

Baptism for Infants and Children

At

Church of the Resurrection, Pleasant Hill

Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.



Why?

Why do I need to baptize my child?

The Episcopal church no longer teaches that all persons are born into sin and thus baptism is your cleansing from original sin. Rather, baptism is now seen as an initiation, or an entry point, into Christ's Body, the church. Baptism is the ritual and sacrament of declaring that you wish your child to be part of a Christian community and to be raised with Christian values and practices.



What does "Marked as Christ's own forever" mean?

Baptism is a bond with God that is indissoluble. The physical marking of the cross on the child's forehead is a visual reminder that you are forever God's and nothing that a person does can ever break that bond. God will always offer forgiveness no matter how far we have strayed.

What does it mean to be a member?

There are perhaps two different kinds of memberships in the Episcopal church. There is membership in a particular local congregation where you share your time and gifts with that community, regularly worship with Eucharist, and become incorporated into that specific community of Christians. There is also the membership into God's household that is described in the baptismal liturgy that is open to all believers through baptism. This membership isn't into a certain locale or even denomination but rather into God's family that transcends the limitations that we humans often define it. This membership is indissoluble and marks you as God's own.

When?



When does the church perform baptisms?

Baptisms are held four Sundays during the year. We celebrate baptisms on All Saints Day (around November 1st), on or around January 6th when we remember the baptism of Jesus, at the Easter Vigil (Saturday evening service before Easter Sunday), and Pentecost (The 7th Sunday after Easter).

When does Baptism happen during the Sunday service?

Baptism is part of our Sunday worship several times a year. Right after the sermon, the parents and godparents gather around the baptismal font and participate by responding to questions on behalf of the child. The entire congregation recites the Baptismal Covenant followed by communal prayers over the child. The Priest blesses the water and then holds the child over the font (or immerses them) and scoops up three handfuls of water while saying, "I baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. The priest then dips their fingers in oil and make the sign of the cross on their forehead or pours the oil on their head. The newly baptized is officially welcomed into the "household of God."

Why does the baptism have to be part of an entire worship service?

We believe that a child is baptized into the household of God, and we are all part of that community. Therefore, this comes with responsibility by all the members to support each other as our faith journeys are life-long and not done in solitude but rather in community where we are formed and send out into the world to do God's work. Thus, unlike private home baptisms or even separate smaller services, The Episcopal Church incorporates baptism into our Sunday morning worship services to purposely be done in the midst of the community.

Who?

Who participates in the baptism of the child?

The child will be the focus of the baptism, but their parents and sponsors (called “Godparents”) will be the active participants.

Godparents also play a special role in the baptism and take the same vows as the parents. They are no longer considered legal guardians (as was sometimes in the case in the past) but rather can serve as mentors, role models and friends as the child grows in their faith formation. Godparents are asked “with prayers and witness to help the child grow into their full stature in Christ.”

At least one parent and Godparent must be baptized.



The other participants in baptism are the community gathered around the baptismal font. (The “bowl” and water that the baby or child is baptized with.) This community includes any family and friends of the baptized but also includes any member of the church that attends that day. The Episcopal church believes that baptism is made into a community of faith and all those that attend are asked “Will you...support this child in their life in Christ?” And the congregation is encouraged to give a loud and thunderous “We will!”

What?

What does Baptism mean in the Episcopal church?

There are different layers of meaning for baptism within the Episcopal church and the greater church as well. Our Prayer book tells us that Holy Baptism is “full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.” In other words, baptism, at whatever age, makes you a Christian and a member of the church. And once you are baptized, you are always considered baptized as it is not something that needs to be renewed or done over.

The Episcopal church teaches that baptism is a sacrament and thus is a visible sign of God’s grace. Baptism also signifies a public and ritualized way of declaring that you are choosing to follow Jesus’ teachings or are making that declaration for your child. Baptism carries the seal of the Holy Spirit which is expressed through the “sevenfold gift of the Spirit” asking for the gifts of “an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.” This means that baptism has brought the Holy Spirit into the child’s life in an immersive and substantial way.

In the case of infant’s or young child’s baptism, baptism also offers the opportunity for parents and godparents to have a chance to reaffirm their own Christian beliefs. They will be called upon to answer on behalf of the child, a renunciation of evil. In three different ways, they are asked to turn away from evil thoughts and actions (individually and communal) and return to God. And from this turning away from evil, they are then asked to come closer to God and follow Jesus’ teachings. These two sets of questions set the baptismal liturgy and all that comes later because of our belief that with baptism you enter into a new life with Jesus and forgiveness of sins. In order to be baptized, you need to declare (on behalf of your child) that you desire to be in relationship with Jesus opening the waters of baptism and a new life in God’s household.

How?

How do we prepare for the baptism of our child?

Once you have notified the church of your desire to have your child baptized, a clergy member will contact you to schedule the baptism. The clergy will meet with you and any others to be baptized to provide some teaching around baptism and answer any questions you might have. The teaching will discuss why we baptize our children, what the Episcopal church believes about baptism, and how we perform baptisms here. We will also explore how you can practice your faith as parents and how to model your faith to your children. (Including your family and individual prayer life, participating in a faith community, reading and digesting scripture, and modeling a Christian life.) We hope to offer you resources for practices to implement so you can find some that best fit into the rhythm of your life. This is not intended to be an unattainable goal but rather ways for you to draw closer to God and offer the support that your child will need to make these connections also.

How do we choose Godparents for our child?

Choosing Godparents is a way for you to extend “the village” that raises your child. Godparents are expected to support the child’s faith formation by helping them grow in their “knowledge and love of God.” They can be another support system for the child to encourage them in their faith journey so when they stumble (as we all do) they will help them to stand again and move forward. Godparents should be people who are committed to being part of your child’s life and will offer love and support. They do not need to be family members but can be close friends who have shown you their faith and commitment to God.

