

Preparing for Holy Baptism

Anglican Parish of Hunters Hill

Some straight talking
about . . .



Welcome, and thanks for making contact with our Parish about Holy Baptism.

We know that your child's life is extremely important to you and that you want nothing less than the best for your child.

Your child's life is equally important to this church, and we want nothing less than the best for your child.

We therefore want to be upfront and honest about this important step that you are considering for your child, and your family.

We want there to be no misunderstanding about why we believe that this is so important for your child, and allow you to make an informed choice about what is best for you and your family at this time.

So, this booklet has some straight talking in it. We don't intend to offend, but hope and pray that what it means to be baptised, and how that is lived out, will be the end result of your reading this, and any ongoing conversations that we have.

Reading this booklet, and responding to the questions in the back is the first part of preparing for baptism in our Parish.

A Changing World

Sometime between 1960 and 1980 a very different view of the place of religion in the world started to come about. Some people have grieved this deeply, while others, including many in the Church, have found new freedom and possibilities.

While many now operate in this new way, many others still practise their Christian life in the old ways.

What this change brought with it is a new sense of what it means to be Christian and, specifically, what it means to be baptised.

How did we change?

In the 1950's and early 1960's many parents did not worry about whether their children would grow up Christian. It just usually happened.

Outside work and school the Church was "the only show in town". Large Church Youth groups met on Friday nights. On Saturday you played sport and went to the movies with the same crowd. On Sundays, the town closed down – shops were shut and no one worked. On Sunday morning kids went to Sunday schools while parents were in Church.

Church, home and town worked together to give us 'Christian values'. People grew up Christian by simply being raised in a local community.

Most of us expected to be baptised, to have a church wedding, to have a church funeral. Why? Because we lived in this Christian society, where everyone was "Christian".

When did we change?

It's hard to date just when it happened.

It was made up of a series of events that came with a rush: TV in every home, Sunday sport, extended trading hours for pubs, clubs and shops.

Link this with an era of full employment and high wages, making possible the second car, family mobility, travel and financial security. We also found secular ways of understanding the world.

This new Australian society no longer acts as a prop for the Church, nor does it need the Church to prop it up. There are no longer any free rides for the Church!

This new world provides as many challenges for the Church as it does for those who we share it with.

A new way of being Christian (or perhaps an old one rediscovered)

This is an opportunity to celebrate! We are at last free to choose to live in a way that makes being a Christian an exciting adventure, and a significant choice.

It is a choice that each of us get to make.

Choosing to follow Jesus and live differently to the world about us is what the very first followers of Jesus did. As a result they lived within an adventuresome Church – a community of people seeking to live faithfully together and act differently to make a difference to themselves, and the world about us.

We are different. We have a different story and view of the world. We have a different set of values. We are Christian.

Making a Choice

In this new situation, the central question for all of us is which group of people do I want to shape my life and the life of my family? What set of values and principles do I seek to live by?

Baptism is the deliberate way persons (children and adults) are located within a Christian group, a church. A church is a group of people who walk this journey together. It is impossible to live a Christian life without being a part of a community that seeks to nurture, encourage, sustain and uphold one another in this important choice.

So, there's no more important choice to be made than this . . .

Which group of people do I want to shape my life and the life of my family?

Is it to be a Christian group, a church, or not?

So, Is Baptism really what you want?

You see, the new situation we've just described also means a new freedom and a new honesty for people to choose not to be Christian!

Parents ask for baptism for their children for a whole variety of reasons.

Many of those reasons still belong to the 'old situation' which is over, but for some the break has not yet fully occurred.

In the new situation, perhaps Baptism and actively belonging to our Christian community is not what you honestly want for your child or yourself?

Some questions and reasons given for baptism?

Let's take a look at some commonly given reasons for seeking baptism and see if baptism is still the best way to satisfy your reasons.

'It's expected of us. It's like turning twenty-one. Everyone goes through these things, don't they?'

Reply: No they don't! There's nothing natural about Baptism any more. It's about being different, not about being the same.

If you want a special occasion to welcome your child into your family, throw a party and we would love to help you prepare a special blessing to celebrate at the party, or consider 'Thanksgiving for the gift of a Child' as an alternative to baptism (see below).

'Our parents are always on our backs to get the baby done.'

Reply: Grandparents who really care are a precious part of any family. Tell them how their support always helps when you have an important decision to make. Get them to read this booklet so that you might have a conversation together.

'This child's arrival has been a gift to us. We want to say "thanks" to God.'

Reply: We know just how thankful you feel. It's a wonderful feeling. In our Church we have a beautiful service of 'Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child'. We'd love to talk about celebrating this with you in the church, or at your special place.

'We were baptised as kids, and as a result never got sick'

Reply: Baptism has nothing to do with health and well-being. It does not have any miraculous properties, inoculation or vaccination 😊.

'If my child is not baptised, and they die, will they go to heaven?'

Reply: We believe in a God who is so loving and so compassionate that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ. Sadly, in centuries past, and even today, some parts of the Church teach that you need to be baptised to get into heaven. We believe that baptism is a human response, and that it is only God who judges each of us. We do not believe that baptism is a ticket to heaven!

'If my child is not baptised can they still go to a Christian school?'

Reply: The policies of individual schools differ from place to place. Our experience is that our local Christian schools are usually happy to discuss with you why you have not baptised, and if they understand your reasons, but can see your desire to have children raised with faith as a choice, they are often open to this. We often tell schools about the integrity of parents to choose a Thanksgiving, rather than make false promises – and they are often more receptive.

'If my child is not baptised can they still receive the sacraments of the church, including Holy Communion and marriage?'

The Church offers seven sacraments and you do not need to be baptised to receive most of these, including forgiveness. Baptism is the usual requirement for people to receive Holy Communion. However, in the Parish

of Hunters Hill we believe that if you truly believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then you will always be welcome to participate in this holy meal. We hope and pray that through such participation deeper questions might be asked, and you might come to desire baptism. The Church currently requires that at least one partner in a couple seeking marriage is a baptised person.

'Our life in the Christian community is essential to us. It has formed us into the persons we are. It keeps us in touch with the source of our faith, hope, joy and love. We know and share in the lives of others in the community. We want that community to also shape the life of our child'.

Reply: Then let's start to prepare for baptism!

If you are still with us . . .

We've tried to let you know why we take Baptism seriously in this Parish. That it is a choice about a way of living, and not a once only event. If you now feel sure that Baptism is what you must do for your child and if you are prepared to do some preparation for Baptism, then so are we.

If however you feel that you are unable to commit at this time, then we thank you for taking the time to read this, and bless you for making such a decision. We would welcome the opportunity to offer a special blessing for your child at a family event, or a Service of 'Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child'. All you need to do is make contact and ask, and we will work with you to arrange this wonderful event.

Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child

The Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child is a short liturgy which makes no demands of belief or commitment from the parents. Instead, it expresses our deepest wishes and desires for this child, and pronounces the blessing of God on this child and their family. It is a meaningful liturgy which brings together the past and the present.

Contact Rev'd Michael for further details: revmichael@aphh.com.au

Baptism

Baptism takes place within the context of our normal Parish worship where the whole body gathers to welcome its newest members. Baptism is not a “private” event, but a public profession.

Baptism is a universal Christian rite – you are not baptized an “Anglican”, but as a disciple of Jesus. However, you are baptized into a community of believers, and so our desire is that you would enter into the journey of life with us.

Baptism in our Parish is not an event that you “book”, but a sacrament into which you are invited to participate within by the Rector, when the time is right.

Those who are invited for Baptism are active and regular worshipping members of our congregation, thus already fulfilling the promises they are about to make at Baptism – the promise to raise children in faith.

The next step . . .

We hope you will take some time to talk and pray. Feel free to contact us if you have further questions.

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