

# WHY baptism & WHY baptist?

**Amutha Devaraj was born into a Hindu family in India. Highlighting the significance of baptism, she explains why she became a Baptist minister**

I am proud to say that I am a 'Born Baptist' - not because my parents were attending a Baptist church, nor because of my personal decision after attending revival meetings. It is not even because of the in-depth research I did on Baptist theological principles. Although I was physically born into a Hindu family, I was spiritually reborn through water and the Spirit (John 3:5) in a Baptist church. I did not choose to attend this Baptist church because it belonged to the Baptist denomination, but because I reluctantly accompanied my husband as it was close to

the place where we moved to London in 2006. Spiritually speaking, I was going to this church before my rebirth!

I have a great conviction that God's calling begins with everyone even before we were born. He continually equips us as we journey through our life. On our journey, he constantly develops our characters towards his ordained destination. One of the qualities he envisioned in me is to ask questions about everything, not proceeding until I am truly convinced. This has enabled me to embrace Christianity.

If Christianity professed inferiority of gender, discrimination in societal status, or preferences based on ethnic backgrounds, I would not have followed Christianity at all. But I found Christianity fascinating, particularly through

Galatians 3:28. 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' This great love of God embracing all of humanity reveals his impartial nature. It beckoned me to follow Christ. There was no struggle for me to choose Protestantism as the truth depicted in scripture, especially concerning believer's baptism, which is evidently seen in Baptist church practices.

The Christian Church should be a congregation of biblically based, baptised believers. The Word of God and the church's practices should align with one other; without one, the other will fall apart. This alignment is seen in Baptist church practices. While I started reading and reflecting the Word of God, I was convinced to undergo the baptism of immersion. It was my simple response to my Saviour's love

for me - I determined to obey what he has commanded, as he has demonstrated through his obedience.

Nonetheless, when I sensed a call to ministry, I asked myself this question, 'why Baptist, and not another denomination?' A three-part Baptist Declaration of Principle<sup>1</sup> became the foundation of my understanding in pursuing Baptist ministry. This Declaration of Principle is established on Jesus' Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), which highlights its threefold pattern of *authority, baptism and mission*. Scripture and the Baptist principle correlates the absolute *authority* of God the Father by obeying his commands, identifying ourselves with God the Son by undergoing believer's baptism, and living out our lives for God's *mission* with the help of God the Spirit.

God's commandment of 'going, making disciples and baptising of all nations' breaks down the geographical, racial, gender, societal, and cultural barriers. Baptism is an act of faith that also provides an assurance of belonging to Christ. Baptism is a sign of missional outreach that embraces all of humanity, proclaiming Christ's love for everyone. The Baptist denomination, which portrays this principle, captivated me and convinced me to become a Baptist minister.

Although the ordinance of baptism is not explicitly found in the Old Testament, there are events that point toward and ultimately find fulfilment through Christ in the New Testament. Peter speaking of Noah, says he was 'saved through the water' (1 Pet 3:20-21), and Paul's mentioning of Israelites being 'baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Cor 10:1-2),

were, in the Old Testament, the foreshadowing of baptisms.

In the New Testament, when John the Baptist inaugurated the act of baptism, those living in Jerusalem and around Judea - including Pharisees, Sadducees, and later Jesus' disciples - were all Jewish. There may have been a perception that baptism was an invitation to the Jewish community, like physical circumcision. However, the perception of 'repentance-baptism' for Jewish people alone was expanded with believers' baptism when Gentiles were also included in God's plan through spiritual circumcision.

God's authority was unveiled to both the Israelites and Gentiles simultaneously through the act of baptism. Peter (Acts 10) and through him the Jewish Christians (Acts 11) and Cornelius, the gentile Roman centurion, came to the awareness of God's concept of inclusivity - his invitation to every race and gender into his Kingdom through baptism.

Baptism played a significant role as a sign of approval to enter the Christian faith, which was evident through the work of the Holy Spirit. When Cornelius and his household received the Word of God through Peter, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and were speaking in tongues, just as the Jewish believers did on the day of Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Spirit offered to the Gentiles affirmed that God invites all who believe in him. The biblical sign of the Spirit's presence and power of the Spirit can be seen in baptism, as Jesus said, "You will be baptised with the Holy Spirit. . . and you shall receive power." (Acts 1:5, 8)

Christ's calling embraces all of humanity—those who believe in him and follow his teachings. The early disciples proceeded on their mission journey with the inaugural words of Christ in the Great Commission. The prelude to this commissioning - 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus' - encourages us, as his current disciples, to confidently pursue God's ministry with his presence and authority.

Let us proclaim the necessity of baptism, a physical representation of a believer's old life being buried with the Lord Jesus in his death and then raised to a newness of life in his resurrection. Let us prepare our baptistries, as Lynn professed<sup>2</sup>, waiting prayerfully for countless souls to come into God's kingdom.



**Amutha Devaraj is the lead minister at Ashurst Drive Baptist Church on the north-east edge of London. She grew up in India, comes from a Hindu background and has a PhD in Materials Science.**

**Amutha was one of the Project Violet co-researchers. The title of her research was: 'Understanding the journey into ministry for Asian women' - available at [baptist.org.uk/projectviolet](https://baptist.org.uk/projectviolet)**