



PREPARING FOR **Baptism** IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH



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## PREPARING FOR BAPTISM IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

This guideline is prepared by St. Barnabas Episcopal Church to help parents, sponsors, godparents and candidates to prepare for baptism. The following pages include excerpts from *Preparing for Baptism in the Episcopal Church* by Anne E. Kitch.

# PREPARING CHILDREN FOR BAPTISM

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Regardless of whether children are infants, toddlers, or older, there are simple ways parents can prepare them for their baptism. The most important thing a parent can do is to explain to a child what is happening and why. Some parents may feel intimidated about this, because they don't think they have a good enough understanding of the sacrament of baptism. But a theological education is not necessary. Parents can begin by simply telling a child, in their own words, why baptism and a life of faith are important to them and why they are choosing baptism for their child. We share our hopes with our children all the time, even whispering words of love into the tiny ears of sleeping infants. It is never too early to share with children the love we have found in Jesus.

Parents can also respect their children by telling them what will happen during the baptismal liturgy itself. Again, whether they are infants or school age, children are more comfortable if they know what ceremony is all about and what is expected of them; after all, this is true for adults as well!

Many parents wonder at what age a child should be baptized. There is no one right answer to this. Some parents want their children to be baptized as soon after birth as possible; others want their children to be old enough to choose the Christian life for themselves. Some children become part of a Christian family through adoption at an older age, and are baptized when the time seems right. Some children are members of households that become Christian and are baptized along with their parents. It is helpful to remember that children (or parents for that matter) do not need to “understand” what baptism is about in the moment in order to receive its full benefits; infants are baptized all the time and joyfully raised in the faith. Baptisms should be planned thoughtfully and without a sense of urgency; there is no need to rush to the font. In the case of infants, it may be practical to choose a time when sleep deprivation of new parents and crankiness of a newborn do not overwhelm the joy of the occasion. The timing of a baptism might also depend on whether the family belongs to a congregation in which the child's faith can be nurtured and the parents can be supported.

Whenever the baptism is to take place, these are some simple ways to prepare children for the holy event:

*Almighty God, heavenly  
Father; you have blessed us  
with the joy and care of  
children: Give us calm  
strength and patient  
wisdom as we bring them  
up, that we may teach  
them to love whatever is  
just and true and good,  
following the example of  
our Savior Jesus Christ.*

*Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer  
Page 829*





Whenever the baptism is to take place, these are some simple ways to prepare children for the holy event:

- † Take a tour of the church in which the baptism is to take place, especially exploring the baptismal font.
- † Look for baptismal symbols that may be in church or near the font—such as, sea shells, a dove, signs of the Trinity, icons, or stained-glass windows depicting the Baptism of Christ.
- † Review with your child all the steps of the service, what will happen, and what to expect.
- † Explain how water will be used in the baptism. Will it be poured on the forehead or will the child be immersed?
- † Choose clothing for the baptism that is both comfortable and celebratory for the child.
- † If children are old enough, let them have a choice in what they will wear that makes them feel special. If a child will wear a family baptismal gown, explain to him where it comes from and who has worn it before.
- † Tell the story of other family baptisms, like those of the parents, siblings, cousins, or godparents.
- † Tell all these stories to infants even if you think they cannot understand.
- † Read books together about baptism.

## A NOTE ABOUT OLDER CHILDREN

The baptismal rite of The Episcopal Church indicates that children who are old enough should speak for themselves, rather than having parents and godparents speak for them. When are children old enough to speak for themselves? This is a judgement call, which is why a particular age is not given. Certainly, young children are able to have a relationship with God and to express their yearning for a closer connection to God. Parents can lovingly discuss this with their child and let him/her choose if they feel ready to speak for themselves. Children who express a desire to be baptized and can speak for themselves are presented for baptism along with adult candidates. Parents still play a pivotal role in formation, and act as baptismal sponsors along with godparents, but do not make promises on behalf of the child.



## GODPARENTS

Parenting is wondrous, amazing, dangerous, remarkable, scary, magical stuff. And perhaps never more so than when tackling life's biggest questions: Who is God? Who are we? Why do things happen we can't explain? As children grow and change, parents continually encounter these and other hard questions in their children's lives, and in their own. Parents play an important role in helping children observe the world and learn to recognize their role in things. Parents also nurture their children's innate, authentic relationship with their loving Creator. These experiences are vital to helping children understand how faith (and their Baptismal Covenant) plays a part in everyday life, but navigating them as a parent can also sometimes be difficult . . . and that is why godparents are so important.

## CHOOSING GODPARENTS

The word “godparent” is used in many different ways. In some families, the term is used to denote the people who would have guardianship over a child should something happen to the parents. Other families use the word as an indicator of a close familial relationship, but not necessarily a spiritual role. However, in the eyes of the church, a godparent is someone who stands as a sponsor with parents at a child's baptism, promising to support by prayer and example as the child begins his/her new life Christ.

When considering godparents for a child, it helps to be clear with potential candidates about roles and expectations. Godparents do not need to be theological scholars, nor do they need to be present every day in a child's life to make a big impact. What is probably most helpful is to choose people with the willingness to “swim in deep waters” and a comfort level with talking about big subjects like life, death, God, and love. Godparents don't need to be people who have the answers—because no one does—but rather folks who aren't intimidated by questions and who will love and support children when they begin to wrestle with things.

*God our Father, you see  
your children growing up  
in an unsteady and  
confusing world: Show  
them that your ways give  
more life than the ways of  
the world, and that  
following you is better  
than chasing after selfish  
goals. Help them to take  
failure, not as a measure  
of their worth, but as a  
chance for a new start.  
Give them strength to  
hold their faith in you,  
and to keep alive their joy  
in your creation; through  
Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer  
Page 829*

Sometimes godparents are chosen based solely on friendships or family ties without pausing to think about the sacred responsibility they are asked to undertake. In choosing a godparent, it is important to consider their ability to follow through on the promises they will be making to see that the child is brought up in the Christian faith and life. In big question moments, it is a wonderful blessing to have a godparent who can sit quietly when there aren't easy answers or will stand in the gap with a child as she navigates something that is unknown or unknowable. Often when parents choose godparents, they look at a tiny baby and imagine a beautiful life with only a few minor bumps along the way. But most people find that life unfolds a bit differently and godparents can help parents respond faithfully and prayerfully to whatever life brings. Godparents might be there to give extra hugs or offer a special prayer when a beloved family pet dies. Or they may send a note when a young godchild struggles to understand the chaos in his world because of a sick grandparent. Maybe a godparent is there to cheer alongside mom or dad when the godson finishes elementary school. Or perhaps they begin regular e-mail or video chats with a teen goddaughter who is trying to make sense of injustice and violence she sees in her community. As families work through the ups and downs of life, godparents can provide invaluable, god-like support to their godchild, which can strengthen the entire family.

## PREPARING GODPARENTS

Parents can honor the godparents they have chosen by naming the particular gifts those godparents have to bring to this child's life. Parents can further encourage godparents by welcoming them into their household and the life of their child, and including them in ordinary as well as extraordinary moments.

These are some ways godparents can prepare for the baptismal day and the life ahead:

- † Before the baptism day, read through the entire baptismal service beginning on page 298 of the Book of Common Prayer, especially noting the vows you will take on behalf of your godchild.



- † Take pictures as appropriate on the day of the baptism (most churches will not allow photography during the service—check with the priest. Consider saving pictures, bulletin, and other mementos in a scrapbook for your godchild.
- † Find Bible storybooks or videos to share with your godchild.
- † Sing songs or hymns. Children don't care if you can sing well; they just enjoy learning new songs and having fun!
- † Go out of your way to acknowledge godchildren every time you see them. Children are sometimes unsure of how or when to approach, so take the initiative to greet them warmly and affectionately.
- † As your godchild gets older, stay in touch regularly! It doesn't have to be a long or elaborate but regular contact is important—call, text, e-mail, card, postcard, photo, trinket, smoke signal—the medium doesn't matter much; the regularity does. Also be sure your godchild knows how to reach you if they need you.
- † Send cards or notes, not just on birthdays or holidays, but also (and especially) on the anniversary of their baptism date, reminding them again and again that they are a beloved child of God.
- † Pray regularly for and with your godchild.
- † Try to pay attention to the symbols of baptism so that as you encounter them you can mention them to your godchild and help teach them to watch for them too. Send an older child an e-mail from your beach trip to say, "I picked up a shell today and it reminded me of your baptism day," or call and say, "Today when it was raining, I watched the water splash and remembered the sound the water made as it was being poured into the font."
- † Bake bread with your godchild or share a freshly baked piece. Talk about how bread is vital to most cultures and a powerful symbol of life.
- † At some point in the later years of childhood or adolescence, it is possible your godchild may temporarily lose his/her way. Go see them face-to-face, if possible. Look them in the eyes. Hug them. Tell them you love them. Tell them God loves them. Remind them that they were "sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." Even if they're not sure what they believe about those words at this particular point in life, promise them that you are still one hundred percent sure of how God feels about them. Remind them that whatever path they find themselves on, it is absolutely impossible for them to ever wander outside the realm of God's attention and affection.



## THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

—Acts 2: 37-42

A central part of the baptismal rite, the Baptismal Covenant is both a statement of Christian belief and a guide to everyday living as a Christian. The Covenant consists of two main parts: first, three questions based on the Apostles’ Creed, and second, five promises about living out the Christian faith. The church has a mission to bring the reconciling love of Christ to all the broken and hurting places of the world, and this mission is carried out by all of its members. The Baptismal Covenant helps Christians live into this mission in practical ways.

Ultimately, the Baptismal Covenant is about love. It encompasses our loving relationship with God, and directs us in how to show that love in the world. The baptized live is one of action, and the five promises of the covenant show us how to live out a life of faith. As we live into the Christian life all day, every day, we have opportunities to enact these promises in our households, congregations, neighborhoods, and the world.

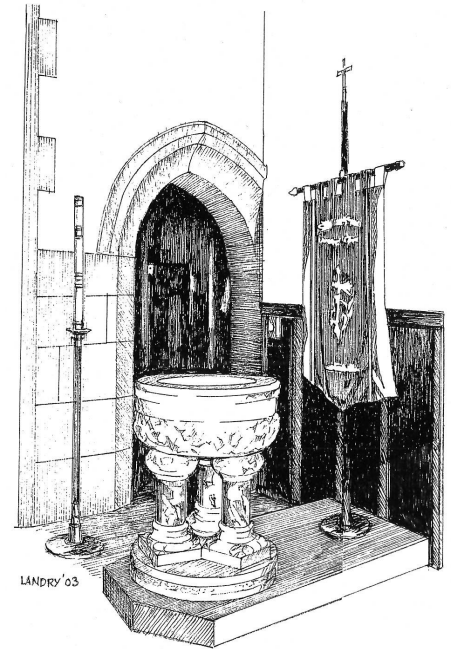
The response to each of the five promises is, “I will with God’s help.” We are not left with the impossible burden of living a perfect life. Rather we are reminded that we always have God. We do not do these things on our own.



## THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

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- Celebrant:* Do you believe in God the Father?  
*People:* *I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.*
- Celebrant:* Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?  
*People:* *I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.*
- Celebrant:* Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?  
*People:* *I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.*
- Celebrant:* Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and  
fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?  
*People:* *I will, with God's help.*
- Celebrant:* Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you  
fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?  
*People:* *I will, with God's help.*
- Celebrant:* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good  
News of God in Christ?  
*People:* *I will, with God's help.*
- Celebrant:* Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving  
your neighbor as yourself?  
*People:* *I will, with God's help.*
- Celebrant:* Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,  
and respect the dignity of every human being?  
*People:* *I will, with God's help.*



## LIVING THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT EVERY DAY

The Baptismal Covenant is to be lived out every day, in ordinary ways and ordinary places. Here are some practical suggestions:

- ◇ *Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, in the prayers?*

These practices were the direct response to baptism by those living in the time of the apostles, as expressed in the Acts of the Apostles.

*In the world:* Actively participate in the life of a Christian congregation. Attend Bible studies, spiritual formation classes, and parish dinners. Be regular in worship; participation in the Eucharist is a renewal of baptism—the third part of the unified rite (bath-handlaying-communion). Practice prayer daily, for yourself, for others, for the world.

*In the home:* Read Bible stories. Learn together about the lives of the saints. Share family meals on a regular basis, and enjoy special feasts for Christian holy days. Say grace before meals and offer bedtime prayers.

- ◇ *Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?*

The words to note are “persevere” and “whenever.” Baptism does not prevent anyone from sinning. Rather, it offers us the loving response: repent and return.

*In the world:* Learn to recognize temptations and actively resist hurtful and harmful behavior. Be willing to admit shortcomings, faults, and sinfulness. Expect opportunities for reconciliation and act on them.

*In the home:* Teach children to accept responsibility for their actions and to apologize when they have hurt someone. Help them to understand what it means to say, “I am sorry,” and to be sorry. Be willing to apologize and make amends to children when you have done the hurting. Be willing to apologize and make amends to the adults in your home when you have done the hurting.

- ◇ *Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?*

The Christian life is good news. Great news. We share this news by what we do and what we say, how we say it, and to whom we say it. The good news is that Jesus loves us. The outrageous news is that we do not need to do anything to gain or earn this love; it is pure gift.



*In the world:* Do not be shy about being a Christian. Invite others to your parish for worship, a class, or a social event. Share your joy, love, and hope in the goodness of God's creation with others.

*In the home:* Tell children that Jesus loves them. Act like you know that Jesus loves you too.

◇ *Will you seek and serve Christ in all person, loving your neighbor as yourself?*

Seek and serve. A baptized life is not about our close friends and us. It is about seeking out those who need love, and then offering our gifts to them. It is about expecting to find Christ in others: in people who we don't know, in people we don't like very much, in people who are quite different from us, in all people.

*In the world:* Notice people you would normally overlook and expect to find Christ in them. Look for opportunities to use your gifts to serve others. Be open to receiving the gifts of others. Volunteer in a soup kitchen, at your local school, or a prison. Participate in a blood drive or a community improvement project. Expect to be changed by these activities.

*In the home:* Practice loving your neighbor down the street or across the world by loving the people you share a home with. Look for the image of Christ in those who live closest to you, in a bawling infant or a cranky teenager. Think of preparing a meal or assisting with homework as acts of loving service.

◇ *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?*

No one is beyond the love of God. All people, regardless of their status or behavior, deserve to be treated with dignity.

*In the world:* Be aware of instances of injustice around you. Advocate for those with little power. Work against racism, poverty, and other social injustice. Recognize what privilege you hold and be willing to share it. Speak with courtesy and kindness to toll-booth workers, customer service folks, and children.

*In the home:* What would it look like to respect the dignity of every member of a household? Especially the youngest? Give all people in your household a voice and the opportunity to make important choices and contributions, regardless of age or ability. Teach children to negotiate and settle disputes with love and fairness.

The Baptismal Covenant is a lot to live in to and up to. It may be helpful to ponder the promises one at a time. Which seems most compelling? Which seems easy to live in to? Which seems to be the most challenging? Each time we renew our baptismal vows in the Baptismal Covenant, we encounter the opportunity to discover new ways to live more deeply into the Christian life.

## THE EPISCOPAL BAPTISMAL RITE

*Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.*

—Book of Common Prayer  
Page 308

In the Episcopal Church, baptism most appropriately takes place as part of public celebration of the Eucharist on a Sunday morning or other feast day: the Easter Vigil; on the Day of Pentecost; on All Saints' Day, or the Sunday after All Saints' Day; or on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany). Baptism is not a private affair; a person is baptized into the body of Christ, so it is important that the body is present. Also, the baptized life is not lived in isolation, but in relationship to Christian community. Community support is integral to the baptismal rite; all those present promise to uphold the newly baptized in their life in Christ.

The opening dialogue, or the first words of the service, reminds the gathered community of what baptism is all about, echoing words from the letter to the Ephesians 4: 4-6:

*There is one Body and One Spirit  
There is one hope in God's call to us  
One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism*

In The Episcopal Church, baptism is never repeated for an individual since it is understood as full initiation into the Christian life. Thus, those who have been baptized Christians in another denomination, using water the triune formula, are welcomed as full members of the Body of Christ and are never re-baptized. Even those members who have left the church and return years later seeking renewal are offered the rite of Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows rather than repeating the baptismal rite itself. The action God takes in baptism cannot be dissolved; thus the Episcopal rite of Baptism begins with the foundation of one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.

After the opening dialogue, the service continues with the prayers, readings from scripture, and the sermon. This not only sets baptism in the context of regular Eucharistic worship, but also reminds the community that any sacrament is imbedded in prayer and scripture.



Sponsors, faithful baptized Christians who have already begun to share this journey with them, first present the candidates. Those candidates who can speak for themselves are then asked, “Do you desire to be baptized?” while infants and younger children have parents and godparents to speak for them. And so comes the moment to make the public commitment to this new life in Christ.

The examination follows, in the form of renunciations and acclamations. To be baptized is to enter into a new life, and these statements set the parameters for what that life is all about.

To renounce is to say “no” to, to turn away from. So the candidate is asked to renounce:

- † Satan and all the spiritual forces that rebel against God;
- † the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God;
- † the sinful desires that draw us from the love of God.

But the baptized life is about much more than saying “no.” It is also about saying “yes” to the love promised by Jesus and to turn toward that new life in Christ. So the candidate also promises:

- † to turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as the savior;
- † to put trust in Christ’s grace and love;
- † to follow and obey Jesus.

And then, the entire congregation, all who are gathered, the Body of Christ, pledges to support this person in her/his new life in Christ. The members of the congregation renew their own baptismal promises as they join the candidate in the Baptismal Covenant.

The Covenant is immediately followed by the Prayers for the Candidates, so that even before they are baptized, the candidates receive the prayerful support of the congregation.

## THE BAPTISM

Finally, after all this preparation comes the baptism itself as the candidates and the celebrant move toward the font. The celebrant prays the Thanksgiving over the Water, blessing it. Each candidate is presented by name, and then the celebrant immerses, or pours water on, the candidate (depending on the tradition of that congregation) using the ancient words, *“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

Then, using chrism, oil that has been specifically blessed by the bishop for baptisms, the celebrant imposes hands and marks the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized, sealing the baptism and marking them as *“Christ’s own forever.”*

It is done. And there is more. Immediately the newly baptized are prayed over, the bishop or priest asking that God will, *“Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and persevered, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.”* They are next publicly welcomed by the entire congregation, and immediately invited to share in communion and in the ongoing life of the baptized.

## BAPTISM AND HOLY COMMUNION

Anyone who is baptized is welcome to receive communion, regardless of age. This is one of the results of understanding baptism as full initiation. Thus, there is nothing to prevent an infant receiving communion on the day of their baptism. Baptism is entrance into the Christian faith and life, and through communion that faith life is nurtured.

Sometimes parents and other adults believe that children should not receive communion until they can understand it. But, just like baptism, the Eucharist is a holy mystery. None of us, not even the greatest theologian, can adequately explain it. Rather, we are fed by it. We do not wait until children can understand the workings of the digestive system and the complexities of nutrition before we feed them. Sharing in Holy Communion, in the one bread the one cup, is a significant way in which Christian faith is nurtured and the vehicle through which we enter deeply into communion with God. All of us are invited. All of us are made worthy through God’s mercy. Each of us can experience the profound love of God through this sacrament and spend a lifetime reflecting on this experience.

*Q. What is the ministry of the laity?*

*A. The ministry of the lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.*

*—Book of Common Prayer*

*Page 855*

People are baptized at a particular time on a particular day in a particular place. But the baptized life is a continuous, developing relationship with Jesus Christ. Christians spend their entire lives living into their baptisms. To remember is to re-member, to call to mind or to be mindful again, to put something back together. Some people remember their baptismal day, and can call to mind the promises they made and the community of witnesses who surrounded them. They can draw on this experience, re-live it, and re-examine it as they continue to practice the Christian life. But even those who were baptized as infants can remember their baptisms. They too can be mindful of the promises made on their behalf, and can examine how they are living into their life in Christ.

The Episcopal Church teaches that all the baptized are ministers, and that laypeople have an important and particular part to play. With baptism comes responsibility. Laypeople, or the laity, are the non—ordained members of the church. The Episcopal Church recognizes four orders of ministry, and laity is considered the primary order. Laypeople share with bishops, priests, and deacons the charge to “represent Christ and his Church.” Being Christian is never a private affair.

Laypeople are also expected to bear witness to Christ “wherever they may be.” This is the call to be an ordinary Christian—that is, to practice Christian teachings and values in all the ordinary times and places. Christians are to spread the love of Christ in the world and not just keep the good news to themselves. This means sharing that love on the subway and the highway, in the workplace and on the athletic field, in the grocery store and at the vacation resort.



The baptized are to “carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world.” They are Christ’s hands and feet here and now. This is why the Baptismal Covenant calls us to persevere in resisting evil, to seek Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace in the world. And it is assumed that laypeople have been given spiritual gifts to carry out this work. Spiritual gifts are named in scripture and they include attributes like wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, teaching, and prayer (see 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4 for examples of spiritual gifts). Not everyone has the same gifts, but all of us have God-given capacities to minister in the world.

Part of remembering that one is baptized, of living into one’s baptism, is to identify what particular gifts one has for serving others . . . And then use them. Some might use their gifts of teaching to lead a children’s class at their parish or a literacy class at the local library. Others might use their expertise with finances to volunteer as the treasurer for a local charity. Whatever an individual’s particular gifts are, when they are put to use to make the world a better place, then Christ’s work is being carried out.

Remembering one’s baptism also calls for us to continually strengthen our faith life through spiritual practices or disciplines. Such disciplines include prayer, fasting, the study of scripture, and giving. We also live into our baptisms by learning more about our faith. This can be done through reading scripture, being involved in Bible study or other classes, and intentional conversations with other Christians.

We strengthen our faith by participating in the Christian community. Christians are called to worship God together in community, and to share in the Eucharist. But Christian community is also found in church spaghetti suppers and youth care washes, which offer opportunities for fellowship and building relationships with others.

Other ways to remember one’s baptism, whether a child or adult, might include:

- † celebrating one’s baptismal anniversary with prayers or a party;
- † attending a spiritual retreat;
- † keeping a journal;
- † observing the seasons of the church year;
- † participating in a church camp or vacation bible school.

However, one chooses to live into the baptized life, it will always be living into the mystery.

*It shall be the duty of Rectors or Priests-in-Charge to ensure that persons be prepared for Baptism. Before baptizing infants or children, Rectors or Priests-in-Charge shall ensure the sponsors be prepared by instructing both the parents and the Godparents concerning the significance of Holy Baptism, the responsibilities of parents and Godparents for the Christian training of the baptized child, and how these obligations may properly be discharged.*

—Canon III.9.5.b.3,  
*Constitutions and Canons of The Episcopal Church 2012*

The sacrament of Holy Baptism is appropriately preceded by instruction and prayerful preparation. Providing such instruction is a canonical obligation for clergy in charge of congregations; it is essential to provide those about to enter into the holy mystery of baptism with information, loving guidance, and support. No one, regardless of age, can ever be fully instructed in the Christian faith before being baptized. Faith formation is a lifelong endeavor. The baptized spend their entire lives growing into the full stature of Christ. Nevertheless, one can be equipped to being this journey, and having some instruction and the right tools always makes an expedition more successful.

Adults, parents, or young children may be asked to participate in any of the following activities as part of their baptismal preparation and instruction:

- † Meet with the clergy as soon as possible to discuss the nature of baptism and any particular practices of the congregation.
- † Attend several classes for instruction. Hopefully your priest has been mindful of how to make these accessible for participants who may be adults with busy work schedules, or older children who have different learning needs, or the sleep deprived parents of infants.
- † Learn about topics to include:
  - the significance of Holy Baptism;
  - the place of Holy Scripture;
  - the importance of the creeds, corporate worship, and individual spiritual practices;
  - the responsibilities of parents and godparents for raising a child in the faith;
  - the role of lifelong formation in the faith;
  - The components of the baptismal service.

- † If there is more than one baptismal candidate, expect to attend classes with others, as people of all ages learn much from engaging with other seekers.
- † Invite godparents to participate in the instruction.
- † If you are an adult preparing for baptism, you may be requested to enroll in the catechumenate, using the “Preparation for Adults for Holy Baptism” found in the *Book of Occasional Services*.
- † Receive other resources for further reading and preparation.
- † Attend a rehearsal close to the day of the baptism.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF REHEARSAL

Clergy and lay leaders are accustomed to the rhythm of liturgical rites, to speaking up in church, and to participating fully in community worship. This may not be true for baptismal candidates, sponsors, parents, or godparents. A well-run rehearsal is not only an additional opportunity for instruction in the faith, it is also an act of hospitality. Rehearsals are best done without haste and when possible should occur on a day other than the baptism itself.

Participants need to know where to sit, where and when to stand, and how to move smoothly into place. They need to know when, and how loudly, to speak up. They need to know who to follow the service using the service leaflet or the Book of Common Prayer. Walking through the service (rather than just talking through the service) with all the participants present is the best way to put people at ease so that on the day of the baptism itself the participants can be focused on the significance of the ritual rather than worrying about where and when to stand.





◇ *What is one parent is not Christian?*

Since baptism of a child assumes that child will be raised in the Christian faith and life, parents who are raising a child together need to be in agreement about nurturing the spiritual life of their child. However, it is not necessary that both parents be Christian. Children can be immersed in the Christian faith and at the same time be taught to understand, respect, and appropriately participate in other faith traditions. A parent who is not Christian would not be one of the child's sponsors for baptism, as being a sponsor necessitates making a commitment to Christ; however his/her presence would be very welcome.

◇ *What is the right thing to wear?*

A baptism is a celebration of new life, so wearing something festive would be fitting. In the church, white is a traditional color representing new life. However there is no rule or rubric that dictates what color should be worn.

◇ *At what age should children be baptized?*

Children can be baptized at any age. If parents intend to raise their children in the Christian faith, there is no reason to delay. The sooner a child is baptized, the sooner she can be formed by full inclusion in the faith community. As a practical consideration, parents of newly born or newly adopted infants might want to wait a few months so that all involved are able to participate in the ceremony joyfully.

◇ *How many godparents should (or can) a child have?*

There is no set rule about the number of godparents a child should have. Two or three is a reasonable choice. Some congregations do provide guidelines about choosing godparents, so parents should check with their priest.

◇ *What if a godparent can't be present at the service?*

Being present at the baptismal liturgy to sponsor a child is one of the most important roles of a godparent. Parents should make an effort to choose godparents who will be able to attend. But there are also significant godparenting tasks that take place throughout a child's life, and parents may wish to include a godparent who simply cannot be present at the baptism itself. Parents should check with their clergy about choosing godparents as many parishes have policies regarding this situation.

◇ *As an adult candidate, do I need a sponsor or godparent?*

Adult candidates have sponsors rather than godparents. Sponsors are mature Christians who present the candidate during the baptismal rite and support the candidate in her/his life in Christ. Sponsors are typically members of the congregation to which the candidate belongs.

◇ *When are baptisms held?*

According to the Book of Common Prayer, "Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast day (page 298). Private baptisms are not the practice in The Episcopal Church. Some parishes schedule baptisms on these especially appropriate feast days: the Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints' Day (or the Sunday after All Saints' Day), and the Feast of the Baptism of Christ (which is the first Sunday after the Epiphany).

◇ *Can family and friends attend the baptism if they are not members of the church or Christians?*

Family and friends who are not Christians or who are not members of the baptismal candidate's church are most welcome to attend the baptism and to participate in the liturgy as appropriate. The Episcopal Church welcomes all those who are baptized Christians, regardless of denomination, to receive communion.



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### OUR DIOCESE AND PARISH

The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Bishop  
The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, Suffragan Bishop  
The Rev. W. (Will) H. Mebane, Jr., Rector