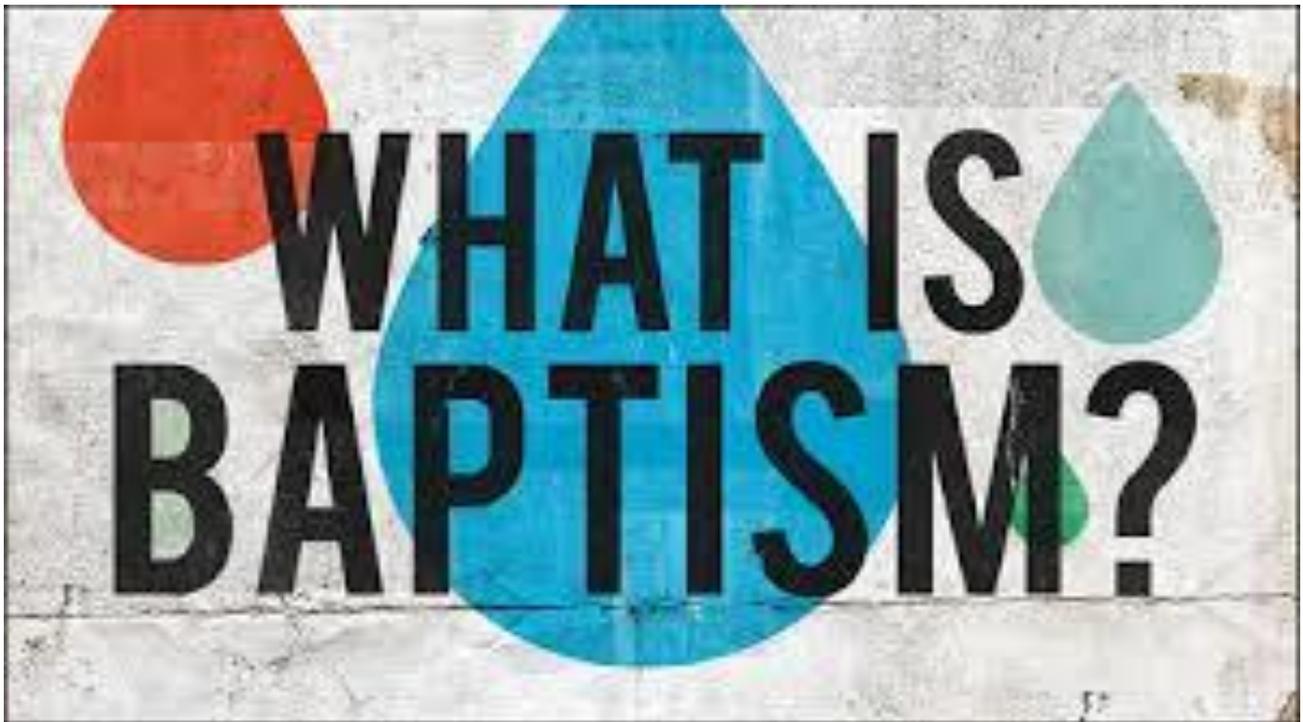


*Bringing your child to God
Through a service of Blessing or Baptism
in the Parish of Coffs Harbour*



This leaflet is intended to assist in the understanding of the meaning of **Holy Baptism** and the promises that are made by sponsors during this service. You are invited to read it carefully and bring any questions or reactions to the Priest during a meeting.



Why might a parent want their child baptised?

Some common answers given by parents, and comments are as follows:

To give our child their name properly?

But people are properly named when their birth is registered.

To make sure our child keeps well?

Baptism is not a spiritual inoculation or insurance payment. In fact God is not pleased if parents and godparents make the promises dishonestly in the Baptism Service.

Because our child's grandmother is pressing the parents to 'have him/her done'?

But the child's parents must provide the Christian upbringing, not the grandparent. It is their faith which will count, so they must decide - whatever other people may wish.

To make sure our child goes to heaven if he/she dies young?

God does not judge people differently just because one has been through baptism and another has not.

So our child can be married in Church?

Although those who come for a Christian wedding should be believers, Baptism is to do with a person's relationship with God, not a preparation for marriage.

To thank God for our child's birth?

This is a good thing to do, but there is quite a different service for this, which the Parish Priest would be glad to discuss with you.

To give our child a good start in life?

Yes, it's a good start; but this start must continue with a Christian upbringing, otherwise it is the start of nothing and is pointless.

So that our child can grow up as a Christian?

A good wish, but it needs more than Baptism to achieve it. If you are going to give your child a full Christian upbringing (which is what you promise in the Baptism Service), then now is the time to start. If you are not sure about the Christian Faith and would like to know more, please ask the Parish Priest.

Baptism or Blessing?

A Christian is a person who has a relationship with Jesus Christ within his family. If you do not yet see yourself as part of his family but you would like to do something significant for your child, you may ask the Parish Priest if you can have a blessing instead of a Baptism.

There is considerable difference between Baptism and Blessing:

Blessing is simply a way of thanking God for the wonderful event of birth and the joy of a new life, which is bound to you in a very special way, and asking for God's blessing on your child. There is no further commitment.

To arrange a Blessing is very simple: book a date with the Parish Priest on which to hold the *Service of Thanksgiving for a Child* and allow a member of Clergy to come round once in order to go through the service with you.

Baptism is completely different and demands some solemn promises from you. These are discussed later in this booklet.

To arrange a Baptism requires the Priest or a member of the Baptism Preparation Team to come to your house to go through the service, so that you know exactly what promises you are being expected to make and to talk through the issues surrounding these. If the godparents live locally, they should also be invited to attend.

The meaning of Baptism

A Prayer Book for Australia states, "Baptism with water signifies the cleansing from sin that Jesus' death makes possible, and the new life that God gives us through the Holy Spirit." "In baptism ... we are joined to Christ, and made members of his body, the Church universal." So, what does this mean?

Relationships. The indication here is that the Christian life is first and foremost about *relationships*: our relationship with God and with each other. When we are born, we are self-centred in nature. But God wants us to become mature human beings characterized by the virtue of sacrificial love that God has for each one of us, and that he demonstrated through Jesus. Jesus was the most mature person who ever lived. He lived his life entirely for other people - even those who hated him! He was never selfish or self-centred. Likewise, the mature person does not look out for their own rights, but acknowledges their responsibilities in society and looks after the needs of others.

Family Life. When a person is baptised they become a member of Jesus' family, accepting the culture of the Christian family for themselves (if baptised as an adult) or being brought up to learn and accept that culture (if baptised as a child). So a Christian is not just a nice person, but a person who is a child of a heavenly Father, who is himself all love, living in relationship with God our Father.

Being part of the Family. Living in relationship with God and Jesus requires us to come together as Jesus' Family. Families come together to share, care, learn and demonstrate their unity. Every family shows that it belongs together by being together. The Christian Family is no different! You cannot grow to be a mature Christian on your own. Mature Christian growth is dependent upon being baptised into Christ's family.

Godparents

It is very important who you ask to be godparents for your child. It is also important to be clear what a godparent should do.

First, **a godparent is not a guardian**. A guardian is a person you appoint legally to care for your children until they come of age, if you or your spouse can no longer care for them: for example, if you are killed in a car crash.

The responsibilities of a godparent are spiritual responsibilities – they should:

- pray regularly for their godchild,
- set their godchild an example of Christ-like living,
- help their godchild to come to know God and to respond to him,
- encourage their godchild to follow the ways of Jesus, and
- help their godchild to look forward to their confirmation.

It is thus very important to choose a godparent who:

- is a baptised Christian (this is also a requirement of Bathurst Diocese);
- is able to undertake these responsibilities as a believing Christian,
- is willing to undertake these duties conscientiously; and
- has regular contact with their godchild to have the maximum beneficial effect.

Whilst it has been a custom to prescribe the number and gender of godparents (two of the same sex and one of the opposite sex) this is a matter of choice of individual families. It is preferred that at least one parent or godparent be a communicant member of the Anglican Church.

It is anticipated that godparents living locally join in at least one preparation meeting.

Some families bring children from other parishes to be baptised in The Parish of West Wyalong. These families are asked to do two things:

To contact their local Parish Priest, as their pastor, and let him/her know the intention to take their child outside the parish to be baptised and to obtain their good will; and to ask him to meet with them to go through the service and discuss the meaning of Baptism with them.

What you do in the Baptism Service

In the Baptism service you promise to bring up your child by your example of trust and commitment to God as your and their heavenly Father. You promise to:

bring them to know God in their own experience, to communicate with him, to follow the example of Jesus in gratitude for what he has already done for you and what he promises in the future;

encourage them to be confirmed when they are old enough; and

pray for them.

Your Commitments

In the Baptism service sponsors (parents and godparents) will be asked to present those you are sponsoring for Baptism and to respond to two sets of questions. The first set asks three questions relating to your willingness to be a sponsor:

1. Will you accept the responsibility placed upon you in bringing this child to Baptism?

Answer: I will

2. Are you willing to answer on behalf of this child?

Answer: I am

3. By your own prayers and example, by your friendship and love, will you encourage this child in the life and faith of the Christian community?

Answer: I will, with God's help.

The second set of questions asks about **your own faith**, and then asks you to affirm the faith of the Church as set out in the Apostles Creed. The questions are:

Question 1: Do you turn to Christ?

Response "**I turn to Christ**"

Comment:

When do I turn to Christ; when faced with my own death, when someone else dies, in a difficult situation, in my failures, at mealtimes saying grace?

Do I ever turn to him in good times, in successes, in my everyday life?

Or do I only turn to Christ at Christmas, Easter, Baptisms, weddings and funerals?

If our children only turned to us when in trouble or in need of help we would help them, but we know they would miss the richness of family life that could be theirs if they shared the whole of their life with us.

It is just so with Jesus, if we only turn to him in trouble he will help us, but we will miss the richness of Christian life if we do not turn to him in all things.

We turn to Jesus because he died to pay the penalty for our Sin on Good Friday and rose again on Easter Sunday to provide a way for us to come back into a relationship with God and to have eternal life with God in heaven.

Question 2. Do you repent of your sins?

Response "**I repent of my sins**"

Comment: What does this mean to me?

To repent is to actively turn away from our sins and turn to Christ for help and forgiveness.

My sins are those areas of life where I rebel against God's love and plan for my life. I sin when I reject God and, without reference to God, seek to decide what is right and wrong for me and plan my own destiny without God in my life.

Question 3. Do you reject selfish living, and all that is false and unjust?

Response **"I reject them all"**

Comment:

When we reject God and desire to run our lives our own way without God, we become self-centred and self-indulgent. It is this nature that leads to greed, lust, theft, murder, oppression, abuse, etc.

Question 4. Do you renounce Satan and all that is evil?

Response **"I renounce all that is evil"**

Comment:

What is evil and where might I find it: in the world, in Australia, in my work place, in my family, in my life?

Have I or my family been involved in any questionable activities? For example:

- ridicule of God and those who practice the Christian faith,
- rebellion against parents and authority,
- immorality and irresponsible sexual practices,
- disregard for the rights and wellbeing of others,
- indulging in harmful gossip,
- experimenting in other religions,
- involvement in occult activities?

Is there anything I need to confess or renounce before my own Baptism or the Baptism of my child?

At this point the minister asks those to be baptised, or their sponsors, if they are willing to strive to live their lives as disciples of Christ.

The candidates or sponsors, as appropriate respond:

"I will, with God's help"

The second set of questions are what godchildren will be asked to 'confirm' personally when they come to the Bishop for Confirmation. Meanwhile, sponsors have taken on the role of 'spiritual trustee' to help your child prepare for that day.

A confession of Faith

After the water for baptism has been blessed, and as preparation for the baptism itself, the Minister asks you to affirm as yours the faith of the church as expressed in the Apostle's Creed. If there is anything that you do not understand in this (for example the meaning of the term 'catholic') you should ask the Priest to explain.

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in God the Son?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father;
from there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**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. Amen.**

If you can honestly answer these questions in the affirmative and you are willing to bring your child for baptism please contact:

Coffs Harbour Anglican Parish

Ph 02 6651 4700

This booklet is intended for use with the Baptism services from *A Prayer Book for Australia*, Broughton Books 1995
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