

I Have a Child to be Baptized

Do I want to baptize my child?

You may or may not be sure about this. In baptizing an infant or young child, parents make a sweeping commitment to raise their child as part of a church. At Calvary, a child's church life can start right away, thanks to great Sunday morning nursery care and our comfort with having babies and children in church. Many of our children cannot remember a time when they were not at the Communion rail with their parents each Sunday. On the other hand, if you are not sure you want to commit yourself to regular participation in the life of a church, you may want to come and explore for a while before you take this step. In the meantime, we would love to celebrate your child's arrival with the "Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child" on one of the first Sunday mornings that you are able to bring him or her to church.

Why do we baptize our children?

Do we do it to announce their birth? No – at least not specifically. The church has a "Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child" for just this purpose (page 439 of the *Book of Common Prayer*). This brief service of celebration and welcome can probably be held the very first time you bring your child to church, if you will let your clergy know ahead of time. (Call Robyn Mauldin at 525-6602, ext 108.)

Isn't it sort of urgent that we have the baptism soon after our child's birth or adoption?

There is no rush. God starts loving and caring for babies even before they are born. The important thing is to find a faith community in which you can raise the child to know Christ, to love Christ, and to serve Christ.

There is no record in the New Testament of any child being baptized, just the hint that some people were baptized "with their whole household." Even today, great portions of the Christian Church do not allow infant baptism, preferring instead to wait until children are at an age when they can consent and "choose Christ" in some meaningful way.

Well, why DO Episcopalians baptize babies and young children?

We do it because we believe God is at work in their lives long before we can recognize and articulate the grace of God's presence. Before we can consciously invite God into our life or commit ourselves to following Christ's ways, God is preparing our hearts and minds to receive God's own Spirit. Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the gift that is God's relationship with us, proclaimed and modeled for us by Jesus.

Also, we do it because we believe the power of Christian nurture is very strong. Those who grow up in a faith community where people worship together, listen to the Scriptures together, and seek to serve God together are far more likely to come to a mature faith than those who do not receive this gift in their formative years.

Parenting has many challenges. Surely, sharing our faith with our children is one of the big ones. If you want help on this journey, we suggest that you:

1. **Get well grounded in your community of faith.** If you are new to Calvary, attend the regularly-scheduled welcome classes held throughout the year. If you are new to the Episcopal Church or have not yet been baptized yourself, attend one of our Practicing the Faith sessions to prepare for Baptism and/or Confirmation. Take a regular part in Sunday worship, social and educational opportunities. Find a place to serve others through your church.
2. **Call the Rector's assistant, Robyn Mauldin,** when you are fully at home in your faith community and ready to schedule your child's baptism. All baptisms at Calvary (except in extreme emergencies) are held on Sunday mornings. They are usually scheduled on major feast days—Pentecost (in May or June) when the Holy Spirit descended on the first disciples, the Sunday after All Saints Day (November 1), the Baptism of Jesus (the first Sunday after the Epiphany, January 6), and the Great Vigil of Easter (usually held in the darkness on Saturday night or early on Easter Day). Often, an additional day is added in late summer. Sometimes children are baptized at the same time their parents are being confirmed or officially received into the Episcopal Church.

What about baptizing my grandchild?

We love to baptize the grandchildren of parishioners. If your grandchild lives out of town, we expect his or her parents to be active members in a congregation where they live. Just have them ask their pastor to send us a letter asking us to hold the baptism on their behalf. If your grandchild lives nearby, we expect the child's parents to be an active part of this or some other local congregation. Again, we are happy to baptize your grandchild on behalf of another faith community. If the child's parents need help finding a church home where they live, sometimes we are able to make suggestions about this.

What about godparents?

Godparents or sponsors are the special supporters that parents choose to help them share their Christian faith with their child. They exercise a ministry of encouragement and challenge to parents and seek to develop a special relationship with their godchild. We suggest that at least one of the godparents be a family member or close friend with whom you will not lose touch; and that one be an active member of Calvary Church, with whom your child can have a special connection as he or she grows up in this worshiping community. Having three godparents is traditional, two to four works just fine.

Is there any other preparation involved?

At Calvary, we hold at least one class for parents and godparents before each scheduled baptism. Then, usually on the day before the baptism is held, we schedule a rehearsal to be attended by parents and godparents together. Even parents who have "done it before" are expected to attend. New parents sometimes learn from those familiar with this experience.