

Why Baptism?

By the time you open this booklet, we hope that you will have had an opportunity to meet your Baptism Visitor. They are representatives of the Congregation at St Mary's & St Peter's. They will not only help you through the planning of your child's Baptism but they will also be there as a friendly face to support you and your family as you prepare for the big event.

Baptism is the gift of God to his children. Baptism is the event through which we become members of God's family - the Church. It is a sacrament. This means that it is a sign of God's love for us and a means through which he gives us the strength and support of his Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to belong?

For Christians, as for Jesus, community life has always been essential. Jesus built up a community of people who were bound to him and to each other by love and a shared understanding of the purpose of life. It is through that community that Christians reach out to the rest of the world.

It is through baptism that we become part of this community. Baptism binds us to Christ and the whole family, which is his Church, in love and faith.

God created us in order to share his life and love with us. He made us to share a relationship with him. He wants us to live by faith.

What then is faith?

Faith is a gift, offered freely by God, which enables us to know that God loves us as a parent loves a child. The Hebrew word for faith means literally 'to lean upon'. Whenever Jesus spoke of God he always called him Abba which means Dad or Daddy. So, faith is a gift which enables us to lean on God as a child leans on its father or mother.

In baptism we celebrate this relationship of faith which God has given us and wanted for us from the very beginning, but which, through sin, we rejected. Instead of 'leaning on God' we went our own way. Instead of loving God and others we loved ourselves becoming self-centred and selfish.

The love of Jesus gives us the power to break out of self-love and learn how to love as God wants. Baptism celebrates and makes present the power of God which makes us free.

Why do we need water?

The symbolism of water in the Baptism Service goes back to the Old Testament times, when the waters of the Red Sea parted allowing the Israelites to pass from slavery to freedom. In the same way, through Christ's own baptism in the River Jordan the Holy Spirit came upon him as it does us, giving us real freedom.

The importance of baptism is shown in Christ's command to his disciples:

Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.
Matthew 28:19-20

From the earliest days of the Church, children were admitted through baptism, often as part of whole family baptisms. We read of Lydia's family in Acts 16:15 and Cornelius' family in Acts 11:14 and the family of Paul's gaoler at Phillippi in 1 Corinthians 1:16.

Hippolytus, an early Christian, writing around AD 215 says:

First you should baptise the little ones, those who can speak for themselves should speak. But for those who cannot speak their parents should speak or another who belongs to their family.

What happens in the Baptism Service?

Children who are too young to profess the Christian faith are baptised on the understanding that they are brought up as Christians within the family of the Church.

St Mary's & St Peter's, encourages baptism to take place during the main Service of the week, when we gather as a family to celebrate God's love and his presence among us in the sacraments. At the Sunday morning Eucharist, which most of the congregation attends, we listen to the reading of God's Word, we join together in prayer and, most important, we meet around the Lord's table. There, we celebrate the Eucharist and meet Jesus in the bread and wine - his body and blood.

Obviously the baby is not going to understand the readings. However, the readings should: help us to get to know God a little more through his word,

help us to understand his will for us,

and remind us all, but especially you, the parents and godparents, of your responsibility to help your child to come to know and love God.

After the readings the priest explains and draws out the message from the readings in a sermon.

The Decision

The first part of the baptism takes place at the chancel steps. The priest asks the parents and godparents the questions which you will see in the Baptism Service. It is important that you as a parent or godparent are sure that you can make these declarations. What they are asking is:

Do you turn away from evil in your life?

Are you sorry for the things that you have done wrong in your life?

Do you wish to live a better life with God's help?

Do you want Jesus to be part of your life?

The Signing of the Cross

After the decision has been made, the child is anointed on the forehead with the oil of Baptism. This oil was blessed by the Bishop for this purpose. Anointing is a sign that the child is set apart as a member of God's family.

Christ claims you for his own.

Receive the sign of his cross.

The Baptism

When we arrive at the font, the first thing the Priest does is to bless the water which will be used. After this the parents and godparents, along with the whole congregation, declare the faith in which they believe and into which they want their child to be Baptised. Then the priest takes the child from one of the godparents, asking them to name the child. Then he pours water over the child's head three times, "*In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" just as Jesus commanded. The newly baptized child is then handed back to a parent.

The Commission

This sets out more fully the role that parents and godparents have in bringing up the baptised child in the way of Christ, and explains that to carry out this task they will need God's help. A prayer is then said to ask for God's assistance in carrying out the nurturing of a new believer in His Church.

The Welcome

The first thing that the family of God at St Mary's & St Peter's does after someone has become a member of that family is to welcome them. This happens immediately after the baptism when the whole family join in saying to those newly baptized:

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism:

N and N, by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.

We welcome you into the fellowship of faith;

we are children of the same heavenly Father;

we welcome you.

If the baptism does not take place at the main Service on a Sunday morning, then the parents return the following Sunday with the newly baptized child for this Welcome and the Commissioning. The reason for this is that it is important for the worshipping community to be able to welcome the newest members of the Christian family. This is also a chance for you to meet with the congregation, especially after the Service over a cup of coffee. You may feel that you do not know anyone,

but this will not be so as your Baptism Visitor will be there to make you feel at home.

The Light

*God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness
and has given us a place with the saints in light.*

*You have received the light of Christ;
walk in this light all the days of your life.*

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

The candle is the symbol of the life of Christ bringing light into the lives of those who are baptised. This gift, however, is not given as a private and personal gift - it is to be shared with others. Just as the candle uses itself up in giving light, so we must use ourselves up, as Jesus did in the service of others.

*Jesus said: You are the light of the world...
your light must shine in the sight of all,
so that, seeing your good works, they may give
praise to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)*

FAQs

Can anyone be Baptised in the parish?

Usually it is for people who live in the parish or perpetually attend one of the Churches. However, we can baptise anyone with the written permission of their own local Church of England parish priest.

When do you Baptise?

We normally Baptise on the first Sunday of the month (also Mothering Sunday and Easter Day). In very exceptional circumstances we will baptise at other times. The Baptism may take place during one of the regular Services or at another time, usually on a Sunday afternoon.

Do you do private Baptisms?

Baptism is a Public Service usually within the Eucharist. If we undertake to do a Baptism at another time this Service will be open to anyone else who may want Baptism.

What is the Baptism Welcome?

If your Baptism has not taken place in a main Service we ask you to return and come to one of those Services in order that the newly Baptised may be presented to the congregation and welcomed into the parish. It is at this Service that you will receive your Baptism Certificate.

How do we find out more?

In the first instance, ring the Parish Office (01784 469155) or click below to email. You will be invited to a Baptism preparation morning at which we will talk about Baptism and answer your questions and then go through a rehearsal. It is at this event that you will be able to book your Baptism.

Can anyone be a Godparent?

You can only be a Godparent if you yourself are Baptised. Godparents have to make promises on behalf of the child and you cannot make these if you are not Baptised. If you are not Baptised you may be a sponsor for the child.