

December 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 WIC Christmas Party 7pm (Whitehead Home)	2
3 Sunday School 9:30am Morning Worship <i>Sacrament of the Lord's Supper</i> 10:30 am Evening Service 6pm	4	5 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am Joint Officers Meeting 5:30 pm	6 Choir Practice 6 pm	7 Ladies' Book Study 1 pm WIC Prayer Time 7 pm (Madeja Home)	8 Readers Game Night 6 pm (HILL Home)	9
10 Sunday School 9:30am Morning Worship 10:30 am Evening Service 6pm	11 Youth Christmas Party 6 pm (Elliott Home) Men's Book Study 7 pm (Madeja Home)	12 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am	13 Choir Practice 6 pm	14 Ladies' Book Study 1 pm	15 Parent's Night Out 6 pm	16
17 Sunday School 9:30am Morning Worship 10:30 am Christmas Hymn Sing 6 pm	18	19 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am	20 Choir Practice 6 pm	21	22	23
24 No Sunday School Morning Worship 10:30 am Christmas Eve Communion Service 5 pm	25 Merry Christmas! 	26 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am	27	28	29	30
31 No Sunday School Morning Worship 10:30 am No Evening Service						

NORTHPOINTE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



December 2023

From the Pastor

Of the Sacraments Pt. 6

WCF 28.3: *Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.*

Last month, we saw in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 28.2 that with Baptism “the outward element to be used ... is water.” To this, all Christians agree. Beyond this divergence in *mode* and *meaning* of Baptism comes to the fore. I will discuss mode following the approach of the WCF, but only as it takes us deeper into distinctions regarding the underlying meaning of the mode. Many debates among Christians on the question of Baptism expend energy on the mode. When, in fact, much of the heart of the difference lies in the meaning.

The Mode of Baptism

To speak of *mode* is to speak of practice, the way a thing is done or performed. The WCF maintains a level of liberty as to the mode of Baptism. The *dipping of a person*—or immersing—*is not necessary*. Notice that it does not forbid the practice, but only states the unnecessary nature of this mode. Then, it continues with a right administration done *by pouring, or sprinkling upon the person*. In the first mode, the person goes into or under the water; in the second, water is placed upon the person. These are two distinct modes of baptizing. Van Dixhoorn infers a pastoral generosity on the part of the Westminster Assembly in that it “did not want to exclude this mode of [dipping], or to deny that those who have been immersed have a valid form of baptism.” Accordingly, the WCF communicates in a brevity of words both that the mode is not of singular importance to Baptism and that *there is a mode that rightly,*

or better, conveys the meaning. Compare the WCF with the London Baptist Confession, which states that “Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.” The latter makes one mode unequivocally necessary to such degree that the administration hangs upon the mode. To sort through this difference, we must consider the meaning of the water used in baptism.

The Meaning behind the Mode

The mode of Baptism is important as far as it serves the meaning. And so the question is: *what is the meaning intended in the use of water for baptizing?* The question might also be asked: to what does the water of baptism point? Baptist brothers and sisters will likely answer that the action of going down into and rising out of the water is necessary because the full meaning of Baptism is realized in the symbolism of dying and rising with Christ (based on Rom 6:4 and Col 2:12). So that the motion of the body is central to the sacrament. So central, in fact, that the element of water recedes into the background.

But the water is absolutely central. And surely, the element used should bear upon the meaning, so far as it accords with Scripture. When we consider the element, we find with Geerhardus Vos that “water is that element in nature that has been created by God for the purpose of physical cleansing.” Then, we find in Scripture overwhelming evidence of the need of the sinner for internal, spiritual cleansing because of the defilement of sin (i.e., Psa 51:7, 10, Jer 4:14, 1 Cor 6:11). And fittingly, the internal need finds its perfectly suited symbol in a physical element used for physical

cleansing. In Ezekiel 36:25-27, the LORD promises a sprinkling of clean water to cleanse his people of their internal filth. This passage looks both backward to sprinkling the blood of sacrificed animals to make clean what had been defiled *and* forward to the fulfilling work of Christ whose blood sprinkles clean (Heb 9:14, 10:22). Not a full bath, but a sprinkling is the picture of God’s ritual purification for those defiled by sin. In Christ, the total picture of cleansing culminates—for, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). When we come to the baptism of John, we find a baptism *with water* for repentance (Matt 3:11). In Acts 22:16, Paul directly connects his own water baptism with the washing away of sins. The meaning attached to water baptism is a washing, a purification. Thus, it emerges that Baptism is the outward sign and seal of an internal washing for the person who joins to it faith in Christ.

In light of the above, Romans 6:4 is helpful. Paul writes that “we were buried therefore with [Christ] by baptism into death.” There is a link between baptism and the death of Christ, but Paul is not focused here on filling up the mode of baptism with meaning. Instead, the link is found in that having been baptized into Christ, the believer is united to him in his death (as the blood-spilled sacrifice, John 19:34) and resurrection. And his death means that atoning blood has been sprinkled for the purification of the conscience (Heb 10:22, 1 Pet 3:21). Water placed upon the body is sufficient to picture this purification. The mode matters less but is not altogether unimportant. For, in which mode—full immersion or water poured upon—do we find a more fit picture of the cleansing of the water? This is meant as an honest question to be discussed among us with generosity.

Pastor Kevin Vollema

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MISSIONS MINUTE

A note from Robert and Lisa Stewart - MTW , Nagoya, Japan

Dear Friends,

You may have assumed that we made it back to Japan. And, yes, you made a good assumption since you haven't heard from us! We are so sorry, especially since a report from us would have prompted your prayers for our specific requests during this initial time back in Japan. It was a challenging period emotionally and mentally as we had to leave William and Isabel at college and begin a new job in Japan. It took us a few weeks to adjust to the new environment. We are grateful for your continued prayers and will strive to keep you informed of our specific needs in the future.

In August, we said goodbye to family and friends and flew from Nashville on August 21st to Japan. During the first week, we visited friends we hadn't seen in a year while on Home Ministry Assignment. We also prepared to move our belongings to Nagoya, specifically a suburb called Nisshin. We had a week to unpack while some necessary renovations were nearing completion in the building where Nagoya Christian School would begin classes on September 26th.

Once the renovations were completed, we had just one week to set up the classrooms with the help of many volunteers. Unpacking a house and a school building can be overwhelming, especially when combined with the exhaustion of big moves. Despite being tired, we have managed to get ourselves to school each day.

We are grateful for the renovations made to the building, which included getting rid of mold, updating the lighting and air conditioning systems, and installing an air circulation system to ensure clean air.

Please pray for us as we get to know the people of Nisshin Christ Church and this community. It's a different experience for us since we are working at the school full-time and not yet involved in the outreach of the church. Our church experience here is different as well in that it is an established church that has many Japanese believers involved in ministry and outreach (Praise God). We plan to be a part of a future church plant from Nisshin church!

The school year started on September 26th. Our students are missionary kids from MTW and other mission organizations as well. Robert and I are the two full-time teachers, so we split the nine students into two groups, elementary and middle school. There are three high school students studying online who are a part of our school community as well.

These first months have been quite a challenge for us as we transition back into full-time teaching, especially for Lisa as she is back in the classroom full-time for the first time since our kids were born! We are grateful to the Lord for the many details that have come together to enable us to start this school year. We ask for you to pray for two families and a "second career" couple who are raising support to join us as teachers at NCS. We are also praying that more students will be joining our school as more teachers arrive!

Many Thanks

We give thanks for those who faithfully support our work each month.

We give thanks for so many who lift us up in prayer.

We give thanks for our new home in Nagoya. We are thankful for a great location and a kind landlord.

We give thanks for this new season of life and all that we are learning.

We give thanks that God is growing His church in Japan.

We give thanks for the encouragement of our friends and family.

"For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." Psalm 100:5

JOINT OFFICERS MEETING

The 2023 Joint Officers Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, **December 5**, beginning at 5:30 pm . Dinner will be served.

YEAR-END GIVING

If you plan to make a year-end gift to the church, please make sure it is in the office or **postmarked by December 31**. According to the IRS regulations, any contributions received after that date must be credited to 2024.

REMINDERS

- ◆ The *Lord's Supper* will be observed during morning worship on Sunday, **December 3**.
- ◆ The next *Reader's Game Night* is **December 8**, at 6 pm. [Hill Home]
- ◆ *Women's Prayer Time* date this month is at 7 pm, on **December 7** in the home of Carmel Madeja [420 Eastwood Street].
- ◆ *Men's Prayer Breakfast* dates for this month are **December 5, 12, 19, and 26 @ 6 am**.
- ◆ The *Men's Book Study* date is: **December 11** at 7 pm. [Madeja Home].
- ◆ *Parents' Night Out* will be **December 15** from 6-9 pm. Please make sure to pick up your children by 9 pm.
- ◆ The *Men's Monthly Prayer Breakfast* is cancelled for December.
- ◆ Please note *Sunday School Classes* will not meet on **December 24 or December 31** and there will not be an *Evening Service on December 31*.
- ◆ We will resume *Wednesday Night Activities* on **January 10, 2024**.

COMMUNITY MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY

Northpointe will again be gift wrapping Christmas presents for free at the Uptown Mall on **December 15**, from 10:30 am to 3 pm. Please consider donating Christmas wrapping paper, gift boxes, tape, bows, ribbon, gift name tags and gift tissue paper for this community ministry opportunity. There will be a box to collect those items by the WIC table in the foyer. Please contact Carmel Madeja for any questions. 815-861-8900.

WIC CHRISTMAS PARTY

Northpointe women: Please join us for our annual Christmas party on **December 1**, at 7 pm in the home of Beth Whitehead [906 Beechwood Dr, Meridian]. Please bring a heavy appetizer and/or dessert to share as well as a wrapped gift (\$15 max) to exchange.

YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY

Hello Northpointe Youth!! It's the most wonderful time of the year and time for our Christmas party. We'll see if anyone can beat William in the most festively dressed contest. We'll have Christmas games and a gift exchange, no gift cards, \$15 limit. Looking forward to seeing you **December 11**, at 6 (5323 Linmoor Dr, Marion).

CHRISTMAS HYMN SING

For the past several years we have set aside a Sunday night in December to sing Christmas hymns and carols. This provides everyone a chance to choose what we sing and to make sure you get to sing your favorite Christmas song. This is a very informal and fun service that will help you get in the true spirit of Christmas. Plan to be with us for this special opportunity on Sunday, **December 17** at 6:00 p.m.

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT COMMUNION SERVICE

There will be a Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion service on Sunday, **December 24**, at 5 pm. We hope you will come join us for this special time of worship.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 5 Rachel Thaggard
- 6 Isaac James
Titus Wadley
- 7 Elli Ausbrooks
- 8 Gary James
- 14 Emily Elliott
- 19 Stacey Joransen
Constance Wadley
- 20 Todd Kiefer
Bo Gunn
William Russel Phillips
- 21 David Goldman
- 27 John McEachin
Dotty Graham
- 29 Brett Rushing
- 30 Lee Thaggard
Wyatt Gunn

