

Baptism, Thanksgiving & Blessing at Trinity United Reformed Church, Wimbledon



As a parent you want to offer your child the best so that he/she will grow into maturity and enjoy life to the full. The Church can play an important part in that growth and development:

- We all need hope and meaning in life. Christianity says that these are found in God, who made all things and declared them to be good, and who has transformed suffering and death by Jesus' own death and resurrection.
- We all need guidance, inspiration and vision. Christianity offers a vision of God who actively loves us and offers to make us more capable of living life to the full. It also gives us a clear example of Jesus to follow as a model and guide for how to live our life.
- We all need a sense of relationship and community. The Church seeks to be a community of care and support for all. Being with other people enables us to grow and mature, to share the important things of life, and to act together for the good of all.

There are different ways for you and your child to start on this journey with God. At Trinity two main forms of service are possible:

- **Baptism**
- **Thanksgiving & Blessing** (sometimes with **Dedication**)

The following pages help explain which of these will be appropriate for you.

What is Baptism?

Baptism is ***appropriate for children or adults who are part of the church family***: those who share in the church's life and worship on a regular and frequent basis.

Baptism, in which the person has water poured or sprinkled upon their head, is an outward sign of inner renewal. It says that a person no longer lives life for themselves but now wants to follow Jesus Christ. So Baptism marks a *commitment* to be a disciple of Jesus and this means that *faith in him* is necessary if you are bringing your child – or yourself – for Baptism.

Babies and very young children are not old enough to make such a commitment for themselves. This means that as a parent you promise to encourage your child to grow up in the faith and life of the church. They then have the opportunity in due course to make their own commitment to Jesus and fulfil the promises you make at Baptism.

The main declarations and promises that parents make at an infant's Baptism are:

- *Do you believe and trust in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, maker of heaven and earth, redeemer of the world and giver of life?*
- *Do you promise, trusting in God's grace, that by prayer and example you will teach your child the faith of the gospel and bring her/him up in the worship and life of the church?*

Infant Baptisms take place during our main Sunday worship and the congregation also make a promise to support you in the task of raising your child in the Christian faith. The child receives a certificate, a baptismal candle, and a Bible.

Believers' Baptism

People who were *not* baptised as children and who later come to faith can undergo Believers' Baptism (which can be by full immersion instead of by sprinkling/pouring water, if requested), followed by an act of church membership. They make the equivalent promises of faith and Christian commitment.

(People who *have* been baptised as young children can make a further public commitment to Jesus at a Confirmation Service. Here they confirm the promises previously made on their behalf

at their Baptism, publicly affirm their faith in Christ and become full members of Christ's whole Church.)

Thanksgiving and Blessing (sometimes with Dedication)

A service of Thanksgiving and Blessing is **available to all**. For example, parents may conclude that the declarations and promises in a Baptism service aren't right for them; they may not share regularly in the church's life and worship, but still wish to celebrate the birth and ask God's blessing. Some church parents choose to let their children grow up and decide for themselves when they wish to be baptised; in this case a Thanksgiving & Blessing may include words of Dedication to God's purposes.

A Thanksgiving and Blessing normally takes place in our main Sunday worship. The parents make promises to love and care for their child, and God's blessing is sought on all the family. The child may be anointed with a small amount of oil on the forehead, as a sign of God's presence, protection and purpose.

Further Thoughts and Frequently Asked Questions

If what you are looking for is a naming ceremony (giving the child a Christian name) or a ceremony to acknowledge and celebrate the birth of your child, then a Thanksgiving & Blessing is appropriate.

In the case of Baptism, because it is a mark of commitment to and entry into the Church, we would ask and expect that those seeking it should already show a regular, committed pattern of attendance at worship and involvement in the activities and fellowship of the church.

Baptism is the start of a journey of faith, and belonging to a church is an important way of receiving support and encouragement to grow in faith. Without this readiness to become fully part of the church family, it would be inappropriate to proceed with Baptism; those seeking it would be directed instead to a service of Thanksgiving & Blessing.

“What about Godparents?”

(a) *Baptism*: Godparents don't take on any automatic legal responsibilities, but do promise to take a close interest in the child's wellbeing – and in his/her development in the Christian faith. Therefore we would expect that prospective Godparents should themselves have been baptised.

(b) *Thanksgiving and Blessing*: We are happy to include provision for 'Godparents' in this kind of ceremony. In this case, it would *not* be a requirement for the 'Godparents' to have been baptised.

“We're not married, can our child still be baptised?”

As Christians we believe that marriage can provide the most stable and committed environment in which to raise a child. But we recognise that each family's situation will be different, and we'll take all the circumstances into account. Because baptism is administered to the *child*, not the parents!

“I was baptised as a baby, and have now become a Christian as an adult. Can I be baptised again?”

We believe that Baptism, because it marks a person's point of entry into the Church, can only be administered once to a person. But we'd love to talk with you about other ways to mark your coming to Christian faith!

“This is different from what I've heard elsewhere.”

Sometimes different churches do have different policies about Baptism, and it can be tempting to 'shop around'. But because Baptism marks a person's entry into the *whole* Church, expressed through commitment to a particular *local* church, we'd encourage you to seek Baptism at a church to which you feel comfortable making a long-term commitment.

“Anything else I should know?”

A baptism at Trinity is recognised as valid by many different Christian denominations – as well as the URC, this includes e.g. Methodist, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, among others.

You might also like to know that Trinity will not charge any fee for Baptisms or services of Thanksgiving & Blessing.

For further information contact the Minister:

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