



# Baptism in the Early Church

Session 3





### From Session 1...

- Scriptures teach that baptism is not salvific
- Baptisms performed immediately after conversion in the NT
  - Thus baptism is sometimes associated with salvation in Scripture.

### From Session 2...

- Early church (beyond the NT) wrote of baptism being salvific (we would disagree)
- 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Century baptisms: Professing believers





## Early Church Examples of Baptism being salvific:

- Epistle of Barnabas (late 1<sup>st</sup> century)
  - "we go down into the water full of sins and foulness, and we come up bearing the fruit of fear in our hearts, and having hope on Jesus in the Spirit."
- Tertullian (~200 AD)
  - "HAPPY is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life!"





verses that give us assurance of salvation, even after baptism

Hebrews 10:14

For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.

Romans 8:1

...there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus,

1 John 5:13

I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.







## Two Extremes Practiced in the Early Church

1. Delay baptism until immediately prior to death (risky)
2. Baptize infants (why not save them early if baptism saves?)
  1. Infant deaths were common-place in the early church





## 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Century Writers Acknowledging or Advocating Infant Baptism

- Tertullian (~200 A.D.): Advocated against infant baptism
- Hippolytus (3<sup>rd</sup> century): Disputed text (from the 11<sup>th</sup> century)
- Origen (3<sup>rd</sup> century): in his work "Commentary on Romans"
- Cyprian (3<sup>rd</sup> century)
- Asterius the Sophist (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Gregory of Nazianzus (4<sup>th</sup> century): Advocated against infant baptism, except in cases where the infant is about to die.





## 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Century Writers Acknowledging or Advocating Believer's Baptism

- Hippolytus (3<sup>rd</sup> century): The older, more reliability text
- Origen (3<sup>rd</sup> century): in his work "Homilies on Numbers"
- Cyril of Jerusalem (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Basil the Great (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Gregory of Nazianzus (4<sup>th</sup> century): Argued against infant baptism, except when death is imminent
- Ambrose (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Etheria (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Chrysostom (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Theodore of Mopsuestia (4<sup>th</sup> century)





Origen (Highlighting an example of infant baptism), mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century

"Commentary on Romans Ch. 9 "For this reason the Church received a tradition from the Apostles to give baptism even to infants. For the Apostles, to whom were entrusted the secrets of divine mysteries, knew that there is in everyone the inborn stains of sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit."







Irenaeus (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century)...

"Against Heresies", Book 2, Ch. 22: "but from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify; those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account from them, and bear testimony as to the [invalidity of] the statement."





Gregory of Nazianzus, mid-4<sup>th</sup> century, advocating against putting off baptism until your own deathbed:

From his sermon on "Baptism Day" in 381 A.D.: "Why wait for a fever to bring you this blessing, and refuse it from God? Why will you have it through lapse of time, and not through reason? ...Why will you receive it of force and not of free will; of necessity rather than of liberty?"





Gregory of Nazianzus, mid-4<sup>th</sup> century, advocating against infant baptism (except when the infant is dying):

From his sermon on "Baptism Day" in 381 A.D.: "Be it so, some will say, in the case of those who ask for Baptism; what have you to say about those who are still children, and conscious neither of the loss nor of the grace? Are we to baptize them too? Certainly, if any danger presses. For it is better that they should be unconsciously sanctified than that they should depart unsealed and uninitiated. A proof of this is found in the Circumcision on the eighth day, which was a sort of typical seal, and was conferred on children before they had the use of reason. And so is the anointing of the doorposts, which preserved the firstborn, though applied to things which had no consciousness. But in respect of others end of the third year, or a little more or less, when they may be able to listen and to answer I give my advice to wait till the something about the Sacrament; that, even though they do not perfectly understand it, yet at any rate they may know the outlines; and then to sanctify them in soul and body with the great sacrament of our consecration. For this is how the matter stands; at that time they begin to be responsible for their lives, when reason is matured, and they learn the mystery of life (for of sins of ignorance owing to their tender years they have no account to give), and it is far more profitable on all accounts to be fortified by the Font, because of the sudden assaults of danger that befall us, stronger than our helpers."







### 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Tomb Inscriptions

"Here is laid Fortunía, who lived more or less 4 years. The parents set this up for their dearest daughter. She obtained grace on July 25...and died on July 27."

"Dedicated to the departed.

Florentius made this inscription for his worthy son Apronianus who lived one year and nine months and five days. As he was truly loved by his grandmother and she knew that his death was imminent, she asked the church that he might depart from the world as a believer."







3<sup>rd</sup> Century Tomb Inscriptions, Continued...

"Sweet Tyche lived one year, 10 months, 15 days. Received (grace) on the 8th day before the Kalends...Gave up her soul on the same day."

"Irene who lived with her parents 10 months and 6 days received grace on April 7 and gave up her soul on April 13."





3<sup>rd</sup> Century Tomb Inscriptions, using the term "neophyte"...

"Aristo, an innocent child, who lived 8 months a neophyte, departed on June 4."

"Innocentius a neophyte lived 23 years."

"Mercury a neophyte is buried here. He lived 42 years, 2 months, 15 days."

\*\*Note: A "neophyte" was someone who was just recently baptized.





Known Adult Baptisms of early church Pastors and Bishops (even though they were raised by Christian Parents):

- Basil the Great (4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, one of the "Cappadocian Fathers").
- Gregory of Nazianzus (4<sup>th</sup> century, Patriarch of Constantinople)
- Augustine (late 4<sup>th</sup> / early 5<sup>th</sup> century, influential theologian and bishop)





## Early Church Views on Baptism:

- Symbolic: buried with Christ into his death, raised with Christ into his resurrection
- Performative / Salvific: widely believed that the sins are washed away in the act of baptism.
  - This led to "sacramentalism" in the early church







## Early Church views on what Baptism accomplishes:

- Remission of Sins
- Entry into the Kingdom of God (salvation)
- Bestowing of a number of spiritual blessings on the individual





Evidence of Believer's Baptism being the Normative Practice through the 4<sup>th</sup> Century:

1. No written record of infant baptisms from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries
2. No description of baptism or church order from the early church is known that describes the Rite of Baptism that would be appropriate for an infant.
3. 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> century tomb inscriptions do not indicate infant baptism
4. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine were not baptized as infants by their Christian parents.

