

A close-up photograph of a baby being held by an adult's hands. The baby is wearing a white christening gown with a large, light-colored bow at the back. The baby has light skin and blue eyes, looking slightly to the left. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a church interior with a person in white vestments. The entire image is framed by a thin black border.

*Your child's baptism
in the Church of England*





What is baptism?

In baptism, you as parents are: thanking God for his gift of life, deciding to start your child on the journey of faith and asking for the Church's support.

For your child, baptism: marks the start of a journey of faith, which involves turning away from the darkness of self-centredness, turning towards Christ and becoming a member of the local and worldwide Christian family.

Baptism is a 'sacrament': a visible sign of God's love. In baptism, we are thanking God for his gift of life and publicly acknowledging his love. We are acknowledging that we all need to turn away from the darkness of evil and to make a new start with God.

Shouldn't our children make their own decisions?

Some people worry that they are imposing views on their children; but from the moment they are born, you make choices on their behalf. You don't wait until they are old enough to ask for milk before you feed them and in the same way it is right to give them spiritual nourishment and teach them about the love of God from an early age. When they are old enough they may choose to be confirmed and to make an adult affirmation of faith.

However, you may wish to talk over any doubts and concerns you have with your parish priest. He or she will be happy to help. There may be a discussion group that you can join to talk through some of these issues and to find out more about what being a Christian involves.

Making decisions and promises

When you bring your child for baptism, you will be asked to declare publicly on behalf of your child that you believe in God and that you will bring your child up to follow Jesus.

You will be asked to answer, on your child's behalf, that you have decided to turn away from everything which is evil or sinful and to turn instead towards Christ.

The declarations made by you and the child's godparents will be made in front of the church congregation. The Christian community will promise to support you and to pray for you and your child.

The declarations

During the service, you will be asked to make the following declarations:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?
Parents and godparents: I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?
Parents and godparents: I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?
Parents and godparents: I repent of them.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?
Parents and godparents: I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?
Parents and godparents: I submit to Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?
Parents and godparents: I come to Christ.



Thanksgiving

You may wish to ask your parish priest about having a service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child. In this service, you thank God for the gift of your child and the child is blessed. You do not make the same promises as in the Baptism service.

If you choose to have a Thanksgiving, you may also have a Baptism service for your child at a later date.



What happens in the Baptism service?

Your child's baptism will normally take place during the main Sunday service (usually in the morning). This is so that your child can be seen to be joining the family of the Church and be welcomed into membership. In turn, the Church will promise to support and pray for you and your child.

The priest will make sure you know where to sit and when you need to move. Some parts of the service will be for the whole congregation to join in, some will be for you and the godparents.

For the baptism itself, parents and godparents will be asked by the priest to gather either at the front of the church or around the font. (The font is a large basin on a pedestal, containing the water for baptism.)

The priest will ask the parents and godparents to make declarations on behalf of the child (see the section 'Making decisions and promises').

Important symbols

A number of important symbols will be used during the service itself:

The sign of the cross The priest will make the sign of the cross on your child's forehead. This is like an invisible badge to show that Christians are united with Christ and must not be ashamed to stand up for their faith in him.

The priest says: 'Christ claims you for his own. Receive the sign of his cross. Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.'

The priest may invite you and the godparents to sign the cross on the child's forehead after he or she has done so.

Water The priest will pour water on your child's head. Water is a sign of washing and cleansing. In baptism it is a sign of being washed free from sin and beginning a new life with God.

Water is a sign of life, but also a symbol of death. When we are baptized our old life is buried in the waters (like drowning) and we are raised to new life with Christ.

Anointing After baptism in water, the minister may put the christening robe on the child and anoint him or her with oil. This is a sign of the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.

The priest says: 'May God, who has received you by baptism into his Church, pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people

you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit, and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory.'

The welcome The church congregation will say some formal words of welcome to acknowledge that your child has joined the Church and to show how pleased they are to have you among them.

Candles Jesus is called the light of the world. A large candle may be lit in the church and you may be given a lighted candle at the end of the service as a reminder of the light which has come into your child's life. It is up to you, the child's godparents and the church community to help your child reject the world of darkness and follow a way of life that reflects goodness and light, and shares this light with others.



When did baptism start?

Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan. This was a turning point in his life (you can read the story in the Bible: at the beginning of Mark's Gospel in the New Testament). Jesus told his followers to baptize others as a sign that they had turned away from their old life, and begun a new life as Christ's disciples, members of his Body, having been assured of God's forgiveness.

Baptisms often took place in a river: new Christians were dipped under the water, marking their death to an old way of life, and lifted up again as a sign of new birth. Some churches still follow the practice of full immersion in water today.



Frequently asked questions

Q| What's the difference between a baptism and a christening?

A| None, they are just different words for the same thing.

Q| Can we have a private service of baptism?

A| Baptisms usually take place in the church's main service, because they are a public declaration that your child has become part of the church family. It is important that the church congregation is there to support you and welcome your child. However, if personal circumstances make this difficult, talk to your parish priest.

Q| What is the right age for baptism?

A| Baptism can happen at any age. What matters is that those concerned believe it is right to ask for baptism.

Teenagers and adults may also be baptized – speak to your priest about this. This is celebrated with confirmation by the Bishop. You can only be baptized once, but there are ways of renewing your commitment publicly as an adult – your priest will be able to advise.

Q| I'm not a regular churchgoer. Can I still have my child baptized?

A| Yes. The Church believes that God's love is available to all, regardless of their background. Your parish priest can talk you through the options: you may prefer to have a Thanksgiving service first and then consider baptism when you have had time to talk through what is being asked of you.

You may also wish to find out more about the Christian faith and what joining the Church involves before you make a decision about baptism. Again, your parish priest can give you guidance.

Q| What does it cost?

A| The Baptism service is free. There may be a small charge for a certificate or an administration fee. Ask your parish priest.

Godparents

Q| What is a godparent?

A| Godparents make the same promises on behalf of the child being baptized as parents. Godparents promise to pray and support the child and to help the parents to bring up the child in the Christian faith. It is an important and responsible role.



Q| How many godparents should I have?

A| You should have at least three: two of the same sex as the child and one of the opposite sex. Parents can also be godparents.

Q| Who should I choose to be a godparent?

A| Godparents can be family members or friends. However, it is important that you choose people who will take an interest in your child's spiritual welfare and who will pray for you and your child. They should be baptized themselves. Ask your parish priest for advice and see the 'Becoming a godparent' leaflet in this series.

What happens after the baptism?

Baptism marks a new start for your child, as a member of the worldwide Christian community. In turn, the Church welcomes you and your child and promises to support you in bringing the child up in the faith. Most churches have services where children are welcome and special groups and activities for them. There may be a toddler group or 'pram' service during the week. Ask your parish priest.

You may also have questions yourself about the Christian faith – ask your minister for advice. There may be newcomers' or enquirers' groups which you could join.

We hope your baby's baptism will be a wonderful and memorable occasion and that it will mark the beginning of a long and happy association with this church.

For further information about this church and about baptism, please contact:

New Zealand
PO Box 338 Hamilton 3240
51 Victoria Street
The Very Revd Peter Rickman



dean@stpeter.org.nz
021 1977788