading. There Jesus said, “*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven*.”
      1. And the same account, almost word for word, is repeated in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But while Matthew and Mark talk about little children, Luke specifically refers to infants. And so, being good covenant parents, these people were eager to have Jesus lay His hands on their infants and little children and pray for them, as Matthew explains. And rather than doing something that would indicate that the inclusion of children was an Old Testament practice that was on the way out, Jesus instead doubles down on the concept by saying, “*For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven*.”
      2. So for this reason too we believe children should be welcomed into the visible church and have Jesus’ name put on them in baptism.
   4. And the **fourth reason** why we ought to baptize the children of believers is **household baptism**.
      1. Earlier I mentioned the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. And what we read there is that he was baptized together with all of his household. And on three other occasions in Acts we read about a person believing and they and their whole household being baptized. And then in 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions that he baptized “*the household of Stephanus*.”
      2. Now, this too is an argument from silence. It does not explicitly state that the household included infants.
      3. But we are helped here by the Old Testament. In the very next chapter after God established His covenant with Abraham and his children, God said of Abraham, “*I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD*.” And some of you will remember Joshua’s beautiful declaration of allegiance to the Lord in **Joshua 24**. Having challenged the people of Israel to choose whether or not they would serve the Lord, Joshua said, “*But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD*.”
      4. So the language of household baptism in the New Testament is consistent with the language of household circumcision, which included infants, in the Old Testament.
   5. The **fifth reason** why we ought to baptize the children of believers is that **Paul included children in the New Testament letters that he wrote “to the saints.”**
      1. Both Colossians and Ephesians begin with “to the saints” at Ephesus or Colossae. And saints means holy ones – members of the church – those who are marked out as belonging to the covenant community.
      2. And in both letters Paul speaks specifically to children about obeying their parents. And he doesn’t pause to say that he has finished talking to the saints and he now has a few words for the children. No, he just carries on and speaks to the children in the same way that he has spoken to wives and husbands and that he will speak to parents and slaves and masters.
      3. And what’s more, he calls on these children to obey “*in the Lord*.” It is because of who they are as the Lord’s people that they are to obey their parents.
      4. So if Paul viewed children as among the saints, then they ought to receive the sign of being among the saints – baptism.

* 1. And the **sixth reason** why we ought to baptize the children of believers is closely related to the last, and it comes from **1 Cor. 7:14**. Let’s turn there.
     1. The situation here is one spouse is a believer and the other is an unbeliever. And some in Corinth thought that unbelief trumps belief so the believer should leave the marriage. But Paul says that is wrong and that God’s grace is such that it actually works the other way. We read, “*For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy*.”
     2. Now, salvation, as we have repeatedly said, is not by marriage or parents. So this being made holy is not in the sense of saved. The unbelieving spouse will be saved only if he or she comes to faith and the children will be saved only if they come to faith. But by virtue of their connection to this believing spouse, God views the unbelieving spouse and the children as “holy” – set apart, different than those in completely unbelieving homes.
     3. Now, in the case of the unbelieving spouse, it would be wrong to baptize him or her *because he or she is an adult* who is able to hear the gospel and choose whether or not to believe. But in the case of the children, for all of the reasons we have already cited, they ought to receive the sign of being among the holy ones – the saints – the covenant community.
  2. Well, the **seventh** and last reason why we ought to baptize the children of believers is that **we treat them as those who belong to the Lord**.
     1. In one booklet that was given to new members of a church to explain what a believer ought to do, it said, go to church regularly, read and study your Bible, pray regularly, try and obey God’s commandments, observe the Lord’s Day, tithe your income, and share the gospel with others.
     2. Now, no believing parent says to their child, You don’t have to do any of that until you are old enough to profess your faith and be baptized. And only then you can start to do all that. If they did, we elders would want to have a word with those parents! We teach our children from their earliest days to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and do all of these things. In other words, we treat them as those who belong to the Lord. So they should receive the sign of belonging.

And as we draw to a close, I want to wrap all of this up using a New Testament example. And that example is **Timothy**. In **2 Timothy 1:5**, Paul says about Timothy, “*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well*.” So that’s the generational faithfulness of the Lord on display – “*you and your children*.” And where had this faith come from? Well, later in chapter 3 Paul says to Timothy, “*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*.” So Timothy was raised as someone who belonged to the Lord. Now, Timothy’s situation is very unusual because he did not have a Jewish Father, so he was not circumcised as an infant, and he also lived in the crossover time between Old Testament and New Testament. So he actually ended up being baptized *and circumcised* as an adult! But the point is that Timothy was raised by his grandmother and mother as one who belonged to the Lord.

And from time to time someone like this stands at the front of the church and publicly professes faith in Christ. They too were raised by believing parents and surrounded with the Scriptures from their earliest days. And from their earliest days they have believed that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for the forgiveness of her sins. And all along the way they have had the visible sign of their baptism as a reminder of God’s faithfulness and Christ’s work on the cross. And many of us who were baptized as infants have had this experience.

And because of all we have seen, it was right that our parents saw to it that we received the sign of belonging to the covenant community – baptism. And this is why we speak of profession of faith for one who was baptized as an infant as the *completion* of baptism or *claiming* your baptism. We stand up in front of the congregation and we say, I am thankful for what was done to me all those years ago. And I am thankful that the Spirit of the Lord has washed me with the blood of Jesus. So I publicly commit myself to Christ and His congregation.

Now, this is not everything that can be said on this topic. And there will be some questions or objections that have not been answered. But I trust enough has been said to show that God *requires* believing parents to present their children for baptism. He wants little children have a visible reminder of His covenant faithfulness.

So may the Lord bless this explanation of His Word to His people. Amen.