

Thinking about Christening/ Baptism?

This leaflet has been produced to help
parents who are considering baptism for
their child or children.

Christchurch
Chapel Hill
Clevedon
www.christchurch-clevedon.org.uk
01275 871483

For further information please contact:
Revd Dr Russell Herbert
Tel: 01275 872580
Email: clevedonmethodist@btinternet.com
Revd Clive Jennings
Tel: 01275 872134
Email: vicar@christchurch-clevedon.org.uk
Kate Dommert
Tel 01275 871483
Email: Childrenandfamilies@christchurch-clevedon.org.uk
Will Alvarez
Tel: 01275 871483

We are delighted that you are interested in having your child baptised or dedicated in this church. Before you proceed, it's important for you to consider the significance of baptism, especially the baptism of infants. This leaflet attempts to outline in more detail what baptism is, and what it is not, and it has been produced to help answer some of the questions parents often ask when considering having their children baptised. We want you, as parents, to be able to make an informed choice as to what is right for your children regarding baptism.

What is Christian Baptism?

Baptism is all about making a fresh start, a new beginning with God. When a person is baptised they are welcomed into the church. At the heart of all this is the celebration of the new life which God gives us when we come to trust in Jesus Christ and are "born again" (John 3:3-8). At baptism, a person is immersed in or sprinkled with water as a sign that he or she is washed clean of all his or her human failings, making a fresh start with God.

Baptism in the Bible

The Bible tells us that people came to John the Baptist to be baptised in the River Jordan when they wanted to make a radical change in the way they lived their lives (Mark 1:4-5). Subsequently, Jesus instructed his followers to baptise all who came to believe in his message and profess faith in him (Matthew 28:19). Paul later described how the act of being immersed in water is a sign of being buried at death and then being raised to everlasting life, as Jesus was at his resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Baptism celebrates this hope of eternal life.

Making the right decision

Please take some time to mull over the issues concerning baptism outlined in this leaflet. If you would like to talk through any concerns we would be more than happy to do so. If, after considering these things you feel that you would like to have your child/ren baptised, then we would be very happy to make the necessary arrangements with you.

In bringing your children to be baptised you will be making serious promises before God and the Church, so this must not be taken lightly or as a matter of course. It's important that you feel happy with the promises that you would be asked to make in bringing your child for baptism, and you should not feel that you are having to compromise your integrity in any way. Don't be pressurised by anybody to do anything you don't feel is completely right for you or your child/ren.

Having read this leaflet, you may feel that a service of **Dedication** or **Thanksgiving** is more appropriate than infant baptism. A summary of these different options, and what each involves, is given overleaf.

Two opinions regarding Christian Baptism

Broadly speaking, there are two different opinions regarding baptism. As a parent considering baptism for your child, you will need to decide which to take.

Firstly, some Christians maintain that the Bible teaches that a person should be baptised only when he/she makes a personal decision to become a Christian. Therefore, many parents prefer not to have their children baptised as infants. This means that their child can be baptised as a Christian believer when he/she is old enough to make such a decision for him/herself. Parents who feel that it is not appropriate to have their children baptised but nevertheless want to celebrate the gift of their child may therefore choose to have a similar but slightly different type of service: either a **Dedication** or a **Thanksgiving** service.

Secondly, other Christians choose to have their children baptised as infants. They do this *in anticipation* that in time these children will make a personal decision to believe in and follow Jesus Christ. On this understanding, baptism is primarily seen as an expression of God's grace: in other words, God's love is not dependent on our response to Him; God accepts us long before we are old enough to understand our need of Him. Infant baptism is a practice which goes back to the early church. There is no explicit reference to the baptism of infants in the Bible, although it is implied in places where we read that "households" were baptised (eg 1 Corinthians 1:16; Acts 16:15 & 33). When an infant is baptised the parents make promises before God and before the Church that they will make every effort to encourage their child to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and follow him. In making such promises, the parents undertake to provide a Christian home for their child, encouraging him/her to pray and read the Bible, and when they are old enough, to attend Sunday School / Junior Church regularly. It is understood that in choosing to have their children baptised, parents and children will worship together at their local church as often as possible, as part of the Church family.

What is Infant Baptism?

- A visible sign that your child is loved by God even before he/she knows anything about it or is able to do anything in return.
- Receiving the child into the family of the Church (so it is natural to assume that the parents will regularly bring the child along to church with them).
 - A commitment by the parents to encourage their child to become a Christian.
 - An act of thanksgiving to God for a new life.
 - A public declaration of Christian faith by the parents, sponsors (godparents) and congregation, whereby the baptised child is claimed for Jesus Christ, in the hope and anticipation that he/she will choose to pursue the life of Christian faith as he/she grows up. As parents we can never *force* our children to become Christians (and neither should we try to!), but by our own Christian faith and example, we seek to point them in the direction of making a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ.

What Infant Baptism is not!

- Something which earns God's favour (God already loves you and your child)
- An act which immediately makes the child a Christian (the child must make his/her own decision when he/she is old enough to do so)
- An entry ticket into heaven (It is by Christ's death on the cross that we have eternal life, and this must be received by faith (Ephesians 2:8))
 - A naming ceremony
- A tradition that must be maintained for the sake of tradition (Colossians 2:8), or to satisfy another member of the family
- A magical protection against evil, illness or accidents (we all have to live each day as it comes, trusting daily in God's strength to see us through, whatever happens (Romans 8:28-39))

Three Types of Service

BAPTISM is for parents who believe in the Christian faith and wish to welcome their child into the Church now in anticipation of a personal commitment to Jesus Christ which the parents will encourage their child to make. In this service, the parents promise before God and the Church that they will encourage their child to follow Jesus Christ. The parents make this promise by responding to these three questions:

“Will you provide for this your child a Christian home of love and faithfulness?”

“Will you help him/her by your words, prayers and example to renounce all evil and put his/her trust in Jesus Christ his/her Saviour?”

“Will you encourage him/her to enter into the full membership of the Church, and to serve Christ in the world?”

In each case, the parents respond: *“With God's help we will”*

DEDICATION service is for Christian parents who wish to celebrate and give thanks to God for their child, but feel that baptism should be something undertaken only by their child him/ herself, when he/she is old enough to make a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ. The parents make the same sort of promises as above, but the child is given a blessing rather than baptism with water.

THANKSGIVING service is an opportunity to say thank you to God for the child without the requirement of a profession of faith. The child is blessed rather than baptised. This differs from a DEDICATION service in that the parents are not required to stand and make promises. Such a service is for those parents who may not attend Church regularly, and have not as yet made a firm commitment to the Christian faith, but who nevertheless would like a Church service to celebrate the gift of their child to them.