

# All About Baptism

Baptism is the sacrament which marks the beginning of our Christian life. At a baptism service, the minister often begins by telling us that baptism means:

- **being washed;**
- **'dying' and 'rising';**
- **being clothed with Christ;**
- **receiving a new dignity.**

All of these are important parts of what it means to begin to live the Christian life.



**Being washed** - Forgiveness of sins was won for us by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God offers us this forgiveness at our baptism. In the case of adults, baptism washes away the burden of past sin and guilt, and gives a new start. In the case of children, baptism begins a new relationship with God within his Church where they will know forgiveness throughout their lives.

**'Dying' and 'rising'** - At baptism, we die to sin so that we may live Christ's risen life. Adults – or godparents and parents on behalf of children for whom they're acting – are asked if they will turn away from whatever separates them from God and other people, and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. This is not just a once and for all thing, because throughout our lives we need to make new starts, to renew what happened at our baptism. One of the wonderful things about God is that he allows us to do this.

**Being clothed with Christ** - To be 'clothed with someone' is an expression going back to biblical times. It means to take on someone's character and principles, and to live like them. So when we say that God 'clothes us with Christ', it means that, through the Holy Spirit, God gives us the gifts that are Christ's so that we can begin to live like Jesus.

**A new dignity** - In baptism, we are 'born again' of water and the Holy Spirit to become Jesus' adopted brothers and sisters. This is an amazing gift, since it means becoming part of God's 'family life'. It also means that we become the brothers and sisters of all the other people who have been baptized and are members of the Church. All this gives us a new dignity.

**Who can be baptized?** - Anyone can. If you want your baby or child to make a start on the Christian path, then baptism is the way for them to do it. Or if you place your faith in Jesus and want to accept God's offer to forgive your sins and to strengthen you to live the Christian life, then baptism is right for you, too. Since baptism is the beginning of the Christian journey, you can only be baptized once in your life. If you have already been baptized and feel you want to make a renewed commitment to living the life of Christ, it is possible to renew your baptismal vows. Or if you are not already confirmed, that may be the next step for you to take.

## **Do I need to have been coming regularly to Church in order to be baptized?**

No. Baptism is about making a start. So, the important thing is what you intend to do in the future.

## **Is baptism right for me, or for my child?**

The most important question is whether you are ready to place your faith in Jesus and to make a new start in your life with Jesus and his Church – or whether you are ready to help your child to make that new start.

**Next Step** If you are, or think you might be, then the next step is to ask your local Minister about baptism. He or she will be delighted to help you further and to explore with you what accepting God's gift of baptism can mean in your life.

# Frequently asked questions about Baptism and Christening

**What is the difference between a baptism and a christening?** - There is no difference between a christening service and a baptism service. Some churches will use the word 'baptism' and some the word 'christening'. Babies are 'baptised' during a 'christening' service just as couples are 'married' during a wedding service.

Christening is a traditional English word which means to become a member of the Christian church. Baptism means to be immersed in water. During a christening service, a baby or child will be baptised with water and welcomed into the community of the local church.

**What is baptism?** - "Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love." It is also a celebration, a time to come together with family and friends; remembering that your child is loved by God, is part of a wider community and has a place with God's people

**What happens in the service?** - Baptisms are services replete with symbols for new life. At your baby's baptism water will be blessed and used to pour on the baby's head. A candle and book may be given. Godparents and parents will make promises on behalf of the baby, and prayers will be offered for the baby and the family. There may also be readings and hymns, which you may be able to choose.

**Does a christening give my baby a name?** - No. Your baby's name is given when you register the birth. During the baptism, the baby's name will be used often, and when the water is poured over the child's head, the minister will always use the name.

**Who can have a baptism service?** - The Church welcomes all babies, children and families - whatever shape that family takes. You do not have to be married to ask for a christening for your child. You do not have to be an active churchgoer - as parents, you do not even have to have been christened yourselves. Everyone is welcome at their local church.

**How much does a baptism service cost?** - The good news is that a baptism service is free. There may be costs for a family party, for gifts, for christening robes - but the church is free.

**Where can I hold the baptism?** - You can have your baby baptised at your local church. If you want to have the baptism at a different church, for example, where you grew up or where you were married, you will need to talk to the minister at that church.

**When can I have a baptism?** - You can have your baby or child baptised at any age. There is no upper age limit, but after about the age of seven your child should be able to make the promises for themselves.

The service can be held as part of a main Sunday service, but there are also opportunities to have a service at a different time, again usually on a Sunday. Talk to the minister, and ask their advice.

**What about godparents?** - The involvement of godparents can be one of the most joyful parts of the christening. Godparents are not necessarily the people who will care for your child should anything happen to you. Rather they should be people who will be there for your child and help them think about the bigger questions in life - questions of love, hope and faith.

Every child should have no fewer than three godparents, at least two of the same sex as the child. Parents may be godparents for their own children, providing they have at least one other godparent.

Godparents must be baptised themselves and old enough to make some serious promises on behalf of the child.