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# Sacrament of Baptism

Some notes for the guidance of parents  
considering Baptism for their child

## WHY BRING YOUR CHILD FOR BAPTISM?

People bring their children for Baptism for all kinds of reasons - social or family pressure, sentiment, convention, even superstition. In the end none of these reasons is really adequate and the Church invites parents to look further for a deeper reason in wanting their child to be baptised.

You will perhaps have felt that the birth of your child has been something wonderful - something literally "full of wonder". There can be few parents who, looking at what they have brought into the world, do not feel something of a sense of awe, wonder and mystery. The birth of a baby is also a reason for the deepest thanksgiving. There is an inarticulate need to say thank you to someone - someone with a capital "S". But, equally, there can be few parents who are not at least a little anxious. A baby is so obviously helpless and damageable. You, as parents, have been given an immense responsibility. If your child is to become all that he or she is meant to be, you may feel yourselves in need of more than you alone can provide.

Perhaps all these feelings - of wonder, gratitude, responsibility and need - lie behind your desire to seek Baptism for your child. Are these feelings in themselves hints and signs that life itself, this new life, this life of your child, is a gift from God, something precious and sacred? And that this life which is now in your hands depends on your care and your love if the promise of birth is to be fulfilled?

## WHAT DOES BAPTISM MEAN?

"Love" - the central message of the Christian faith. And what more perfect expression of love is there than a child? We bring our children to baptism as a sign and symbol of what we already know and they will discover - that they belong to God, they are loved by God, and no matter what the future holds they always will be.

It is this Truth we seek to affirm in Baptism, and it is this Truth we seek to live by in the family of the Church because we believe that only when it has penetrated our being will we have the security to grow and change and become the sort of person we were meant to be.

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The Church believes this is true for all of us from the moment we first draw breath in this world. And so we bring our

children to Baptism as a sign and symbol of what we already know and they will discover. That is what Infant Baptism in the Church declares. It is a proclamation of who and what a human being really is.

## WHY CHILDREN?

Some churches confine Baptism to adults, to those who can understand what they are doing. It is often argued that this was the practice of the early Church. But the Church of Scotland, together with most of the world's churches, believes the early Church did baptise children. "The promise is to you and your children" (Acts 2:39). The historical debate is confused and in the end unhelpful.

We baptise children today because we believe that God loves us before we have ever heard about him. We believe that from the very moment your child was born, God's love was already there for him or her.

## WHICH CHILDREN?

The Church of Scotland offers Baptism to children when at least one parent is associated with the congregation or where assurances can be given that a child will have a Christian upbringing, both within the home and within the family of the Church.

This is because it is important to see Baptism as being not just as a single event, a memorable day, a special celebration (which it is!), but even more as the beginning of a process in which parents and the Church together can help a child grow to discover the truth that was proclaimed about him or her at Baptism.

## THE CALL FOR A RESPONSE

If all this is true, and if the truth of Baptism is to be fulfilled in your child's life, it can only come about through you the parents in your response to all that your child's Baptism declares. You should be aware of what this involves for you, and consider carefully your readiness to honour and follow through what has been begun in your child's Baptism.

What is required if our children are to discover that they are unconditionally loved by God and so become all they were meant to be?

The unconditional love shown by us as parents is the first essential requirement, and no doubt you have already discovered both the joy and the cost of offering such love, and the necessity of it.

A happy home, a secure upbringing, good education, a sense of right and wrong and a consideration for others, all help our children to become truly human, and to all these things you are already committed.

But there is more to it than that. There is a need to draw out of our children the potential for wonder, worship and faith that is naturally born in them, to help them experience the mysteries of acceptance, forgiveness and love, to enable them to discover why they are alive, what their lives are for and how they can be fulfilled.

This is very far from the old ideas of indoctrination, of instilling into children the right beliefs; it is more like sharing with them on a journey of discovery. It is also a task which cannot be left to the Sunday School to undertake on our behalf. The Christian upbringing of children lies primarily with parents themselves. For it takes all of life, and all that parents have to give, to fulfil the promise declared at Baptism.

This is the task parents take upon themselves at Baptism - to make it possible for their child to sense, perceive and apprehend that mystery we call God, to nurture that capacity to respond to the God who is in them.

Baptism is also a promise. In bringing your child for Baptism, acknowledging that he or she comes from God and belongs to God, you are joining the family of God in the world and specifically here at the Cathedral, and together we promise to provide a loving, safe, open place where all can find God for themselves.

## THE PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY

A child begins the process of living the Christian adventure which you, the parents, enable and encourage. The Church makes it perfectly clear that the key responsibility for a Christian upbringing and influence lies with the family. That is why at Baptism parents are asked to profess their own faith and to promise to bring their child up in that faith.

Parents who are not members of the Church are invited to consider what measure of responsibility they truly wish to take upon themselves and to think of all the implications of their child's Baptism for their own place within the Church. The Church sees Baptism as a partnership in which the parents are very much involved. Baptism can often be the starting-point for a family commitment to the Church.

It should also be said that all children are welcome to grow up in the Church, attend Sunday School etc., whether they have been baptised or not; the difference with Baptism lies precisely in the parents' commitment and involvement

with them.

## THE PROMISES YOU MAKE

All these thoughts are summed up in the promises you are asked to make at Baptism.

There are two questions to be answered, and the Church allows for the situation where only one parent feels able to make a commitment, and in these circumstances it is possible for only one parent to make the following vows:

• In presenting your child for Baptism, desiring that she/he may be grafted into Christ as a member of his body the Church, do you receive the teaching of the Christian faith and confess Jesus Christ as King and Head of the Church?

Answer: I/We do.

• Will you tell him/her of his/her Baptism, raise him/her in the delight of God's love? Depending on the grace of God, will you teach your child the truths and duties of the Christian faith; and by prayer and example bring him/her up in the life and worship of the Church?

Answer: I/We will

In the Baptismal Service, you will be asked the first question about your intention and belief, and on the strength of that vow your child will be baptised.

Then, after your child is declared to have been received into the Church, you will be asked to respond in the form of the second question by affirming your commitment to the task which now belongs to you of bringing up your child within the Church.

## THE CONGREGATION'S RESPONSIBILITY

As part of the Baptismal Service, your child will be carried by the minister into the midst of the congregation as a symbol of his or her being received into the community of faith.

The congregation, the assembled people of the Church, are more than mere observers at Baptism. They are partners with parents and children in the process of Christian nurture. So, first, the children of the Sunday School will be asked if they will welcome and help your child as a friend of theirs.

• N &hellip;&hellip;. is the newest member of the church. He/she is now part of your family. So each one of you is a big brother or a big sister. Now we ask you some very important questions. When he/she falls down, will you help him/her up? When she/he is sad, will you give him/her a hug? When she/he is being a pain - like all of us are some of the time - will you love him/her anyway? Will you listen to him/her, and will you tell him/her all the stories about Jesus that you've learned so that he/she can come to know them for him/herself?

The children respond: "We will";

Then, as a sign of their commitment to you and your child, the congregation will be asked:

• "Do you welcome N&hellip;&hellip;. and promise to support these parents, and do you renew your commitment to live before all our children in a kindly and Christian way, and to share with them the knowledge and love of God?"

The congregation responds:

\* "We do.

We will nurture one another in faith,  
uphold one another in prayer,  
encourage one another in service";

## GODPARENTS

There are no God-parents as such in the Church of Scotland. We affirm our desire that, wherever possible, the actual parents of the child be the ones who take the vows. It is not that we are right and other churches wrong, or vice versa. It is simply that we are trying to stress the aspect of parental responsibility.

Having said that, it is usual, though by no means obligatory, for some friend or relative to carry to baby in.

## AFTER BAPTISM - STEPS ON THE JOURNEY

We hope that the day your child is baptised is just the beginning of their (and your) relationship with the family of God represented here in the Cathedral. He/she is the newest member of our community and is welcomed in this place. Here

are some of the first steps we can take together.

**Crèche** - From their very earliest days, children are able feel "Welcome"; and it is important that Church is felt, from the beginning, as a place where they belong and they are safe. By bringing your children to the Crèche, you are introducing them to their church family and making "church"; a part of life. The Crèche is held in the Ritchie room. We will take care of your children as if they were our own, because they are!

**In the Cathedral** - If you would prefer to have your child with you during the worship service, there are things provided to make you both feel more comfortable. Rummage Bags for babies and toddlers are available at the door, and elders should offer you one as you come in. If they miss you, please ask! These have basic survival tools (toys and books) designed to keep wee minds occupied. The Clement Chapel (situated at the rear of the Cathedral) is also available for nappy changes, mid- morning feeds, and a break if the baby gets bored during the sermon (as if!) Feel free to move about during the service as needed, and if the baby gets upset for any reason, also feel free to go to the Hall if you wish.

**Beginners Sunday School** - From the age of three, the children move to a more structured programme. Bible stories, games, songs and art introduce them to their faith in exciting and interactive ways. The Beginners Sunday School is the start of his/her own journey of discovery. The Beginners meet in the Helen Lamb room, and gather there before the service begins.

**Young Families Group** - Human beings aren't meant to go it alone, and we live more fulfilled lives when we are supported and challenged by each other. The Young Families Group seeks to offer that support in the exciting times we find ourselves in. You will be introduced to a member of the group on the day of the baptism, and we hope it is a connection that will grow as you and your child do.

We will try to maintain contact with you following baptism, through delivering the parish magazine to your home to keep you informed of all that is happening in the congregation, and also through the district elder who will have been present with you at the baptism and who we hope may be your contact and your friend.

You will also receive an invitation to share in our annual Cradle Roll Service which usually introduces our summer Family Services early in June. The Cradle Roll Service brings together all the families whose children have been baptised in the previous three years, and during it our children receive a blessing and parents are able to renew the promises they made at the baptism.

Please remember: you are an important part of this community NOW, and we are glad you are here. Welcome!

## FIRST STEPS?

If, having read these notes, you would like to pursue further the matter of your child's Baptism, the following information may be of assistance:

• You can arrange an appointment when one of the ministers will call to discuss it with you both. They are always happy to do so without any commitment being implied on either side.

• Baptisms are usually held on one Sunday each month during the morning Service, although the particular Sunday will depend on other commitments in the congregation as well as on the families' circumstances.

• In special circumstances a private Baptism can be arranged.

• You are welcome to invite your own guests to the Baptismal Service, and an attempt will be made to reserve seating for at least some of them towards the front of the congregation.

• The Crèche (up to 3 years of age) or any of the Sunday School Departments would be happy to care for the children of guests following the Baptism and for the remainder of the Service.

• One of the ministers will contact you during the week preceding the Baptism to acquaint you with the procedure involved in the Service.

[Click here for contact details of the Ministers.](#)

## PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

The Church of Scotland operates a Code of Good Practice for the safety and well-being of all its children and young people. It adheres to the following Policy Statement:

“The Church of Scotland has a deep concern for the wholeness and well-being of each individual. It seeks to safeguard the welfare of all people, regardless of age, who come into contact with the Church and its organisations. It is the responsibility of each individual within the fellowship of the Church to prevent the physical, sexual or emotional abuse of children and young people”.

The Code of Good Practice contains several articles relating to the recruitment, appointment, training and supervision of all staff who work with children and young people. The Cathedral Kirk Session follows all of these guidelines in its work with children and young people. The Kirk Session also has a Child Protection Co-ordinator whose task is to ensure the

highest standard of care in this area of the congregation's work.

Further details of the Code of Good Practice can be obtained by contacting the Minister or the Child Protection Coordinator