

Congratulations! The birth of a baby is a very special event and has undoubtedly brought great joy to you and your family. As parents, you should thank God for the little one entrusted to you. This leaflet is designed to help you understand what is involved in baptism.

Why do you want your baby baptised?

People have different ideas about baptism. Some think of it as a naming ceremony. Others think that a child will not thrive until it is baptised. And many people think that it is the proper thing to do for every child. Some call it a "christening" and believe that it automatically makes a child a Christian. None of these ideas is correct.

What is Baptism?

The Bible teaches that baptism is God's sign of salvation. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who instructed us to baptise (Matthew 28:19,20). In the Old Testament circumcision was the sign of God's blessing of salvation promised in the covenant made with Abraham (Genesis 17:10,11). In the New Testament baptism is the sign of the new covenant and of salvation in Christ (Colossians 2:11,12). Just as water makes us clean, so baptism pictures how God, through Jesus Christ, can make our whole lives clean, forgiving our sins and giving us new life. It is the sign and pledge that our lives are built on Christ and that he is our Lord and Saviour.

Presbyterians believe that it is appropriate for Christian parents to have their child baptised because of God's covenant with Abraham. The sign of the covenant was given, not only to Abraham who believed, but also to Abraham's children. We believe that in the New Testament the promises of the covenant are extended to all true believers and to their children. Baptism does not mean the child immediately becomes a Christian. Although salvation is promised, in time

children must trust and believe in Jesus Christ for themselves.

When believing parents have their children baptised they are publicly declaring they are committed Christians, and that they want their child to come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way and to grow up to serve Him.

Infant baptism is given on the basis of the qualifications of the parent, not the qualifications of the child. It is the parents' relationship with God which is important. No minister or elder can see into the heart of another human being. They can only look at what is visible. What is required of parents is a credible profession of faith, that is, a profession accompanied by some understanding of the Christian faith, a lifestyle in accordance with Christian values, and public commitment to the worshipping Christian community.



What parents must consider:

- Are you committed to your church?
- Do you attend Sunday worship regularly?
- Are you prepared to accept the preparation the minister provides?
- Can you wholeheartedly and faithfully profess faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord?
- Will you, with your children, be regularly involved in the life of your local congregation?

In what circumstances does Baptism take place?

- In the Presbyterian Church in Ireland it is necessary that at least one parent professes faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
- The parents ought to be married and living within the family unit.
- The parents and children should be attending church regularly.
- The baptism is in most cases conducted at a church service in the presence of the congregation.
- Baptism is to be conducted once only for any child.

What happens at a service of Baptism?

The minister will read from the Bible and give an explanation of the sacrament of baptism.

The parents will make a statement of their personal faith by answering the question: "Do you confess your faith in God as your Heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit as your Sanctifier and Guide?"

The parents will also respond to the question which outlines the responsibilities of Christian parenthood: "Do you promise, in dependence on Divine grace, to teach your child the truths and duties of the Christian faith, and by your prayers, teaching, and example, to bring up your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and in the ways of the Church of God?"

Baptism is a sign of God's grace. But God's grace places an obligation on us. We are to keep his covenant, not in order to earn his love, but to show our gratitude and to find his will. Baptism is a sacrament and privilege for those who are part of the Christian family. That is why parents who request baptism for their child must trust in Christ for themselves and accept the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

Perhaps you do not feel that you are in a position to take the baptismal vows. You know that you should not profess something that is not true, nor make obligations that you do not intend to keep. But God may be speaking to you at this time. This may be God's way of calling you to trust in Him as your Lord and Saviour.

We hope that this leaflet has helped you understand the meaning of baptism. Your minister will be glad to discuss the matter with you and answer any questions you may have.

Baptism of Children



in the
**Presbyterian Church
in Ireland**