

PREREQUISITE TO BAPTISM

Most churches baptize new converts into their assemblies requiring them to take a confessional oath of the particular church's polity (beliefs) in the name of Jesus Christ. We of the Church of God baptize into the name of Jesus the Christ upon the affirmation of the candidate's belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God, however, we do not require any oath to church polity. The person baptized is expected to grow spiritually from the time of their baptism into the faith of Jesus. What is required in order to be baptized besides repentance is knowing Jesus and what is the Christ of God. During apostolic times, the potential candidate for baptism was required to know who the Christ is and it is still a requirement to this day.

To better understand what we are talking about, read Acts 8:26 to 34: ***“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readeest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other man?”*** We know that Philip taught the eunuch of Jesus, however, before Philip started talking to him, the eunuch did not appear to know who the prophet was since he asked if Isaiah (Esaias) was speaking of himself or of some other man.

Continuing to read from verses 35 to 38 of the same chapter: ***“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scriptures, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”*** From these preceding verses, we can gather that it was essential to know Jesus the Christ's background before a convert could be baptized. The eunuch was shown by Philip from scripture all the events that would point to the Christ of God, and Philip showed from scripture, that the man, Jesus, was the Son of God.

For Gentiles, it is usually more difficult to understand the concept of the Christ not having knowledge of the role that the Messiah would play on the world scene until that time that we also receive the Spirit of truth. The concept of the Christ involves knowing the plan of salvation of which the Christ is central to that plan. To accept Jesus of Nazareth as being the fulfillment of that plan, one needs to know at least some of Jesus' life, although it would not be necessary to know all doctrines Jesus taught. Jesus, the son of man, was born in Bethlehem of Judaea and raised in the city of Nazareth of Galilee; his father, Joseph was of the lineage of David and his mother, Mary, was connected with the line of the priesthood. Knowing such things may not appear important but if baptism is important to a potential convert, then he or she know who Jesus is to have a firm belief in him for their baptism. ***“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”*** Matthew 1:1; ***“And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.”*** Matthew 9:27; ***“And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?”*** Matthew 12:23. Jesus was recognized by many people as being the son of David. The Jews earnestly waited for the Messiah prophesied by Moses, Isaiah and others. The Messiah was prophesied to speak the words of God (Deuteronomy 18:18, 19) and was also prophesied to come from the lineage of David (II Samuel 7:12 to 14 and various others). ***“And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David***

to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus." Acts 13:22, 23. Jesus, being the son of Joseph, who was descended from King David, fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah came from David's lineage. *"But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph thou son of David..."* Matthew 1:20; *"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)"* Luke 2:4; *"Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* John 1:45.

As we have shown, knowing that Jesus is the Christ is essential knowledge before being baptized. But what does "Christ" mean? Some people seem to think it was Jesus' surname, however, it is simply the Greek version of "Messiah", a Hebrew term. According to the Greek dictionary within Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, "Christ" means "anointed, ie. the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus." From the Hebrew dictionary from the same concordance, "Messiah" (ref. # 4899) means "anointed – usually a consecrated person (as a king, priest, or saint) esp. the Messiah." Notice that both "Christ" and "Messiah" means "anointed". The name bore special emphasis when applied to the chosen one of God. When "anointed" is used in reference to the Christ or Messiah, it is not in the context of being anointed with oil, but being anointed by God by the Holy Spirit. *"Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he will show judgment to the Gentiles."* Matthew 12:18; *"And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God."* Luke 23:35; *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power..."* Acts 10:38a. Jesus of Nazareth, as we can see became the anointed one of God with power by the Holy Spirit. For clarification, that Spirit that descended upon Jesus at his baptism was the Word of God. *"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."* Ephesians 6:17. The Word that was sent from the Father was manifested into Jesus with power and he became the Son of God. *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."* John 1:14; *"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."* John 6:63. Although he was the son of man, Jesus had an intricate union with the Father through the Word, which was before the world was, the beginning of all things. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* John 1:1; *"By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them."* Psalms 33:6.

Jesus was anointed by God at his baptism. *"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* Matthew 3:16, 17; *"And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him."* Mark 1:10; *"And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."* John 1:32 to 34. At Jesus' baptism, he became the Son of God, the Anointed One, having received the Word of God without measure. *"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."* John 3:34. Jesus received the Word of God without measure because he fully submitted his whole being to doing the will of the Father. When we get baptized, the Spirit will also descend upon us, however, not with the same power without measure and that is because we fall short in total obedience unto God. Nonetheless, if we surrender ourselves to God and His Son, Jesus, we will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

When a person believes that Jesus is the promised Christ of God in the flesh, then are they ready candidates for baptism. Read again Acts 8:36, 37. Prior to the baptizing of the eunuch by Philip, Philip baptized others: ***“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”*** Acts 8:12. The gospels also clarify that belief in the Christ is essential for salvation. ***“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”*** Mark 16:16; ***“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”*** John 11:26. Notice that each person must believe to be saved; others cannot save us. We must come to know the Christ on our own and to do that, we must be willing to read scriptures to gain understanding of Jesus and understand why he is considered the Christ of God.

Christ’s word is conveyed through his teachers, elders, and prophets, but nevertheless, each individual convert must open their mind and study the scriptures earnestly with their instructor to understand why they believe Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. One should not go into baptism with the idea of just wanting to belong or because personal friends are baptized into a particular church. We must have an earnest desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and know why we are doing so. We should be ready to serve God through faith in His Christ. If we get baptized for the wrong reasons, not knowing the Christ, we risk shaming Jesus. ***“If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the son of God afresh, and put him to open shame.”*** Hebrews 6:6.

Before we take the step of baptism, we should take the step seriously, but are not required to understand all doctrines and take an oath to a church’s creed or polity. All that is required is we know Jesus and why he is the Christ of God; if this is the case with you, and have been considering baptism, don’t delay but follow the advice found in Acts 22:16: ***“And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”***