

Baptism

at St. James' Church

*A Guide
for Parents and Sponsors*

BAPTISM

HOLY BAPTISM

Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. Holy Baptism is the full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body, the Church. God establishes an indissoluble bond with each person in baptism.

We at St. James' hope that this booklet helps convey the importance of Holy Baptism and its central place in a Christian's life. Commanded by Christ, Baptism is the way in which we become members of the Christian community. It sets in motion a life in which all work, every relationship, is guided by the love of Jesus Christ, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the power of God. Baptism is the foundation for all future church participation and ministry.

The Service

Each candidate for Baptism in the Episcopal Church is sponsored by one or more baptized persons. These sponsors (godparents) speak on behalf of candidates for Baptism who are infants or younger children who cannot speak for themselves at the Presentation and Examination of the Candidates. The baptismal promises are made by candidates or by their parents or sponsors, “who guarantee that the children will be brought up within the Church, to know Christ and be able to follow him” (Prayer Book, pp. 858-859). During the baptismal rite the members of the congregation promise to do all they can to support the candidates for Baptism in their life in Christ. They also join with the candidates in renewing their own baptismal covenant.

The water of Baptism is administered by pouring water on the forehead of the candidate three times as he or she is baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Prayer Book, p. 307). The candidate is then marked on the forehead with the sign of the cross, “sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever.” Oil blessed by the Bishop and used only for Baptism, called Chrism, is used. When the Baptism has been completed, the celebrant and the congregation welcome the newly baptized into the congregation.

The first step to take, once the decision to baptize has been made, is to complete the baptism application and return it to the Administrative Assistant to the Rector.

Next, the Rector’s assistant will help to schedule a date. Baptism takes place within a regular service of worship signifying the baptized person’s becoming part of the community of faith. The Book of Common Prayer commends the following days as especially appropriate for Baptism: the first Sunday after Epiphany (the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord), Easter Eve (Vigil), the Day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, and the Sunday after All Saints’ Day. Given the size of St. James’ congregation

and the number of baptisms annually, other Sundays are made available throughout the year, providing flexibility in determining both date and hour. We do not hold Baptisms during the forty days of Lent, a season of penitence and historically a time when candidates were prepared for Baptism.

Preparing for Baptism

Because of the importance of baptism and because through it those baptized are incorporated into the Church, we encourage parents of children who are to be baptized and adults who wish to be baptized to be active in the life of St. James' or to make that commitment. This means regular attendance at services of worship and participation in the parish's ministries. Godparents/sponsors need not be Episcopalians but they should be active in their own parishes.

Godparents/Sponsors

For children, godparents promise to see that the child is brought up in the Christian faith and life. For adults, sponsors are expected to help model the Christian life. Because of the promises they must make, it is therefore required that sponsors/godparents be baptized Christians. The Church requires one sponsor for each candidate, but it is possible to invite more; often there are three for every candidate. If there is a family member or friend who is important in the life of the candidate, but is not a Christian, we encourage that person to stand with the baptismal party in order to signify their central place in the candidates' life.

Responsibilities

Parents and godparents who commit to having a child baptized take on a variety of very specific responsibilities. These should be undertaken with a clear understanding and willingness to honor them.

- ◆ Parents and godparents agree to pray daily for the baptized child.
- ◆ Parents and godparents support a relationship with a church in a child's life, including regular attendance at worship service and participation in Church School classes. As a child grows, other parish activities may be important as well for that child's growth in faith.
- ◆ Parents and godparents agree to make a conscientious effort to encourage study of the Bible.
- ◆ Parents and godparents support, enhance and strengthen the faith of the child in everyday life. Therefore, sponsors may encourage saying grace before meals, daily prayer, and the observance of other customs and disciplines that can become part of the fabric of a child's daily life with God.
- ◆ Godparents commit to setting aside regular times to spend with a godchild not only to reinforce growth in principles of the Christian faith but also to develop a friendship that will last well beyond childhood.

The Baptismal Seminar

On the day before the scheduled baptism, there is one-hour seminar to consider the beliefs that undergird baptism and to rehearse the service itself. Generally, the celebrant (the priest who will officiate at the baptism) or one of the other clergy leads the meeting. All adult participants, parents, godparents, sponsors, and older children and adults being baptized are expected to attend this meeting.

Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist

The Celebration of Baptism always takes place in the context of a service of Holy Eucharist (Communion). It marks those baptized as full members of the church and communion is the sacrament shared by all Christians. At St. James', parents determine when a child receives communion, whether as an infant, a young child or at Confirmation. If parents wish their infant to receive communion we recommend that the parent give the child a very small portion of the communion wafer. We do believe that children often tell us when they are ready by indicating their desire to participate in this sacrament. We offer communion awareness classes for children and families twice a year in order to familiarize participants with the meaning of the sacrament and the logistics of the service.

CUSTOMS AT ST. JAMES' CHURCH

- ◆ In the course of the service, the baptized are sealed with chrism (oil that has been blessed by the Bishop of New York). It symbolizes union with the life of the Episcopal Church and the entire Christian church.
- ◆ Young children receive the small white linen towel used in the service. It represents the early church's tradition of vesting the newly baptized in white, signifying purity and new life as found through Baptism.
- ◆ Following a custom of the English church, we present each baptized person with a lighted candle, a symbol of becoming Christ's light and Christ's minister in the world.
- ◆ The parish children are encouraged to come up front to watch the Baptism. If there are any children in your baptismal party, please encourage them to come up as well.
- ◆ Siblings of those being baptized should stand with their parents.
- ◆ We reserve pews at the front of the church for baptismal families. At the seminar prior to the service, please let the celebrant know how many family members will be in attendance.
- ◆ Because Baptism is part of a service of worship, photographs are not permitted during the service. However, we encourage families to stay in the church after the service and to take as many photographs as they wish.
- ◆ There is no charge for Baptism, but a contribution to the parish for the Clergy Discretionary Fund (used to assist those in need) is most welcome.
- ◆ Arrangements can be made through the Altar Guild to give the altar flowers in celebration and thanksgiving for a child's or adult's baptism.

◆ When Baptism is scheduled for a principal Sunday service, the name of the candidate appears in the service leaflet. We encourage families to take the leaflet as a keepsake.

TABLE GRACES

Children's First Graces at Meal Time

For food, and all thy gifts of love,
We give thee thanks and praise.
Look down, O Father, from above,
And bless us all our days. Amen.

For what we are about to receive,
the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen.

God, we thank you for this food,
For rest and home and all things good;
For wind and rain and sun above,
But most of all for those we love. Amen.

We thank thee, Lord, for happy hearts,
For rain and sunny weather.
We thank thee, Lord, for this our food,
And that we are together. Amen.

PRAYERS

For a Birthday

Watch over thy child, O Lord, as his days increase; bless and guide him wherever he may be. Strengthen him when he stands; comfort him when discouraged or sorrowful; raise him up if he fall; and in his heart may thy peace which passeth understanding abide all the days of his life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Quiet Confidence

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Prayer attributed to St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

For the Care of Children

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.

For a Child Already Baptized

Into your hands, O God, we place your child [N]. Support *her* in *her* successes and in *her* failures, in *her* joys and in *her* sorrows. As *she* grows in age, may *she* grow in grace, and in the knowledge of *her* Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

| | |
|--|--------------|
| St. James' Church | 212.288-4100 |
| | 212.774-4200 |
| Administrative Assistant to the Rector | 212.774-4251 |



St. James' Church

865 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10021

212.288-4100 www.stjames.org