Baptism in Whose Name?

If you are preparing to baptize a new believer, the method you choose depends heavily on your **church tradition and denominational guidelines**, as different Christian groups handle this differently.

The vast majority of modern churches resolve the Matthew vs. Acts tension by combining both concepts into a single, cohesive spoken declaration.

The Most Common Practice: The Combined Approach

The standard, most widely accepted verbal formula in global Christianity bridges both scriptures. When the person is in the water, the person administering the baptism typically says:

> ***"Based on your profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."***

By using this phrasing, you are explicitly honoring **both** major biblical themes:

1. **The Authority of Jesus (Acts):** You are acknowledging that the baptism is being done under the authority, lordship, and saving power of Jesus Christ.
2. **The Command of Jesus (Matthew 28:19):** You are strictly obeying the explicit instructions Jesus gave in the Great Commission to use the Triune name.

How to Choose Based on Your Tradition

If you belong to...	…You should baptize using:	Why?
Mainstream Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox	**Triune Formula** *(Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)*	This is considered the absolute standard for a "valid" baptism across nearly all historical global networks.
Oneness Pentecostal or Apostolic	**Jesus Name Only Formula** *(In the name of Jesus Christ)*	These traditions believe the literal name "Jesus" must be spoken out loud over the water to remit sins.
Non-Denominational / Evangelical	**Combined Approach** *(Mentioning Jesus' lordship + the Trinity)*	This ensures theological thoroughness, leaves no room for debate, and centers the moment on both the convert's relationship with Christ and God's Triune nature.

Practical Steps for the Baptism

Beyond the words spoken, the general physical practice for a full-immersion water baptism involves a few simple steps:

1. **The Testimony:** Have the new believer briefly confess or affirm their faith in Jesus out loud before entering the water.
2. **The Stance:** Have them plug their nose with one hand and clasp that wrist with their other hand to secure themselves.
3. **The Lowering:** Support their back firmly, say the chosen verbal formula, and gently lower them completely under the water before lifting them straight back up.

The apparent contradiction between the Triune formula (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*) found in the Didache and Matthew 28:19, and the "*Jesus' name*" formula found in the Book of Acts is one of the most famous debates in early Christian history.

Mainstream biblical scholars, historians, and theologians generally resolve this discrepancy through these three main explanations:

1. "In the Name of Jesus" Was a Description, not a Verbal Formula

The most widely accepted view among historians is that the phrase "*baptized in the name of Jesus*" in the Book of Acts was never meant to be a literal script or liturgy spoken over the person in the water. Instead, it was an accounting or legal description.

- **Ownership and Authority:** In the ancient Greco-Roman world, doing something "in the name of" someone meant acting under their authority or transferring ownership. To be baptized "in the name of Jesus" meant you were entering into a covenant ownership with Jesus rather than John the Baptist or a pagan deity.
- **Shorthand Narrative:** Luke (the author of Acts) was writing a historical narrative, not a church liturgy manual. He used "*in the name of Jesus*" as shorthand to denote *Christian* baptism. Conversely, the Didache and Matthew were writing instructional manuals for how churches should actually conduct services.

2. The "New Factor" for Jewish Audiences

Theology explains why the Book of Acts places such a heavy emphasis on the name of Jesus.

- The early converts in the first few chapters of Acts were Jewish. They already believed in God the Father and were familiar with the Holy Spirit.
- The missing, crucial piece of their faith was acknowledging that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Therefore, Peter and the apostles specified that baptism must be done in the name of Jesus to force an explicit declaration of allegiance to Christ.

3. The Singular "Name" and Trinitarian Unity

Theologians also point out a grammatical detail in the Trinitarian command of Matthew 28:19: *"Baptizing them in the **name** [singular] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."*

Early Christians did not view these two practices as contradictory. They believed that the singular "name" of the Triune God was fully manifested and revealed in the person of Jesus.

Interestingly, the Didache itself demonstrates that the early church used both terms interchangeably. In Didache Chapter 7, it commands: *"baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."*

Yet, just two chapters later in Didache Chapter 9, when discussing communion, it states: *"let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist with you, except those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord."*

This proves the early community saw "Trinitarian baptism" and "baptism in the name of the Lord" as the exact same thing.

Alternative View: The "Oneness" Perspective

There is a minority theological view held by modern Oneness Pentecostals. They argue that the apostles in Acts *did* use a literal verbal formula ("I baptize you in the name of Jesus") and that the Triune formula in Matthew 28:19 was either a description of Jesus' titles or a text that was liturgically altered by later scribes as the doctrine of the Trinity developed over the 2nd to 4th centuries.

However, the discovery of the Didache heavily damaged this theory, as it proves that Christians as early as the 1st century were already practicing explicit Triune water baptism.