

Title: "OIC Identity, Part 3 - The Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion)"
Key verse: Acts 2:41-42 (NASB95) – "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴²They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Good morning, everyone. It's good to see you all again. I have been doing a series of sermons on the theme of the identity of Osaka International Church as an interdenominational, evangelical, Protestant church. In my first sermon, I explained the meaning of each of these three adjectives: what it means to be Protestant, to be evangelical, as well as interdenominational. Although we come from different denominations, we adhere to the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Protestant and evangelical Christianity. This is what we have in common. But because we come from different denominations, there will undoubtedly be some differences among us – nevertheless, we seek to be charitable to one another and to seek to journey together in Christian discipleship, fellowship, and service.

In the second sermon in this series, I focused on the statement of the "Purpose" of Osaka International Church, as stated in our church constitution. Let me read that statement one more time:

The purpose of this church shall be to worship God, to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to celebrate the Lord's Supper and baptism. We shall endeavor to bring all people into the saving knowledge of our Lord, to bind together followers of Jesus Christ for the purpose of sharing in the worship of God and to make Jesus Christ better known, better loved, and better served in all the relationships of life.

Notice in the first sentence where it says that one of the primary purposes of OIC is to celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper (also called Communion). The focus of today's sermon will be on these two key ceremonies of the Christian church. From the beginning of the Christian era, these two ceremonies have been essential features of church life and ministry. Notice that I call them "ceremonies." They both have a unique function and they both are noteworthy for being symbolic of something. What are they symbolic of? Explaining that is one of the goals of today's message.

The title of today's sermon is "OIC Identity: The Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion)." In Christian tradition, these two ceremonies have often been referred to as "sacraments." A "sacrament" has been defined this way: it is a "visible sign of the invisible reality of grace" or it is a "sign within the church that pointed beyond itself to the sacred mystery of redemption."¹ Protestant Christians speak of two sacraments that are important to church life: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Although many Christians call these two ceremonies "sacraments," other Christians in the Protestant movement prefer to call them "ordinances," because they were the two ceremonies that were commanded – ordered – by Christ for every Christian to participate in (Matthew 26:26-29 and 28:18-20, also 1st Corinthians 11:23–26). Most of the evangelical churches that I have been associated with prefer to call these "ordinances," and that is the term that I have heard used here at OIC.

I said a moment ago that a sacrament is a "sign within the church that points beyond itself to the sacred mystery of redemption." Baptism is a sign that points to our new life in Christ – as it says in Ephesians 2:5, we were once "dead in our sins but now we are made alive unto Christ." And the Lord's Supper is a sign that recalls the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, our redemption (1st Corinthians 11, Matthew 26) – and it is also a shared meal, shared with our Christian brothers and sisters symbolizing our unity. In addition to that, the Lord's Supper is also an anticipation of

¹ Jack Kilcrease, "The Number of Sacraments," in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

a shared meal with Christ when He returns to establish His Kingdom. That is why the Lord's Supper is also referred to as Communion: communion with our fellow Christians and communion with our Lord.

Let us now take a closer look at these two ordinances (or sacraments) of the Christian church.

Part 1: The Lord's Supper (Communion)

This was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ shortly before His crucifixion. Let us read the narrative in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Matthew 26:1-2 (NASB) – “And it came about that when Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, ² ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be delivered up for crucifixion.’”

Then two days later we read this in Luke 22:7-8 (NASB) – “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ And He [Jesus] sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it.’”

Matthew 26:26-28 (NASB) – “And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ ²⁷ And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.”

We call this episode the “Last Supper,” when the Lord Jesus shared a Passover meal with His disciples the day before His crucifixion. Note the connection to the Jewish festival of Passover. This festival commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, as described in the book of Exodus, when the last of the ten plagues that God brought on Egypt was the death of all firstborn children in the country, except for those children in families that had sacrificed a lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts of their home – you can read the story in Exodus 12: when the angel of death came, he passed over those homes that had the lamb's blood on its doorposts and left them unaffected. The angel passed over these homes, and so the festival is called Passover.

Christ is called our Passover lamb – the lamb that is sacrificed to save us from punishment. 1st Corinthians 5:7b (NASB95) says – “For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.” If you recall the Scriptures that I read a moment ago, the Last Supper and the crucifixion of Christ occurred at the time of the annual Passover festival, identifying Jesus' death with the sacrifice of the Passover.

Note how Jesus connects the bread and the cup to His body and His blood, which He says will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. The bread and the wine are symbolic of His body and His blood – His body will soon be hanging on a cross and His blood will be shed.

In the New Testament, the sacrifice of Christ is said to be for the forgiveness of sins. In the Gospel of John 1:29 (NASB) we read this – “The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” Here we see a statement connecting Jesus to the lamb that is sacrificed for our sins.

The Communion service, which we call the Lord's Supper, is a commemoration of this sacrifice. The Apostle Paul described this in 1st Corinthians 11:23–26 (NASB95) – “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ ²⁵ In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of

Me.’²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

We do this in remembrance of His sacrifice on our behalf. And in doing so, we are also proclaiming to any witnesses that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ is of great significance, for by it we receive forgiveness of sins when we put our trust in Him, as stated in the Scriptures I quoted earlier.

The Apostle Paul continues in verses 27-29 – “Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.²⁸ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.”

In my younger days, we were taught that during the communion service, we should examine ourselves and make sure that we are approaching the communion table in a worthy manner – meaning, that we approach the communion table with no unconfessed sin in our lives. We still live in these imperfect bodies and we still sin sometimes and we must be sure that we are always living a life of repentance, confessing our sins. It is a serious matter if we approach the Lord’s Supper while still harboring some unconfessed sin – to do so would suggest that you don’t really want to repent of that sin, and that is something that is contrary to our life as Christian disciples. This is what I was taught in my younger days and I still follow this practice today: self-examination and confession of sin before partaking of Communion.

The Apostle Paul has some other interesting things to say. Let’s read 1st Corinthians 10:16–17 (ESV) – “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” We Christians participate together in the sharing of this bread and cup. We participate, also, in the body of Christ as we commemorate His sacrifice. This is the idea behind the word “Communion”: we are communing with Christ and we are communing with our brothers and sisters, our fellow believers.

Who may participate in the Communion service and partake of the bread and cup? Some churches are very strict about this and they believe that only members of churches within their own denomination may join the Communion service at their church. Other churches, like ours, have a practice of welcoming any Christian who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to partake of the Lord’s Supper, no matter what denomination they belong to, and they may partake even if they haven’t been baptized yet – after all, it isn’t the act of baptism that determines whether or not you are a born-again Christian, but rather your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Many churches, including ones here in Japan, limit Communion only to baptized Christians – and I think that that is a policy that does have good reasons behind it – but the churches that I have been associated with do not have that limitation and we at OIC do not limit Communion only to baptized believers. Communion is open to everyone who has trusted Christ as Lord and Savior.

Part 2: The Presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper

Let me spend a few minutes describing some contrasting viewpoints held by different Christian groups about the bread and the wine that are used in the Communion service. This is a serious topic and I think you should be aware of these issues, since they have led to divisions among the major groupings of Christian churches. Jesus said “This is my body ... This is my blood.” What exactly does He mean by these words? Are the bread and wine *representative* of Jesus’ body and blood – *symbolic*? Or shall we take these words *literally* – somehow regard the bread and wine as

really being the body and really being the blood of Jesus? During the course of the Middle Ages, a belief developed called the “Real Presence” of Christ in the bread and the wine, that somehow the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. One of the verses used to support this idea is John 6:53-54 (NASB95) – “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.⁵⁴ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day’.” The Roman Catholic Church and many of the churches in the east with ancient roots, such as the Eastern Orthodox Church and related churches, use this passage to say that in the Lord’s Supper, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus, and that this must happen because we must ingest the actual body and blood of Jesus or else we will not be conformed to the image of Christ – something that must occur, according to other passages of Scripture. That’s what some of these churches say, but I don’t agree with them.

The Protestant Reformers rejected this idea. Most Protestants would say that in this passage in John 6, Jesus is not suggesting that the elements of bread and wine actually become His body and blood – rather, He is using physical items to teach spiritual truths. He did something similar earlier in John chapter 6, in verse 35 (NASB95) – “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst’.” Here, Jesus was not meaning that literal hunger and thirst are relieved – rather, He is being symbolic and is saying that spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst for a relationship with our Creator is satisfied when we come to Jesus.

In contrast to the Catholics, John Calvin and what is called the Reformed branch of Protestantism have a viewpoint that I think is much better. Calvin called the Lord’s Supper a “mystical communion” with Christ and that Christ is present in the ceremony, but Christ is not present in the elements themselves (in the bread and the wine), which is what the Catholics and the eastern churches believe. In the Reformed viewpoint, we Christians do have a participation with Christ in this ceremony of Communion, but Christ is not present in the elements – rather, He is present at the communion service as we partake in faith of the Lord’s Supper. It is by participating in faith that we receive a special spiritual benefit in this ceremony. This is the view of denominations such as the Presbyterians, the Dutch Reformed Church, some Anglicans, and some Baptists who follow Reformed theology, also called Calvinist theology. The famous Baptist pastor of the 19th century named Charles Spurgeon followed this viewpoint.²

There is another viewpoint I must tell you about, since this seems to be the majority viewpoint of evangelicals today, including most Baptists and non-denominational churches. This viewpoint on the Lord’s Supper has been called the “memorialist” approach. This approach would say that Christ is not present in any special way in the Lord’s Supper, but that this ceremony is simply a memorial, a remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice and His last supper. After all, Jesus did say, “Do this in remembrance of Me” in Luke 22:19 and 1st Corinthians 11:24. In this viewpoint, the bread and wine are simply symbols pointing to important realities, a reminder and a proclamation of His sacrifice on the cross for mankind, but He is not present in the ceremony in a special way that differs from His presence at other times in our church life. The followers of this viewpoint do not use the term “sacrament” when referring to the Lord’s Supper and baptism, but rather prefer the term “ordinance.”

The memorialist approach is the viewpoint of many modern evangelicals, and it might be the viewpoint that many of you were instructed with. And yet, there are also many evangelicals today

² Haykin, Michael A G. *Amidst Us Our Belovèd Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition*. Amazon Kindle edition. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022.

who follow the Reformed viewpoint that I outlined a few minutes ago. In the history of Osaka International Church, we have had pastors who have followed one or the other of these two approaches.

Part 3: Baptism

In the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV), we read this: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 3:1-3 (NIV) – “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’.³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him”.’”

Mark 1:4-5 (NASB95) – “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.⁵ And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

Luke 24:46-47 (NASB95) – “And He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem’.”

I would like to highlight a few key points in these verses. John the Baptist is the one designated by God to “prepare the way for the Lord,” as Isaiah 40:3 says, quoted by Matthew. As part of the process of accomplishing this, John announces that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near and he preaches a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Evidently, this is the way one prepares for the coming of God’s kingdom, which means preparing for the coming of the Messiah. As people were baptized, they confessed their sins and repented of them – repentance means to change your mind about sin and turn away from it and turn toward God. This is what leads to the forgiveness of sins.

Next, let’s read Romans 6:3-5 (ESV) – “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

This is the basic symbolism of baptism: it is a death and a resurrection, our death to our old life of sin and then being raised to a new life. If you were to continue reading in Romans chapter 6, you would see that the new life we lead is one in which we forsake our sins. And here in verse 5 we read that since “we have been united with him [Christ] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” That is our future: our own resurrection, to be like Jesus, and to be with Him for eternity.

From the beginning, baptism has been seen as the initiation of disciples into the community of the Christian church, where we learn how to live in communion with Christ and with each other. Usually for new converts, there is a period of instruction to make sure that the new Christian understands the gospel and also the church can see that he or she has put their faith in Christ. Then we baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Part 4: Differing viewpoints regarding baptism

It is unfortunate that with the two key ceremonies of the Christian church – baptism and the Lord’s Supper – there are notable differences of opinion about them which have caused division among the various denominations. Passions run high ... traditions run deep ... convictions are very strong. All churches happily baptize persons who have come to Christian faith, and some of these churches also baptize the newborn infants of Christian parents, which is a practice disapproved of by other churches. Some churches insist that the only proper method of baptism is by full immersion of the new convert under the water, while other churches think pouring or sprinkling water over the head is sufficient. These various churches hold their convictions very strongly, which has caused a lot of division. When I was in my 20s, this situation often made me feel really down, but nowadays I simply accept the Christian landscape as I find it and I seek to understand my fellow Christians who have differing viewpoints than I have. I would like to share with you some of the things I have learned. I think you should be aware of some reasons behind these differing practices.

When I was in high school, I attended my friend’s church, which was a Presbyterian church. There I witnessed the baptism of an infant. Although I knew that the Presbyterians had this practice, watching it happen for the first time provoked a strong reaction in my heart. If the New Testament says that we are supposed to repent of our sins and put our faith in the Messiah before being baptized, how can a baby do this? During the baptism service in that church, I felt like standing up and rebuking the people who were baptizing an infant. But of course, I did not do that. I was a visitor. And I was still young. I realized that the Presbyterians must have some reasons for believing that baptizing an infant was a legitimate thing to do and that someday I might learn what those reasons are.

Indeed, I eventually learned what some of those reasons are. Firstly, those Christians who baptize infants see parallels between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament. In their viewpoint, baptism is a symbol of the covenant God has with His people, and when parents baptize their infants, this shows a commitment to raise their children as Christian disciples in the Christian community. These people say that God inaugurated the church not in New Testament times but at the time of Abraham, when he called Abraham to be the patriarch of the chosen people of God.³ We read this in such places as Genesis 12, 15, and 17. In chapter 17, God establishes a covenant with Abraham, a covenant which is sealed with the sign of circumcision. In Genesis 21:4, the infant Isaac is circumcised eight days after his birth. To Christians who desire to baptize their newborn infants, they see this action as parallel to circumcision in the Old Testament, since the baby will be raised in the Christian community and will be discipled in the Christian faith. Furthermore, if you were to read Colossians 2:10-13, you will see that there seems to be some kind of parallel between circumcision and baptism. For these reasons and more, many of our evangelical brothers and sisters believe it to be legitimate and desirable to baptize the infants of Christian parents.

[*Unspoken in the sermon*: Colossians 2:10-13 (NASB95) – “And in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;¹¹ and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;¹² having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.”]

As I was studying these issues back in my 20s, I heard a Presbyterian minister say something rather intriguing. He said that those Christians who see a strong continuity between the Old and New Testaments tend to be those who practice infant baptism, while those who see a strong discontinuity

³ R. Michael Allen, *TH113 Doctrine of Salvation and Eschatology: A Reformed Perspective*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017). Segment 14.

between the Testaments tend toward what is called “believers’ baptism,” the conviction that only people who have made their own decision to believe in Christ should be baptized.

In my 20s, I had a great deal of admiration for my Presbyterian teachers, on a variety of theological and practical topics, and I still do. In addition, I see more continuity of the Old and New Testaments than many of my fellow evangelicals do. But when I read the narrative portions of the New Testament, what I see is that people are called upon to repent of their sins, believe in Christ, and confess their faith – then after that comes baptism. It seems to me that this is the best pattern to follow. And yet I acknowledge that many fine evangelical, Bible-believing Christians have a different viewpoint than I do on this issue.

Next, let me discuss another issue that has been controversial among evangelical Christians. This is the question of whether it is necessary that the person being baptized should be fully immersed under the water or if the pouring of water over the head is sufficient, or the sprinkling of water on the head or on the forehead. The Baptist denomination is well known for its belief that baptism ought to be, or must be, by full immersion. I come from a Baptist background, but I am rather lenient on this question. Let me spend a few minutes explaining how I see this issue.

When we read the narrative portions of the New Testament, we do not find a precise description of how baptisms occurred. We may receive a hint in John 3:23 (NASB95) – “John [the Baptist] also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized.” Because there was much water in that place, this may suggest that they needed a lot of water because they were immersing people, but the evidence here is not conclusive about the exact manner of the baptisms.

A few minutes ago, I read for you Romans 6:4 (ESV) – “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” This verse provides for us a nice picture of baptism. When we undergo baptism, we are identified with Christ’s death, and then we are raised to a new life. If we perform a baptism by immersion, this is a very nice illustration of the new Christian being buried as in a grave after death, and then being raised to new life like Christ was raised from the tomb. I think this is a very nice illustration indeed, though this verse does not say that we have to do baptisms by immersion.

That is what I learned when I took a theology course at John MacArthur’s church back in my mid-20s – that you can’t use Romans 6 to say that immersion must be the proper mode for baptism. Something else I learned in that course was that in cases where someone is in the hospital and they have made a decision to follow Christ, then we would want to baptize them – however, due to the poor health of the new convert, circumstances often make it impractical or undesirable to do a baptism by immersion. Even a Baptist minister under such circumstances would do the ceremony by pouring or sprinkling water on the head. This concession to practical necessity has been a part of Christian practice since the early decades of the Christian era.

The ancient church manual known as the *Didache* (or *Teaching of the Twelve*), written sometime around the year A.D. 100, contains the following instructions about baptism in Chapter 7 of the book:

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then baptize in running water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. If you do not have running water, baptize in some other [water]. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That’s interesting: if you don’t have enough water, then pouring over the head is acceptable. This implies that the first choice is for the person to go completely into the water and to be fully immersed. This seems to be the preference of the early church – but, at the same time, it was also

recognized from very early times that concessions have to be made for reasons of practical necessity. Pouring water over the head is an acceptable alternative if it is impractical to do a full immersion. As church history progressed through the Middle Ages, it became standard to do baptisms by pouring or sprinkling, but actually immersion gives us the best picture of the new life in Christ and there is pretty good evidence that this was the preferred practice in the earliest days of the church.

Here at Osaka International Church, we practice what is called believers' baptism – baptizing those persons who have expressed their own faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As for the method of baptism, we generally baptize by immersion, although I did witness a baptism here that was done by sprinkling – that was when we had a pastor who was a Methodist. Our Statement of Faith and our church's Constitution make no specific prescription of how a baptism should be performed. That is not surprising to me, since we were founded to accommodate evangelical Christians from various backgrounds. Due to the interdenominational nature of our church, it has been the policy of OIC since the beginning to accept for membership Christians who were baptized as infants as long as they have made their own profession of Christian faith as adults.

Conclusion

Today I have discussed with you the two important Christian ceremonies of baptism and Communion, sharing with you the biblical foundations of both and also describing several different ideas about them that exist within the Christian community. I would now like to take a few minutes and ask each of you to ponder again the symbolism behind both baptism and communion – and to reflect on your experience of participating in both.

To my Christian brothers and sisters here today, I ask that you recall how baptism is a picture of you dying to your old life of sin and then rising to new life in Christ. Romans 6:4 (ESV) – “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Verse 6 – “Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” This is the fundamental Christian lifestyle: to forsake anything that is dishonorable to God. Communion is a time for us to reflect on Christ's sacrifice for our sins and to renew our hearts and love Him with all our heart, soul, and strength.

And to those people here with us today who have not yet trusted Christ as Savior, you can do that today. After the service, you can talk to our pastor or talk to me or to one of our council members and we can show you the way to salvation in Jesus Christ. We would be happy to show you the way.