

Your minister will probably want to go through the service with you to ensure that you understand what it is all about. Make a note of anything in this leaflet that you do not understand and ask about it. If any family is not certain about this it may be important not to go ahead immediately but to ask the minister for a chance to talk and learn more about the Christian life first. Your minister will be only too glad to arrange for this to happen.

For parents who are not able, in conscience, to take the vows required at the baptism of an infant, it is possible and more honest, instead, to arrange for an **Act of Thanksgiving** to God for the birth of the child. Again, your minister will be please to advise on this.

The word "Christening" is sometimes used to refer to infant baptism. Baptism is the older and biblical term.

You may like to look up the following Bible passages:

Matthew 3: 13-17

Matthew 28: 16-20

Acts 2: 37-39

If you have any questions about anything in this leaflet or would like to discuss anything to do with the Church, please feel free to contact:



BAPTISM FOR YOUR BABY

Jesus was baptized and He told His followers to go into the world and preach the gospel and baptize others. Baptism is the way that people join the Church and it follows that it can only occur once. The URC recognizes and accepts the baptism administered by all the main Christian Churches.

In the early years of the Church, baptism was for adults who had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and had become Christians. They had repented of their sin and received God's forgiveness. They had undergone a course of instruction and were entering into a new life.

At their baptism they were joyously received into the Christian Church. Baptism was usually by being immersed in a river or pool as a symbol of two things:

that they had died to their old life and been buried
and had risen again with Jesus

and

that they were washed clean of all sin and evil.

The word "baptise" comes from a Greek word for "dip" or "plunge". Some churches still immerse but it is more usual nowadays for water to be sprinkled on the head, often with the sign of the cross and always with the words "I baptise you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit".

Baptism for adult believers remains a normal URC practice.

From very early years, however, Christian parents wanted their children to belong to Christ and to be part of the Church. This may be achieved in the URC in one of two ways: by a service of **dedication** of a baby with prayer that the baby will grow up to be a believer and then be baptised and admitted to Church membership OR by **baptism** with water as a baby. This usually takes place during a normal Sunday morning service.

Infant baptism is NOT a service of giving a name—this is done by the parents usually long before. It is NOT a rite that will ensure the child will go to heaven if it should die. That assurance can only be given to someone who has accepted Christ and becomes His follower. What happens to a child who dies is in the hands of God. Obviously a baby cannot express its own wishes about being baptised, nor can it make the promises to follow Christ that are required at baptism. So the child has the promises made on its behalf by its parents and sometimes Godparents (they may also be called Sponsors).

Baptism is a **sacrament**—an outward and visible symbol of an inwards and spiritual grace—a hidden reality.

Baptism of a baby is a solemn **3 way contract** between
God
The Parents and
The Church

It takes place before the baby can choose to accept or reject Jesus, as a reminder that God's love, shown in death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, was freely given to us before any of us were in a position to choose or reject.

The Church is celebrating what God has already accomplished in Christ for the whole creation and offered to all humankind—the forgiveness of sins, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and newness of life in the family of God.

The church is taking the baby under its care so that he or she may be led in due time by the Holy Spirit to accept Christ as his or her Saviour and Lord. In one sense, therefore, baptism of a baby is a sacrament of entry into the Church which is not completed until confirmation or profession of faith many years later.

The parents are making a solemn commitment that the baby will be brought up in a Christian home, in the faith of the gospel and in the fellowship of the Church.

If there are **Godparents**, the contract becomes a four way one with the Godparents promising before God to help the parents in every way possible to fulfil their commitment.

This is not something to be undertaken lightly. Parents and Godparents are expected to be practising Christians themselves; and to be or to become part of a church. They are expected, before God and in the presence of His people, to reaffirm their faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as part of the service.