

YOUR CHILD'S BAPTISM AT THE OXFORD ORATORY



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Information for Parents

Congratulations on the birth of your child. Just as it is a great joy that a new child has become part of your own family, so too it is a grace for that child to become part of the family of the Church, and this is what happens at Baptism.

This leaflet will help explain something of the significance of the Sacrament of Baptism, and give some practical advice to help you prepare for the baptism of your child.

What is Baptism?

Baptism:

- Washes away Original Sin
- Is the way in which we are made able to go to heaven
- Is the means by which we become members of the Church
- Makes us part of the Body of Christ
- Implants the life of God within us (Sanctifying Grace)
- Calls us to be saints
- Gives us the gift of faith, and the obligation to practise the Faith

What does Baptism achieve?

We might well ask, "How can baptism give eternal life?" and we can find the answer first in the words of our Lord in the Gospel, when he told the twelve apostles to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19) Baptism makes us disciples, precisely because we enter into the communion of the Church, Christ's mystical body.

In the Church we are supported in our faith and in our everyday life by a circle of friends. We grow in communion with them by participating regularly in the sacraments, and particularly in Sunday Mass, and in so doing we grow in communion with Christ, shaping our lives as he calls us to do. Baptism is the means by which we enter into the Church, and it also gives us the grace to help us to do this.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed it in these words:

'This family of God, this gathering of friends is eternal, because it is communion with the One who conquered death and holds in his hand the keys of life. Belonging to this circle, to God's family, means being in communion with Christ, who is life and gives eternal love beyond death.'

'And if we can say that love and truth are sources of life, are life itself - and a life without love is not life - we can say that this companionship with the One who is truly life, with the One who is the Sacrament of life, will respond to your expectation, to your hope, [eternal life].'

Baptism is the beginning of something extraordinary and in deciding to have your child baptized, you are helping give him or her a wonderful gift. In another place in the Gospels we read that our Lord came that we may have life and have it in abundance (John 10:10). God does not intend that we have a life which is just a bit good, but that we have life in all its fullness, the very life of God himself, living in us through the action of the Holy Spirit. This promise is made to us in Baptism.

How do I arrange my child's Baptism?

If you would like to arrange for your child to be baptized, please contact one of the Fathers. He will usually need to meet you at least once, to get to know you, talk about baptism, and make sure you are familiar with the rite, and the responsibilities of parents.

What practical things must I consider?

You must first consider how you will pass on your faith to your child. As parents, you are the first teachers of the Catholic faith to your child, and this is both your right and responsibility.

You will need to choose godparents for your child. At least one is necessary, but more are possible. The godparents' first task is to make sure that your child is brought up in the faith. Therefore the godparents should themselves be practising Catholics. If you wish to have an additional witness who is not a Catholic, then the witness could respond along with the godparent(s) at the Baptism ceremony, but only the Catholic godparents would be written into the register.

If you do not live or worship regularly in our parish and would like to arrange a baptism at the Oratory, you will need to talk to your own local parish priest so that he can give permission for the Baptism to take place in our church.

How can I learn more about the Catholic faith?

If you are an adult who is not yet baptized you could speak to one of the Fathers about receiving instruction in the faith.

A child's baptism can be an opportunity for parents to learn more about their own faith. If you feel that you would like to learn more about your own Catholic faith, you might consider attending one of the talks or courses which are run in the parish. As your child grows there are also groups in the parish which will help you in supporting their growth in faith, e.g. the Mother and Toddler group, Little Oratory, and Young Oratory. If you want to know more, please speak to one of the Fathers.

New life in Christ

Growing in our faith and living an active life in the Church is a wonderful thing for all of us, indeed, it is the way to salvation. In reflecting on the symbols used in the rite of Baptism, Pope Benedict XVI once said:

'Water is the symbol of life: Baptism is new life in Christ. The oil is the symbol of strength, health and beauty, for it truly is beautiful

to live in communion with Christ. Then, there is the white garment, as an expression of the culture of beauty, of the culture of life. And lastly, the flame of the candle is an expression of the truth that shines out in the darkness of history and points out to us who we are, where we come from and where we must go.

Let us thank the Lord for this gift and pray for our children, so that they may truly have life: authentic, eternal life. Amen.'

What happens in the Rite of Baptism?

- The congregation gathers around the font, at the back of the church.
- First the priest will ask you what name(s) you give to your child.

The names should be Christian names – that is the names of saints. Try to find out as much as you can about your child's patron saints and when their feast days are. Then you can celebrate these days as a family.

- Then the priest will ask if you are ready to accept the responsibility of bringing your child up in the faith. This is a solemn promise – you are vowing to teach your child and to bring him or her every week to Mass and to the sacraments.
- The godparents will also be asked if they are willing to assist the parents in their duty as Christian parents.
- The priest, the parents, and the godparents all make the sign of the Cross on the baby's forehead as a sign of claiming him or her for Christ.
- Then there are some prayers for the child about to be baptized.
- After this comes the Exorcism. Baptism means a turning away from evil and washes away Original Sin. Therefore the devil is driven out by this prayer of exorcism.
- The child is then anointed on the chest with the Oil of Catechumens. A catechumen is someone preparing for Baptism, and the oil is to strengthen the candidate to be

strong in faith. If your baby is tightly wrapped up, you may have to unbutton something so that the priest can anoint the chest.

- The water to be used for Baptism is blessed, unless it is Eastertide, when the Easter water, already blessed at the Easter Vigil, is used.
- The parents and godparents will be asked to make the baptismal promises on behalf of the child. It is because of your faith that your baby is baptized, and the gift of faith is implanted within his or her soul. The first three promises are about rejecting Satan, and all his works and empty promises. In the second three promises you vow that you believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit and in the holy Catholic Church.
- Then comes the central moment of the ceremony: the Baptism itself, when the water is poured over the baby's head three times, with the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". This is the essential sacramental action.
- Now that your child is a Christian, he or she is anointed on the head with the oil of Chrism. This consecrated oil shows the dignity of the baptized person, who shares Christ's own roles as Prophet, Priest and King. The balsam, which has been added to the olive oil, also demonstrates how the Christian is to give off the aroma of Christ, bearing witness to Him in everything.
- The child is now clothed in a white garment. You should bring this with you – it can be a simple blanket or shawl. Usually the godmother wraps the white garment around the newly-baptized as a sign of baptismal purity, Original Sin having been washed away.
- The baptismal candle is then lit from the Paschal candle. This is a sign that Baptism enables us to share in the Resurrection of Christ. You can bring your own decorated candle if you wish, or we can provide one. Usually the godfather now holds the lit candle for the remainder of the ceremony.

- The priest touches the ears and mouth of the child, to ask that he or she may hear and speak the Word of God.
- The Our Father is said.
- The rite concludes with a blessing for the mother, father and all present.

Frequently asked questions

When should I have my baby baptized?

As soon as possible after birth.

My baby was baptized in the hospital. May we still have a ceremony?

Sometimes babies are baptized right away when there is a concern about their health. If you can't get a priest, then anyone can do this in an emergency, simply by pouring water three times and saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

When the baby is well enough, we can have the "Supplying of the Ceremonies" in the church, when everything takes place as at a Baptism, except for the pouring of the water itself.

Which times and days are possible for a baptism?

A baptism may take place on any day. Weekends are the most popular – especially on Sundays after the High Mass or in the afternoon. The priest you speak to can tell you which times are free.

Is there a charge for baptism?

There is no fee to be paid to have your child baptized. If you wish to make a donation then you are welcome to do so, but that is entirely up to you.

We are not parishioners. Can we still have our child baptized in your church?

If you are not a parishioner then you should ask your own Parish Priest to write a letter giving permission for the baptism to take place in our church.

Only one of the parents is a Catholic. Is that a problem?

It is the Catholic parent who takes on the responsibility to bring up your child in the faith. We welcome every help that the other parent is able to give to this. If you are not a Catholic, please join in as much of the service as you feel able.

May we take photographs during the ceremony?

If you would like pictures to be taken, or a video made, that is possible, so long as it is not too intrusive. The priest will be happy to pose for a picture with you afterwards.

How will we know what to do during the ceremony?

Everybody present will be given a card with all the prayers and responses.

We prefer the Extraordinary Form Latin Mass. Can we have the baptism in the Old Rite?

Yes – all of the Fathers will be happy to do this if you ask. Most of the prayers will be in Latin, and salt will be placed on the baby's tongue.

We have a close friend who is a Catholic priest. May he come and baptize our baby?

We are usually happy to allow another priest who is a friend or relation to come and baptize in our church. Please speak to one of the Fathers to arrange this.

Will we get a certificate?

If you would like a certificate, please email our parish registrar at registrar@oxfordoratory.org.uk You will need a certificate to apply for Catholic schools, and later on for first Holy Communion, Confirmation and Marriage. A new certificate can be made at any time.

Where can we park?

It isn't usually possible to park in our forecourt, and parking in Oxford is notoriously difficult. There are paid parking spaces in St Giles', and some free timed spaces in streets nearby. You should make sure that your guests leave plenty of time so as to arrive early for the ceremony.

Can we hire the Parish Centre for a reception after the baptism?

It is often possible to hire the Parish Centre, but not always, because of other events and meetings. Please email the Parish Priest at parish@oxfordoratory.org.uk to enquire about availability.

How can I pass on the Faith to my child?

Praying together at home, saying grace before meals, visiting the church and coming to Mass and the sacraments are the most important ways.

As a parish, we can also help you:

- Our bookshop sells books about the Faith suitable for children of different ages.
- There is a mother and toddler group, which meets on Thursday mornings after the 10 o'clock Mass.
- On Sunday mornings we have a children's liturgy during the 9.30 Mass.
- Our parish primary school, St Aloysius', gives a good Catholic education and prepares its pupils for the sacraments. The Fathers visit the school frequently.

Priority is given to applications from baptized Catholic children.

- Preparation for first Holy Communion and Confirmation takes place every year in the parish.
- We have a group for 7-11 year-olds called *Little Oratory*, which meets on Wednesdays at 5pm.
- We have a group for 11-16 year-olds called *Young Oratory*, which meets on Tuesdays at 5pm.
- There are also Catholic Scouts and Guides and other activities for children and young people that take place in our parish. Please see the newsletter or ask any of the Fathers for more information.

Please feel free to ask any other questions of the priest who will baptize your child.

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