

CHURCH MATTERS

Every self-respecting Baptist needs a solid grounding in what it means to be part of his or her local church. This section includes information to help Baptists:

- Focus on the choice to be Baptist and learn typical requirements for being a church member in good standing.
- Understand how to join and become a member of a Baptist church.
- Explore the relationships that are part of church attendance and membership.
- Learn what architecture teaches us about the theology of Baptist churches.
- Enjoy and learn from the worship service.
- Consider ways to strengthen your local church.



“Where’s itty bitty Baptist?”

1

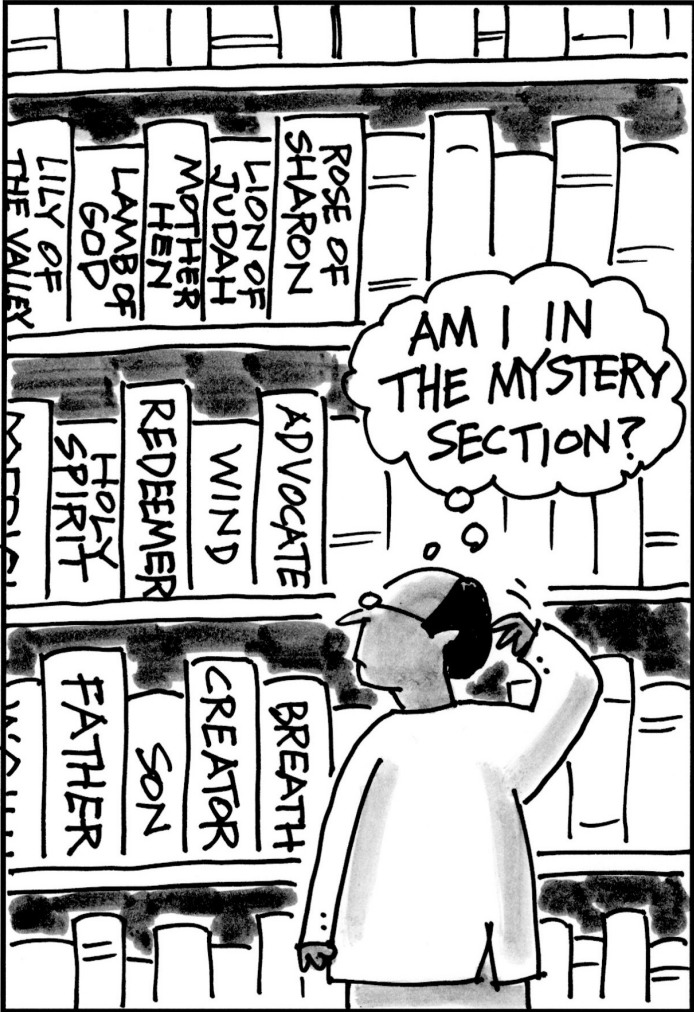
BECOMING A BAPTIST

ARE BAPTISTS BORN OR IS THIS SOMETHING WE CHOOSE?

You can be born with red hair, short legs, or perfect pitch. But you cannot be born a Baptist! One of the beauties of being Baptist is that we choose our commitment to the Christian faith and to our Baptist association or convention.

What Are the Steps for Becoming a Baptist?

- *Hear God's call.* God speaks to each of us at different times. When that happens, we can make a decision to join the church in the presence of a congregation of like-minded believers.
- *Join the church.* Each local church will have its own process for membership. You may need to fill in a membership card or walk to the front of the church at a specified time or verbally indicate your wish for membership to a church leader. (See CHURCH MATTERS: MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.)
- *Learn about membership.* Most Baptist churches have classes for new members that present Christian and Baptist beliefs, introduce church history and ministries, and explain what it means to be a church member. (See CHURCH MATTERS: MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.)



2

HOW TO UNDERSTAND GOD THE THREE-IN-ONE (TRINITY)

What Is the Trinity?

The concept of the Trinity is one of the most important beliefs of major Christian denominations. It teaches that God is identified as the Father or Creator God, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit.

- *God is one.* Deuteronomy 6:4 says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”
- *God is three.* We are also given an instruction called the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) in which it is clear that God is also experienced in the three persons of the Trinity: “Go therefore into all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”
- *Jesus is God.* The Old Testament name for God is I AM (Exodus 3:13-14). The New Testament notes on several occasions that Jesus also claims this divine name. “‘Very truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58).

How Is One God Also Three Persons at the Same Time?

The concept of the Trinity is an effort to explain the Christian experience of salvation through Jesus of Nazareth. Early

Christians held firm to their Jewish roots, maintaining that the God of Israel was the only God and that only God can save. At the same time, they had experienced salvation through Jesus and his continuing presence through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, early Christian theologians resolved that Jesus and his Spirit must also be God.

A variety of analogies have been proposed to illustrate how such unity is possible—including H₂O (which can be ice, water, or steam), an egg (which is comprised of shell, white, and yolk), and the sun (which consists of gases, light, and heat). Another analogy compares the Trinity with a book. Books have three dimensions—length, width, and thickness. Each can be separately defined. Each dimension is an essential component of the book. If any dimension is removed it is no longer a book. Each person of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is separate and has essential dimensions with individual spiritual roles. Together they are the Three-in-One known as the Trinity.¹

NOTE

1. Harold Willmington, “What Is the Trinity?” www.clarifyingchristianity.com/trinity.shtml (accessed July 12, 2012).