

BAPTISMS

The Signs and Symbols of Baptism

Water

The word 'baptise' comes from the Greek and is associated with the dipping into or pouring over of water as an act of cleansing. In baptism, water is used to symbolize the purifying change that comes with forgiveness and the promise of support and nourishment in a new life as members of the faith community of the Risen Christ.

The water is blessed to signify the sacred nature of its pouring onto the head of the baptised in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Sign of the Cross

A sign on something shows its origin or ownership. The sign of the cross is the mark of Christians for Jesus who died on the cross. It is traced with the thumb on the forehead to show that the baptised belongs to Christ and His Church.

Oil

Oil of Baptism is also known as Oil of Chrism. It is a mixture of oil and balsam and has been blessed by the bishop. It is used to signify the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In his letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul indicates that the Spirit brings love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control (Galatians 5:22).

Candles

Candles symbolize Christ the Light of the World. In baptism a candle is lit from the Paschal or Easter Candle (which stands near the altar at Easter as a sign of the Risen Christ) and is given as a reminder that the Light of Christ has entered the life of the newly baptised. Its flame symbolizes the faith which will burn through the life of the baptised.

God Parent Information

Congratulations on being asked to be a godparent: they are very important people! We know that your friends or relations will have thought hard about this. They have chosen you to be a special person in their child's life, someone who will offer encouragement, prayer and support for the child, and help them discover more about the Christian faith as they grow up.

What does being a godparent involve?

As a godparent you have a special role. It's about helping a child to come to know God, encouraging them in their spiritual life and supporting them in their membership of the local church.

You need to be at the Baptism where you will make promises to help bring them up in the Christian faith. It's a role that will grow over time, as your godchild grows up and develops their own faith. If for some serious reason you cannot attend, then talk to the parents and arrange for someone to represent you.

Is it a big responsibility?

It is. Have a look at the questions you will answer in the Baptism Service. Take some time to think through the commitments that you make when you answer them. But don't forget that the church can support you in encouraging and praying for your godchild.

Do I have to be a regular churchgoer?

Being asked to be a godparent is a good opportunity to think about your own faith. At least one godparent should have been baptised. Baptism or Confirmation preparation can help you with your own questions about the Christian faith. It will also help you support your godchild in their own faith. If you have any questions at all, why not speak to your local vicar or other Christian that you know.

What should I give as a Baptismal present?

The most important gift you can give your godchild is your time, your interest and your prayers. You may want to mark the Baptism by giving a special gift.

Ideas include:

- A Bible: there are many different editions of the Bible. Some have pictures and simple words, which are especially suitable for children. Some come in presentation boxes.
- Bible storybooks - there are lovely illustrated books of Bible stories for children, some with prayers included. Why not build up a collection over a few years?
- Books of prayers - there are many which are specially for children
- A silver or gold cross or chain - to be worn in the future
- A small wooden cross
- Drawings, paintings or posters of Christian stories
- An icon or picture for you godchild's bedroom or home
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What happens in the service?

A Baptism might take place during a normal Sunday service or at a separate time. All of you will be made welcome, and the regular congregation will make promises to support and pray for the child, parents and godparents.

At the Baptism itself, the vicar will ask the parents and godparents to bring the child to the front of the church or to gather round the font.

Before the baby is baptised, the vicar will ask you to declare that you intend to do your best as a godparent. The vicar asks you to say that you are 'prepared to walk with the child in the way of Christ' and will help them take their place in the church.

The vicar will make sure it all goes smoothly and that everyone knows what to do and when to do it.

The church may give you a special card to remind you of your godchild's Baptism and the promises you have made. Keep it someplace where you see it every day, so you remember your godchild and ask God to bless them each day. Remember to keep in touch, take time to visit your godchild to get to know them, have fun and to pray.

What do I do next?

Both you and your godchild will get more out of your relationship if you keep it alive. Children love to get letters, postcards, emails, text messages. Why not send a small gift on the anniversary of the baptism to show you care about this special relationship? Keep in touch, and as they grow older they may be able to ask you their questions about life and faith... and that's really special.