



YOUR CHILD'S
BAPTISM

IN THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

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We're delighted you're thinking of baptism for your child. Your child is precious to you and precious to God. At baptism you promise to raise your child to know God loves them, and to help them to follow Jesus as a member of the Church.

Jesus was himself baptized as the sign of a new beginning. You can read the story at the start 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 his followers. Now they were members of Christ's Body (the Church), and could be certain of God's forgiveness.

Baptism is a sacrament, a visible sign of God's love for us. In baptism, we thank God for his gift of life and publicly acknowledge his love. It marks a new start: a decision to follow Jesus Christ within the family of the Church.



What happens in the Baptism Service?

Normally baptisms take place during a regular Sunday morning service, so that the congregation can welcome your child into the family of the Church.

You and the godparents publicly promise to do your best to raise your child to follow Jesus, as part of the wider Church family. The local church members welcome your child and promise to support, encourage and pray for him or her, and for you as a family.

For the baptism itself, the priest asks you and the godparents to bring your child to the front of the church or to the font, containing the water for baptism. The priest asks you to make some promises on behalf of your child. After that your child is baptized, and then welcomed into the Church.

Don't worry about things going smoothly. The priest makes sure that you know what to do and when.

Making promises During the baptism service you and the child's godparents answer six questions on behalf of your child. You declare your Christian faith in front of the church community and promise to help your child to follow Jesus.

Then the church congregation promises to support, encourage and pray for you and your child.

The 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.

Symbols and signs

The baptism service involves many important symbols.

The sign of the cross The priest makes 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 might then invite you and the godparents to sign the cross on the child's forehead.

Water The priest pours water on your child's head as a sign of being washed free from sin and beginning a new life with God.

(In some churches adults go under water to be baptized, to show that their old life is buried or drowned in the water and they are raised to new life with Christ.)

Oil In some churches, after the baptism, the priest puts the christening robe on your child and anoints them 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 says a few formal words to welcome your child fully into the Church family.

Candles Jesus said 'I am the light of the world.' Some churches light a large candle during the service and give a candle at the end of the service as a reminder of the light of Christ in your child's life.

Shouldn't our children make their own decisions?

One day they will. But in the meantime you probably make decisions for your children every day. You don't wait until they can ask before you feed them. In the same way, choosing to baptize your child shows you want them to have spiritual food as they grow up and to be fully part of the Christian family, the Church. Later they will be able to declare their faith for themselves at a confirmation service.

If you're concerned about this, why not talk it over with your parish priest? There may be a local group where you can discuss what being a Christian involves.

Thanksgiving

You could also ask your priest about the special 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. However, you do not make the same promises as in the baptism service.

If you choose to have a thanksgiving, you can still have a baptism service for your child at a later date.



PRAYER

[Child's name],
today God has touched you with his love
and given you a place among his people.
God promises to be with you
in joy and in sorrow, to be your guide in life,
and to bring you safely to heaven.

Shine as a light in the world
to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Frequently asked questions

What's the difference between a baptism and a christening? None. They are the same thing. Churches normally say 'baptism'.

I'm not a regular churchgoer. Can I still have my child baptized? The Church believes that God loves everybody. Ask your parish priest about all the options for your child. Maybe a thanksgiving service feels right for you now. You can still have a baptism later, when you've decided whether you want to make the public promises baptism involves. Your priest can help you while you make that decision.

Can we have a private service of baptism? Baptisms normally take place in the church's main service, so the church community can see your child join the church and welcome them in. If this is difficult for some reason, talk to your parish priest.

What is the right age for baptism? Baptism can happen at any age. What matters is that you believe it is the right thing to do. Teenagers and adults may also be baptized – you can ask your priest about this. You can only be baptized once, but there are ways of renewing your commitment publicly as an adult. To find out more, ask your priest.

What does it cost? The baptism service is free. Some churches make a small charge for a certificate or administration fee.

What are godparents for? Godparents make the same promises as parents to help raise your child in the Christian faith as part of the Church family. It is an important and responsible role.

How many godparents should we have? In the Church of England you must choose at least three godparents. Two must be the same sex as the child and one of the other sex. Parents can also be godparents.

Who should we choose to be godparents? Godparents can be family members or friends. Choose people you trust to take an interest in your child's spiritual welfare and pray for you and your child. Godparents must be baptized themselves. Ask your priest for advice and have a look at the **Becoming a godparent** leaflet in this series.

What happens after the baptism? Now your child is a member of the worldwide Christian community! Most local churches have services where children are welcome. Many run special groups and activities for them. Some offer a weekday toddler group or 'pram service'. Ask the contact person for details.

Perhaps you have your own questions about the Christian faith. Why not get in touch with the priest to discuss them?

We hope your child'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:

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