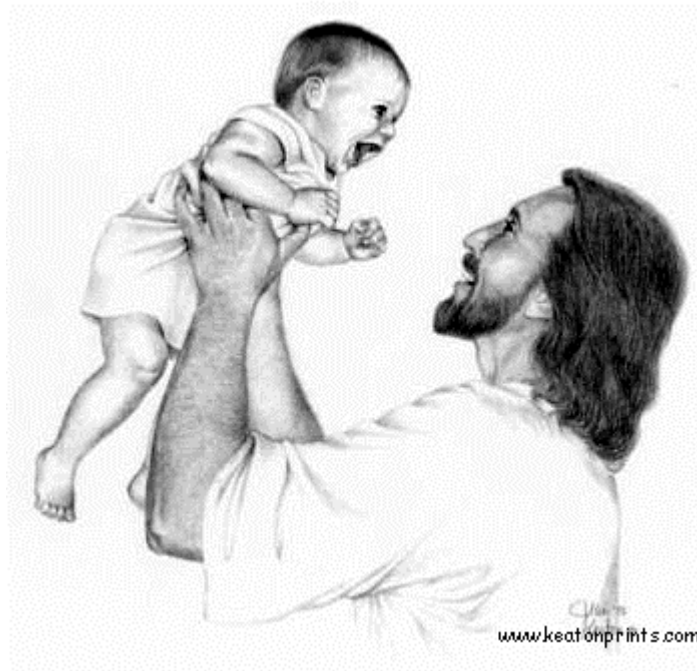


All About Baptism

**A guide to Baptism
For Parents and Godparents**



**St. Peter & St. Paul Deddington, with
Barford St Michael, Barford St John and
St John Hempton**

How did it all start?

Baptism is basically a symbolic washing which marks a fresh start for the person being baptised. Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus himself was baptised, when he was about thirty years old. Jesus told his own followers to spread the word about him and his teaching, and to baptise those who chose to join them. The word 'Christening', which is the common nickname for baptism, reflects this as it means 'Christ-ing' someone or enabling them to belong to Christ.



In those days there were no church buildings, and so baptisms took place in rivers or lakes. They used a lot of water too – the person was baptised by either having water poured over them, or by being dipped under the water.

Who was baptised?

At first, baptism was for adults who had made their own decision to become Christians. It was a serious decision to make because the authorities in the Roman Empire were very suspicious of Christians, and often had them arrested or killed.

Are adults still baptised?

Yes. In fact some churches (such as Baptist churches) *only* baptise those who are old enough to understand the meaning and the serious commitment it represents.

The Church of England baptises both adults and children. In fact, because fewer children are baptised these days, more and more people are baptised as adults when they discover the Christian faith later in life.

So, why do some churches baptise babies?

Although baptism was originally for adults, it soon began to involve whole families. Christians knew that God was just as interested in children as in adults, so they wanted their children to have the sign of belonging too.

When a child is baptised, the parents and godparents make the promises about Christian belief and commitment on behalf of the child. The promises are the same as those used at the baptism of an adult. Obviously, babies are too young to understand, and so when they are old enough they need to make their own decision about whether to carry on following Jesus. The service which the church calls 'Confirmation' eventually developed out of this need. At such a service, people who were baptised as babies make an adult commitment to Jesus and become adult members of the church. The promises used are the same as at an adult baptism.

Why is water used?

In baptism the water is used to symbolise being washed – representing God's forgiveness washing away all that is selfish within us. This applies even to children, not because we believe that children are inherently evil, but as a reminder that we are *all* in need of God's cleansing and forgiveness (even children), because left to ourselves we grow up to go our own way and leave God out of our lives.

So what is a Christian?

Becoming a Christian isn't about being a certain sort of person (being 'religious' or 'good enough') – it's about being on a journey. Jesus Christ said that he came from God the Father to show us what God was like, and to give us life in all its' fullness so that we might know that life as well. Because God made us in the first place, becoming a Christian feels like going home – it is just the start of our journey with God, who loves us completely. That's our destination – to be at home with God and to be made like Jesus.



Being a Christian isn't the destination – it's just the start, the start of a journey back to God, who loves us completely.

Time for a change

The Bible uses the word 'repent' to describe the beginning of this journey. It's a word that simply means 'change' – a change of direction for your life; a changed way of seeing the world; a change of priorities; a change of behaviour and more: the beginning of a journey back to a loving God.

Perhaps you never imagined that being a Christian involved all of this?

People at the time of Jesus were faced with the same kind of questions. Many were already 'religious'. Others were certainly not. Lots were just ordinary people trying to be decent and do the right thing. All of them were faced with

a challenge when they heard Jesus: to go on as before, or to change their way of seeing the world and their way of living in it.

It was tempting for them, as it is for us, to think that all that is really needed is to decide to do better (like a New Year's Resolution). But trying to do better (whilst important) is *not* at the heart of being a Christian. Jesus didn't call us to do better, but to admit our faults with honesty (and apologies where required!) and to receive God's forgiveness so that our past doesn't hold us back.

Marking the new start

Once they knew they wanted this new life, the first followers of Jesus were baptised to show publicly that this was their new beginning. Baptism then has two meanings:

- It is a sign of this new start
- It is the sign of joining God's community, the church

It has to be said that many people get their children baptised without really understanding this.

But you don't have to go to church to be a Christian, do you?

That depends....you can certainly be a good person, even a religious person, without coming near a church, but that's not what being Christian actually means.

It is possible to be a Christian without attending services (for instance, some people can't get there every week because of illness or old age), but there is a world of difference between not being *able* to come to church and *choosing* not to be involved.

What really counts is not just *coming* to church on a Sunday, but *being part* of a church all the time – belonging to the family.



When you play a team game, like football or hockey, although there are some things you can do on your own (like practising, keeping fit, and so on), in order to play the sport you have to be part of the team. Following Jesus is not a game of course, but God's intention in sending Jesus was to form his 'team'; groups of people who wanted to put him at the centre of their lives.

The church is trying to be that team – a living sign on earth of the way things are meant to be. That's why baptism is about **belonging** to the church as well as **believing** in God.

Life's a journey – not a destination

So, to be a Christian is to make a decision to begin a journey – a journey to God.

- It may involve significant changes to our lifestyle, how we make decisions and how we spend our money.
- It may affect our friendships and relationships.
- It means being concerned about things that God cares about, like environmental issues, poverty and injustice around the world and in our own communities.
- It means accepting God's challenge to keep on changing as the journey goes on.

But in all this change there is also a sense of a fulfilled life, of 'coming home'. God always takes us as we are, and does not ask us to make any changes without his help.

This is the life that your child, or godchild is being 'signed up' for in baptism.

The role of parents and godparents

Your role as a parent or godparent is to help the child grow up to **belong** to the church as well as to **believe** in God – and to show them the way by your teaching and example. ‘Godparents’ get their name because they are meant to be people who know about God which is why the Church of England’s rules expect godparents to be baptised, and ideally confirmed as well. In the baptism service you will be promising to help the child to grow in faith and, in due time, to be Confirmed. Obviously, it’s harder to do that if you’re not Confirmed yourself.

What do I need to know?

Perhaps you’re feeling that there is a lot more to baptism and the Christian faith than you realised?

Take a look at the declarations made by parents and godparents at baptism which are printed on the back of this booklet. Make sure you can make these promises and be true to yourself about your beliefs and lifestyle.

Perhaps you have been challenged about your own faith? You might find that joining one of our *Alpha* courses would help – this would provide an opportunity to explore the Christian faith and to ask questions with others who are also finding out more, or perhaps ‘brushing up’ on the basics.

You may want to explore the possibility of being Confirmed in your own faith before you bring your child or godchild to baptism and sign them up for the Christian way of life.

Ask the vicar, Revd Annie Goldthorp if you are interested in finding out more – her telephone number is 01869 336880, but better still, come and talk to her after one of our services and meet her in person, together with God’s family in Deddington, Hempton or Barford.

Extracts from the Baptism Service

The congregation first pledge their support to you and your child, then the minister says to the parents and godparents:

Parents and godparents, the Church receives *these children* with joy. Today we are trusting God for *their* growth in faith. Will you pray for *them*, draw *them* by your example into the community of faith and walk with them in the way of Christ?

With the help of God, we will

In baptism *these children* begin their journey of faith.

You speak for *them* today.

Will you care for *them*, and help *them* to take *their* place within the life and worship of Christ's Church?

With the help of God, we will

Questions about turning to God

The minister addresses the candidate through his/her parents and godparents:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

I repent of them.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

I submit to Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

I come to Christ

Questions about belief

The minister addresses the congregation:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

I believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church
This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.