

The Roman Catholic Parishes of  
St Peter's and St Columba's



The Baptism Ceremony

Notes for Parents

*Child's Name*

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*Date and Time of Baptism*

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# The Meaning of Baptism

## **Bringing your child to God through Jesus**

In approaching Baptism, you are bringing your child to Jesus Christ. This is the great beauty and wonder of this Sacrament. Every child is made in the image and likeness of God, made of soul and of body. Therefore every child is made to yearn for God and to know and love Him. You are bringing your child, not just for a blessing, but to God Himself in the person of Jesus.

Just as you want to nourish your children and provide them with material things so in bringing them for Baptism you are recognising their spiritual need, to be nourished and fed by God. Through Jesus your child will come close to God. The real person who baptises your child is Jesus Himself, who is both God and man.

## **The living heart of Baptism - cleansing and giving new life**

The heart of the ceremony is when we go to the font for the actual Baptism. The Priest pours water on the head of the child and says the words commanded by Jesus - *'I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'*

Baptism is a Sacrament, which is a *'visible sign of a spiritual grace, instituted by Christ and given to the Church by which God's life is given to us.'*

The 'visible sign' in Baptism is the pouring of water. This symbolises the two main 'spiritual graces' in those who receive the Sacrament:

- *Cleansing* - the child is cleansed of what is called 'original sin', the sin we all inherit from our first parents. Obviously there is no personal sin in a little child, but there is the stain of original sin to be forgiven. As we are a sinful race, we all need forgiveness and cleansing from Jesus Christ.
- *Life* - Without water we die. In Baptism we are given New Life from God. Through Jesus, the Son of God, we truly become children of God our Father and receive the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father for the Son. Your child is now surrounded by God's own life and love.

## **Also belonging to God's Church**

Sharing communion with God through Jesus Christ, also means sharing communion with those already Baptised, those who share his life and make up his Church. Therefore with Baptism your child enters the Holy Catholic Church. The Church founded by Jesus Christ and spread throughout the whole world. In Baptism your child dies to sin, is given new life, loved by God, becomes truly a child of God and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, God's spiritual family.

## **Nourishing this new life - the duties of Parents and God Parents**

In Baptism, the seed of God's life is sown in your child. Like any seed it needs nourishment and special care if it is to grow and develop. This care is primarily entrusted to you, the Parents, supported by the Godparents. As your child grows and matures he or she also needs to mature spiritually in the Faith. Children need to be taught to pray, to be brought to church, and to begin to learn in mind and heart about Jesus and his teaching.

Baptism is the beginning, the gateway to the other six Sacraments. Around the age of eight, after Confirmation and First Confession, children will receive Jesus personally in Holy Communion for the first time. Instead of being carried as now, they will walk to the altar on their own. Parents and Godparents, you must encourage this spiritual growth, supported and sustained by the whole life of the Church, the wider family to which your child belongs. It is up to you to ensure a continuing religious education and formation so that the seed sown in Baptism will bear fruit in Jesus Christ.

## **Other symbols of the Ceremony**

The ceremony of Baptism is very ancient, going back to the early years of the Church, and at its heart is Jesus Christ himself. This beautiful ceremony has been revised and developed over the centuries but the main parts surrounding the Baptism itself go back to the earliest times:

- In the *first anointing* before Baptism the child is anointed on the chest, as a sort of exorcism, or driving away of the evil spirit and its influence.
- In the *second anointing*, which takes place immediately after the Baptism, the child is anointed on the crown of the head. The word 'Christ' the 'Messiah' means the 'Anointed one'. In Baptism the child is anointed, has 'put on Jesus Christ', or been 'Christened'.
- The child is draped in a *white garment* by their Godparent(s). This symbolises the pure new life of Jesus that the child has put on through Baptism.
- The *lighted candle* - The child is given a lighted candle which is lit from the Paschal or Easter Candle, which symbolises Jesus, the Light of the World, bearing his wounds but risen from the dead. The candle reminds us that your child has been enlightened by Christ and this Light passed from Jesus to your child in Baptism. In fact, in the early centuries of Christianity one of the names for Baptism was 'enlightenment'.

## Practical Details

### At the beginning in the Church

Please come straight into the church for the Baptism. Parents, Godparents and Child should remain in the porch where the ceremony will begin. After this it is usual for the Parents, Godparents and Child to be in the front bench on the left-hand side facing the altar.

It is usually preferable for the mother to hold the child during the Baptism so that the child can feel 'at home'. The first part of the readings and prayers takes place in the front bench and then we go to the font for the actual Baptism and final prayers and blessing.

### Welcome to all

If you have relatives or friends at the Baptism who are not accustomed to attending church services, please make them feel at home. Everyone is given a Service Book with all the prayers of the ceremony. All are invited to take part in the prayers of the ceremony. There are special parts marked in the books for Parents and Godparents.

### Child's Clothing

The tradition of the Church has always strongly encouraged babies and children to wear white Christening gowns. If this is not possible, please choose an appropriate **white** outfit. A **white shawl** must also be brought with you for the ceremony.

### Photographs

You are welcome to take photos or video in the church. It is best if you ask one member of the family to take photographs during the ceremony and ask others to wait until the end, when you are welcome to have photographs around the font.

This permission is given only on the understanding that no camera will interfere with the ceremony, or be in any way obstructive, so that the religious ceremony is allowed to proceed with due reverence and dignity.

### Certificate and Candle

At the end of the service you will be given a Baptismal Candle and a special box. At a later date, normally with other children who have been baptised, the Baptismal Certificate will be presented.

### Is there a fee?

There is no set fee for a Baptism, although you may wish to give the Priest an offering in an envelope.