



Benefice Baptism Policy

'Baptism is the beginning of a wonderful journey of faith'

Who can be baptised?

For a start, not just your children! Baptism is a gift from God that can be conferred at any age, although for adults it's normally part of confirmation. Any of the ministry team would be happy to speak with you about that step in your own Christian journey. It doesn't matter in the slightest that the parents of a child are not baptised.

If you live within our parish boundaries or are on the electoral roll (church membership roll) of any of our churches, your child can be baptised at one of our Churches. If you aren't sure where the boundaries lie, we will be happy to advise you.

If you don't live in one of our parishes you or your child can still be baptised in one of our three Churches but you will need the goodwill of your own parish priest. The Church encourages people to be baptised in their own parish church unless there is a particular reason (such as a family or school connection) why you wish your child to be baptised in one of our churches, but please feel free to enquire.

Do I need to come to Church before the Baptism?

We expect you and if possible the Godparents to come to the main Sunday service at least three times before your child is baptised, or to attend our Messy Church at least three times. This is so that you feel properly connected to us and the people who will be at your baptism service, and have the opportunity to remind yourself of the important promises you will be making on behalf of your child and what they mean.

Lone Parents and Unmarried Couples

Baptism expresses God's love for your child and His unconditional welcome for him or her. We aim to be just as welcoming – whatever form your family takes. Your marital status or your family structure (and the perceived attitude of the wider Church towards you) has no bearing at all on whether or not your child can be baptised in our Churches. If anything about your family circumstances concerns you we will, of course, be happy to listen and try to help, but our feeling is that nothing about your family or personal circumstances should stop you bringing yourself or your child for baptism.

Booking

To book or make enquiries about Baptism at one of our Churches you will

need to contact Fr.. Nick either by email at father.nick@btinternet.com or on 01322 227 153. A provisional booking can be taken over the telephone but it will need to be confirmed with a visit from one of our pastoral assistants who will discuss the service with you and help you complete the necessary form.

The baptism cannot however take place unless you have been appropriately prepared. If work circumstances make this requirement difficult, then please discuss this with Fr. Nick or with one of the pastoral assistants.

The key thing you will be told is ‘come to the main Sunday service’. All our teaching and preparation is mediated through the main gathering of our parishes in worship, and we want you to be a part of this.

We also strongly encourage you to come to our All Age Service or to Messy Church, which is aimed particularly at young children and their parents. Messy Church happens on the second Saturday of each month between 2pm and 4pm while our All Age Service happens on different Sundays in our different parishes Please see [here](#) for more information on these services.

The best time and place to speak with a member of the Fr. Nick or any member of the ministry team (and you can speak with any of us, not just Fr.. Nick), is after the main Sunday service over tea or coffee, so come along ... Our churches are child-friendly, welcoming places with level access and becoming a member of them and the worldwide Church is one of the main reasons for baptism into God’s church.

What happens in the Baptism Service?

We generally hold baptisms at a separate service just for your family and friends at 12noon or 1pm: that way we can focus on your particular needs, but it isn’t a private service, all baptisms by their very nature are what the Church calls ‘public worship’. Alternatively, a baptism can take place during the main Sunday morning service. It is possible, if unusual, to be baptised at other times. (However in an emergency, we will gladly respond, simply telephone Fr. Nick).

There will be members of the regular congregation at the baptism to help Fr. Nick and to help you find where to sit and to show you what you need to do. Some parts of the service are for the whole congregation to join in and some will be just for you and the godparents. Service sheets are provided but let the pastoral assistant know beforehand if you need a large print copy or have difficulty in reading and we will do our best to help you.

For the baptism itself, parents and godparents will be asked by Fr. Nick to gather first at the front of church and then around the font at the back. Fr. Nick will ask the parents and Godparents to make declarations on behalf of the child. (Please see the section on ‘Making decisions and promises’ for more detail).

Above all we intend this to be a respectful but informal and friendly service and we hope you will feel at home.

Making decisions and promises

When you bring your child for baptism, you will be asked to declare publicly on behalf of your child that you believe in God and that you will bring your child up to follow Jesus.

You will be asked to answer, on your child's behalf, that you have decided to turn away from everything that is evil or sinful and to turn instead towards Christ.

The declarations made by you and the child's godparents will be made in front of the congregation. It is not unknown for a parent or prospective Godparent to be unwilling to make these important decisions and promises, as they declare themselves to be an atheist or of another faith. They may therefore excuse themselves from standing and making these commitments, but are welcome to be present at the baptism. They will not however be asked to come forward in this part of the ceremony and cannot be godparents. We would rather these important promises are made without hypocrisy or deceit and would not seek to embarrass anyone who objected and we ask you respect this view.

Godparents

It is recommended that your child should have at least three godparents. Traditionally there would be two of the same sex as the child and one of the opposite sex. Godparents should be adults, or at least older teenagers.

A useful rule of thumb if you are wondering if a teenager is old enough to be a godparent is that they need to be old enough to be responsible parents if they are to be responsible godparents. Sometimes we have requests for older brothers or sisters to be godparents, but unless they are adults this is usually not appropriate and we would rather try to involve them in the service in other ways – for example, holding the baptismal candle.

Godparents must be baptized and preferably, but not necessarily confirmed. Baptism is an important ceremony and we do not baptise adults simply so they can become godparents. Baptism is also a good opportunity for both parents and Godparents to think about their own faith and commitment, since both will be making wide-ranging and serious promises during the service.

Godparents must also be able to be present at the service so they can make the important promises required of them.

If they are unavailable or otherwise engaged then they cannot be Godparents but where possible we will try to be flexible about the time and date of the service to accommodate this.

There is only one exception to this: a member of HM Forces who is on active deployment. We feel this is pastorally right and a part of our commitment to the armed forces covenant, but is the only circumstance in which a Godparent may be absent and in such cases we will try and make special arrangements

The Declarations made by parents and Godparents.

During the service, parents and Godparents will be asked to make the following declarations:

- Q. Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?
A. Parents and godparents: **I reject them**
- Q. Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?
A. Parents and godparents: **I renounce them.**
- Q. Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?
A. Parents and godparents: **I repent of them.**
- Q. Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?
A. Parents and godparents: **I turn to Christ.**
- Q. Do you submit to Christ as Lord?
A. Parents and godparents: **I submit to Christ.**
- Q. Do you come to Christ the way, the truth and the life?
A. Parents and godparents: **I come to Christ.**

Important Symbols

A number of symbols will be used during the service itself:

The sign of the cross

Fr. Nick will make the sign of the cross on your child's forehead in special oil. This is like an invisible badge to show that Christians are united with Christ and must not be ashamed to stand up for their faith in him.

Fr. Nick will also say: 'Christ claims you for his own. Receive the sign of the cross. Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified. He will also invite you and the godparents to make the sign the cross on the child's forehead in the same oil after he has.

Water

Fr. Nick will also pour water on your child's head. Water is a sign of washing and cleansing. In baptism it is a sign of being washed free from sin and beginning a new life with God.

Water is a sign of life, but also a symbol of death. When we are baptised our old life is buried in the waters (like drowning) and we are raised to new life with Christ.

A Shell

Fr. Nick uses a silver shell to pour the water on the child's head. This is an old symbol of a special journey called a pilgrimage. People who went on these journeys were called pilgrims. They wore shells to show that they were pilgrims.

The person being baptised is on a sort of journey through their lives. They like us are pilgrims too.

Candles

Jesus is called the light of the world. A large candle will be lit in the church and you will be given a lighted candle at the end of the service as a reminder of the light that has come into your child's life. It is up to you, the child's parents and godparents and members of the church community to help your child reject the world of darkness and follow a way of life that reflects goodness and light, and shares this light with others.

When did baptism start?

Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan. This was a turning point in his life (you can read the story in the Bible: at the beginning of Mark's Gospel in the New Testament). Jesus told his followers to baptise others as a sign that they had turned away from their old life, and begun a new life as Christ's disciples, members of his Body, having been assured of God's forgiveness.

Baptisms often took place as the sun rose on Easter Morning in a river: new Christians were dipped under water, marking their death to an old way of life, and lifted up again as a sign of new birth. At our baptism we are reminded of its link with the rising of Jesus Christ from the dead on the first Easter morning.

Parents Survival Tips

The church belongs to all the people of God – the children just as much as the adults – and they are welcome at any service. It is sometimes nerve wracking for parents, though, if they are worried about how their children will behave, and what will happen if they get restless. Here are some tips from those who have brought their own children to church and survived!

Children like to be able to see what is going on. The temptation of many parents is to sit at the back, but often children are happier and feel more involved if they are at the front. If they want to stand or sit or sit on the floor that is fine.

Children, like adults, take a while to feel at home in new surroundings. They will soon pick up from you and from the other people in church, when it is time to stand and sing and when to sit and listen or kneel and pray. Bringing your child to the main Sunday service or to Messy Church, Junior Church or our all age services will enable them (and you) to feel more at home in God's house.

Feel free to bring some quiet toys and books for your children to play with. There are also toys in drawstring bags at the back of the church for your children to play with during the service.

If children become restless, don't hesitate to take them for a wander, perhaps into the Churchyard then come back in again. It is often better to let small children wander (and wonder) rather than trying to tie them down bored in a pew.

You need however to be careful. Around the Church there are candles, lecterns and other things that might cause injury, Please keep an eye on your children if they do go for a wander.

Frequently asked questions

Q. What is the difference between a baptism and a christening?

A. None, they are just different words for the same thing.

Q. What is the right age for baptism?

A. Baptism can happen at any age. What matters is that those concerned believe it is right to ask for baptism. Teenagers and adults can also be baptised although it a longer process — ask Fr. Nick or the pastoral assistants about this.

Q. What does it cost?

A. The baptism service is free. However the upkeep of all our churches needs to be paid for. Sadly none of them are financially well off and contrary to popular belief none of them receive money from the government. We therefore ask that you consider making a gift-aided donation towards the upkeep of the Church in which your child is baptised, although we accept this might not be possible for everyone and you should only give what you feel able to.

Additionally, a collection plate is in church for any donation from members of the congregation. If you are a tax payer, please ask for a printed gift aid envelope for your donation and sign them as we can get an extra 25p for every pound you generously give, at no extra expense or effort from you: everybody benefits!

If you want to talk further about baptism please contact Fr. Nick either after the Sunday service or on 01322 227 153 or speak with one of the pastoral assistants.

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