

Loudoun Parish Church

Baptism



When you bring your baby for baptism, he or she is baptised into the fellowship of the universal church in a special ceremony called a sacrament.

He/she is received into the Christian Church and shown off to the congregation as the latest recruit to be welcomed into their number. As well as being a special and significant occasion for the family it is also a special and significant occasion for the church in which your child is baptised.

Baptism is often called the 'Badge of Membership' of the church. Parents sometimes find it difficult to grasp that in having their children baptised they are bringing them into membership of the Church. From that day on, they belong to the Church. They belong to the family of God.

Centuries ago, when converts to Christianity were baptised they took on new names in order to emphasise that they were starting a new chapter in life. They wanted to follow Christ and with Christ's help to live a life that would give them meaning and joy. This 'Christian' name was given to mark a new start.

Babies don't need a new start, nor a naming ceremony, but since the Church baptises not only adult believers but the children of believers, what we do in Infant Baptism is to emphasise that from the very beginning the child belongs to Christ. Strictly speaking then, Christian names are the names given at the time of the 'Christening' or, as we prefer to call it, baptism.

Why do we have baptism?

We baptise people in Church in obedience to the command of Jesus. Read Matthew, Chapter 28, verses 16-20. Baptism is a sign of belonging to Jesus and of being engaged to him throughout our lives.

Baptism is the ceremony of entry into membership of the Church. We speak of the Sacrament of Baptism because in the action of sprinkling or washing with water we see the sign and symbol of being marked or touched by God's grace. No magic - just an outward sign of the love we hold in our hearts for God and which he holds for us.

For adults who become Christians, baptism is a ceremony of symbolic washing. It represents the washing away and of a past life with values and ways of living that the person wishes to renounce. It represents the start of a new life in Christ. It also represents the acceptance of God's Holy Spirit.

The promise of God to free his people from the grip of sin and to offer them new life in Christ by the giving of his Spirit is extended to believers and also to their children.

Read Acts chapter 2, verses 38-39.

From the earliest times in the history of the church, Christians have brought their children for baptism. There was a day when children died in infancy and parents held the superstitious view that unless the baby was baptised he /she would not be received into heaven. They sought baptism for their babies as early as possible. There is no foundation for such a view. Baptism is not an insurance policy. God's love is not conditional upon anything we do. We baptise our children because of the command of Jesus because we witness to the world that with God's help we shall bring them up as Christians.

Once when people brought their children to Jesus disciples tried to shield Jesus from the hassle of parents and children. Jesus' words on that occasion are very telling. He said, 'Let the children come to me and don't try to hinder them. The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'

Read Matthew 19.13-15.

Baptism has always been the Church's way of helping people set out in the Christian life. All the promises of baptism apply as much to children as to adults and we need look no further than the words of Christ to see just how much children figure in God's plans.

Affirmation and Promise

Parents bringing their children for baptism will be asked to take vows and make promises. The first thing they will be asked to do will be to reaffirm their own Christian faith into which they were baptised.

The question put to parents is as follows:

**In presenting your child for baptism
desiring that he/she may be grafted into Christ
as a member of his body the church
do you receive the teaching of the Christian Faith
which we confess in the Apostles creed?**

These are the big questions at the heart of the Christian faith. Beliefs about God take us into very deep issues.

The second thing required of parents will be their readiness to assume the tasks of being Christian parents. The second question posed is:

**Do you promise depending on the grace of God
to teach your child the truths and the duties of the Christian faith and by prayer
and example to bring her up in the life and worship of the church.**

Will you raise your child as a Christian?

If these vows are not taken with all sincerity then it is your own child you let down nobody else.

When you bring your child for baptism and take these vows you do so before God, your family and the church. If you do not honour them then you deny your child the opportunity to be nurtured in the faith and to be told of their baptism and its significance toward their own faith development and hopefully their profession of faith in later life.

All in all the vows taken at baptism, apply not to the baby's faith but to the faith of the parents and to the congregation as a whole. They are expressions of sincere belief and serious intention on the part of Christian adults. We are all involved in the baptism of your child.

The Church has a responsibility to follow up the faith development of children brought for baptism, by encouragement and invitation by elder, friends and family already connected. In deciding to have your child Baptised the church takes that responsibility seriously. We think you should to.

When we baptise adults or children, we bring them into church membership and place them firmly within the family of God.