



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

**Baptism as
a profession**

**Peter's
profession**

**Stephen's
profession**

**Paul's
profession**

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

2015

September

years of age. God chose baptism as the way to launch Jesus into His public ministry.

Holy Baptism with water is the first and fundamental act of grace bestowed on a human being who believes in Jesus Christ (Catechism 8.1). The prerequisite is the believer’s profession of faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel (Catechism 8.1.5). In the book of Acts, when the people believed, they were baptized. Following a profession of faith, Baptism incorporates a believer into Christ’s activity of redemption.

By believing in Jesus and being baptized, you take your place in the great love story of salvation. God loves mankind, and He has a great desire to be united with every person for all eternity, including you. Likewise, Jesus professed this love for mankind when He took our sins to the cross. Take a few minutes to reflect on your baptism or your confirmation. Recall how you’ve professed your faith since then.

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3.4.8.2 Jesus Christ is without sin. Nonetheless, He allowed Himself to be baptized by John the Baptist and to be counted among the sinners (2 Corinthians 5: 21). This act of baptism—which was an expression of repentance—makes it clear that Jesus Christ abased Himself and subjected Himself to the same act that must be performed on every sinner. Already here it is clear that Jesus Christ, who is without sin, took the sins of others upon Himself and ultimately opened the way to righteousness before God.

8.1 Holy Baptism with water is the first and fundamental act of grace of the triune God bestowed on a human being who believes in Jesus Christ. Through it, original sin is washed away and the believer is led out of his position of remoteness from God. Nevertheless, his inclination to sin (concupiscence) remains.

8.1.6 Through Holy Baptism with water, a person who believes in Jesus Christ and professes Him is incorporated into the church of Christ and thereby has fellowship with Jesus Christ. Holy Baptism with water performed in the name of the Trinity is a binding element among Christians.

Discussion Questions:

1. When was the last time you shared why you have chosen to believe in Jesus Christ? What would you share today if you were asked?

2. Describe the significance of renouncing the Devil and surrendering your life to God. The definition of “renounce” is to give up or put aside voluntarily. Do you see the influence of the Devil in your life? How can you fight against and give him up?

3. What can be learned from the story of Jesus’ baptism? How does knowing that Jesus was baptized effect your relationship with Him?

Bible Reference

Galatians 3:26-29

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Going Deeper

Calvin defines the visible Church as "the multitude of men diffused through the world, who profess to worship one God in Christ; are initiated into this faith by baptism; testify their unity in doctrine and charity by participating in the Supper; have consent in the Word of God, and for the preaching of that Word maintain the ministry ordained of Christ."

"We are baptized into the death of Christ, and it is the remedy for the Fall. Death is, in fact, what some modern people call 'ambivalent.' It is Satan's great weapon and also God's great weapon: it is holy and unholy; our supreme disgrace and our only hope; the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which He conquered."

—C.S. Lewis

4. Why is baptism important to our Heavenly Father? Jesus' baptism sent a message. What message does our baptism send to our God and to those who witness it?

5. Have you ever thought of baptism as an outward symbol of an inward change? Describe what the means to you. What change took place at your baptism/confirmation? Can you describe it?

6. How do you live intentionally for Jesus? How can we as a community support each other in living intentionally?

7. What part of your "old life" are you struggling to let go of? What do you feel freed from?

8. As believer's, we live in relationship with our Heavenly Father. He is present each day of our lives and for that reason our expression towards Him and our profession can continually be changing. Take a few minutes to write down what your profession of Christ is today.

Going Deeper

Holman Bible Commentary: Peter's Sermon (2:14–41)

Peter's Pentecost sermon is the first of the major Acts "speeches." It is built around a number of Old Testament texts, through which Peter interpreted the significance of the Pentecost miracle to the Jewish crowd. He probably spoke in western Aramaic, the language of Palestine in that day. Peter's sermon falls into three parts. 1. Scriptural Proof Concerning the Pentecost Experience (2:14–21). Peter began his sermon by quoting Joel 2:28–32, a prophecy which spoke of God's outpouring of the Spirit on all His people. Joel depicted this as a sign of the last days, when God would visit His people in a special way. Peter declared that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled in the Spirit's descent at Pentecost. The days of the Messiah had arrived. 2. Scriptural Proof Concerning Christ's Messiahship (2:22–36). Peter now needed to convince the Jewish crowd that Jesus was God's promised Messiah. This he sought to do by proving that the Messiah must die and rise again, that the resurrection was a sign of the Messiah. He began by introducing them to Jesus, with emphasis on His death and resurrection. Then he quoted Psalm 16:8–11 to prove that the Messiah, a descendant of David, would conquer death, just as Jesus had done in His resurrection. Finally, he quoted Psalm 110:1 as an Old Testament text that also points to the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah. 3. Invitation and Response (2:37–41). Having set forth Jesus as their Messiah, Peter now called on his Jewish audience to repent and be baptized, and they would receive the same Spirit that they had just witnessed so powerfully. The response was also miraculous. Three thousand were added to the Christian community that day.

says, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." Here again, Peter is fearless and connects the dots regarding the promise of the Messiah and Jesus' fulfillment of the promises of God. Notice the similarity to Stephen's profession recorded later in Acts that we will study next week. Peter is known as a man from the outlying provinces with minimal standing before the council, yet through the Holy Spirit he professes with authority the power of Jesus' name to heal.

Peter similarly professes to Cornelius' household, but in order to do so, he first must change his current understanding of God's will regarding the gentiles. God's spirit reveals a new understanding of the Gospel and then prompts him to profess it; firstly to Cornelius and his household and then to the congregation back in Jerusalem. This is another work of an apostle; to proclaim the will of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit as our understanding continues to evolve. Credibility and belief in the authority of the messenger are required here, too.

Discussion Questions:

1. What would the world know of Jesus Christ today without the testimony of the first apostles and those who came to believe in Christ because of their profession?

2. What credibility do you have as a messenger/disciple of Christ? What can you do to gain credibility?

3. Do you think our church is apostolic in the same way as was the early church? Yes, we have living apostles whose primary task is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, but are we making disciples who confess His name? Are you and I professing the power of His Gospel at work, school, and in our neighborhoods?

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7.6.3 The self-conception of the Apostles

The Apostles have received their ministry and commission from Jesus Christ. They work in accordance with the will of their Sender and are completely dependent upon Him. In accordance with the example of Jesus, the Apostles are servants of all (John 13: 15). They do not have dominion over the faith of the congregations, but are fellow workers for their joy (2 Corinthians 1: 24). This means that, through the activity of the Apostles, believers are to develop a thankful and joyful fundamental attitude toward God. When necessary, admonitions and orders also serve this purpose (James 1: 21). The Apostles feel themselves obliged to serve as examples to the church and lead them in following Christ (1 Corinthians 11: 1).

7.6.5 The Apostles in the church of Jesus Christ

The objective of the Apostles' work is to edify the Lord's work of redemption and lead it to its completion. The fellowship of the Apostles with the believers is characterized by warm care and loving understanding. The apostolate has been given for the entire church of Christ. Its task is to offer salvation in Jesus Christ to human beings (Acts 13: 47). Salvation is only possible through the Son of God (Acts 4: 12). Until the return of Christ, salvation is imparted through the Apostles in word and sacrament, that is to say through the preaching of the gospel, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, baptism with water and Holy Spirit, and through Holy Communion.

4. Have you considered that it is your responsibility to make disciples, as a Christian? Have you ever done this before? What first steps could you take in making disciples?

5. Can you relate to Peter when he was afraid to profess Christ during His crucifixion? Share a time when you were afraid to profess your faith.

6. How can you respond to people who don't want to hear about Jesus?

CHALLENGE: Tell someone in church on Sunday about Jesus and what He means to you.

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3.4.6.3 Son of Man

In Daniel 7: 13–14, the term “Son of Man” is used to denote a heavenly being who is not part of the human race. At the time of Jesus, devout Jews awaited the coming of the “Son of Man”, to whom God was to commit dominion over the world. According to John 3:13, the Lord revealed Himself as the Son of Man: “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man.” As such, He has the authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9: 6), is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12: 8), and has come “to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19: 10)

Finally, the Lord announced the suffering (Matthew 17: 12), sacrificial death (Matthew 12: 40; 20: 28), and resurrection of the Son of Man (Matthew 17: 9). Whenever Jesus spoke about the Son of Man, He was referring to Himself.

Stephen also attested to the divinity of the Son of Man: “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7: 56). Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is now back in the place from which He came (John 16: 28).

Bible References

Acts 6:3 - 8:2

Acts 11:19

Acts 22:20

Matthew 5:11

Psalm 31:5 (a reference to what he said when he was being stoned)

Stephen also provides us with an example of how **courage reflects Christ**. When the crowd hears what Stephen says, they gnash at him with their teeth, but Stephen simply gazes into heaven, sees Jesus at the right hand of God and says, *“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”* Then they stone him. But even as he is being stoned, he calls on God and says, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* Then he pleads with God to “not charge them with this sin.” (Acts 7:54-60 NKJV)

Even in his last moments, Stephen’s words and actions point to his desire to live like Christ. He uses similar words that Christ used from the cross.

Professing Christ in our words and actions is not easy, but it can have great effects. Stephen’s profession and death had a far-reaching ripple effect on the development of Christianity.

Discussion Questions:

1. Each ministry has a certain purpose to fulfill, and each person has been given gifts by God to fulfill their calling. How can we avoid overwhelming expectations in our congregations? What is God asking you to contribute to the church?

2. Have you ever felt overwhelmed by what God calls you to do? Where can you find courage to persist?

3. There are many things in our lives that we can’t choose or change, but we can change our character. How do you react to difficult situations? Your character is formed by the choices you make. How can you choose to let the Holy Spirit lead your actions?

Going Deeper

NKJV Life Application Study Bible

Stephen was a powerful speaker. When confronted in the temple by various antagonistic groups, Stephen's logic in responding was convincing. This is clear from the defense he made before the council. He presented a summary of the Jews' own history and made powerful applications that stung his listeners. During his defense Stephen must have known he was speaking his own death sentence. Members of the council could not stand to have their evil motives exposed. They stoned him to death while he prayed for their forgiveness. His final words show how much like Jesus he had become in a short time. His death had a lasting impact on young Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, who would move from being a violent persecutor of Christians to being one of the greatest champions of the Gospel the church has known. Lessons from life: Striving for excellence in small assignments prepares one for greater responsibilities; real understanding of God always leads to practical and compassionate actions towards people.

4. In adverse circumstances, do we turn to the Scripture to remember God's faithfulness and promises to us?

5. How can you increase your knowledge of Scripture? Why is it so hard to commit to studying scripture? How can you overcome these barriers?

6. Think about your reaction the last time things got tough or you faced a challenge. Were you a reflection of Christ? Did your actions profess His teachings?

7. How do we pick our moments of greatest impact? How do we know when to rise to the occasion? What could your profession lead to?

8. How have you been courageous in your profession of Jesus?

One of these believers was Timothy. Notice the humility that Paul professes in his letter to Timothy regarding his ministry as an apostle. He says even though he was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor, he—the chief among sinners—was shown mercy and entrusted by Jesus with authority in His church.

Peter's profession, led to Stephen's proclamation of the Gospel, which led to the great persecution, which opened the door to the words of Jesus becoming reality for the disciples. The hand of God seems so clearly at work in leading the church when we look back from today's perspective. It's awesome to witness how God put all of these pieces together so that His message would reach the world. But for these early apostles and Christians, it may have felt quite different in real time. Their profession may have seemed like a failure as the resulting persecution decimates the church in Jerusalem. Only with time can they see the larger scope of God's plan and results of their testimony and faith in the Gospel.

Let's continue to give God the glory for being saved and profess our faith in the Gospel with courage and conviction as seen in the examples of Peter, Stephen, and Paul. Regardless of our past, it's never too late to make a change in our life and become a living testimony of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think it's possible to be close to Jesus and not have that relationship change your life? Why?

2. What can we learn from Paul and Stephen in regards to professing during our struggles? How can you apply this to your next difficult situation? Find a Bible verse to carry with you in these struggles.

3. Only with time can they see the larger scope of God's plan and results of their testimony and faith in the Gospel. What lessons can we learn from this? Does God have a bigger plan in the works when we see only short term disappointments?

Going Deeper

From the Holman Bible Dictionary:

More importantly, Paul was born a Roman citizen. Many speculate that Paul's father or grandfather was honored with citizenship because of some special service rendered to a military proconsul. However, early Christian tradition preserved by Jerome and Photius stated that Paul's parents had been carried as prisoners of war from Gischala to Tarsus, enslaved to a Roman citizen, then freed and granted citizenship. Regardless of how Paul's parents received their citizenship, the book of Acts states three times (Acts 16, Acts 22, Acts 23) that he possessed it, and his citizenship was accompanied by important rights that would benefit him in his missionary labors. The Roman citizen had the right of appeal after a trial, exemption from imperial service, right to choose between a local or Roman trial, and protection from degrading forms of punishment like scourging. Paul might have carried a wax tablet that functioned as a birth certificate of citizenship in order to prove his Roman citizenship. However, most people who claimed citizenship were trusted since the penalty for impersonating a Roman citizen was death.

4. Is your faith story interconnected with others' faith stories? How does this point to God's bigger plan for His children?

5. PROFESS, prŏ-fes', PROFESSION, prŏ-fesh'un:

- a. to own before
- b. to put before
- c. to speak or say together in common
- d. to confess publicly

Look at these four definitions. How did Peter, Stephen and Paul profess in these ways? What does your life profess based on these definitions?

6. Read James 2:20-24. James is teaching that an empty profession without the spiritual life to back it up is absolutely worthless in God's eyes (2:20). He goes on to illustrate that point by citing Abraham and his offering up of Isaac as an illustration of genuine faith (2:21-24). A man may profess piety, but have no faith or submission in his heart, even as Judas demonstrated (Matt. 10:4; 26:14; Mark 3:19; 14:10)

Consider your profession being more than your words. Look back on today – did your actions profess Christ, as well as your words?

CHALLENGE: Tell someone that doesn't go to your church about Jesus and what He means to you.