



preparing for the sacrament of

HOLY BAPTISM

a family guide



Life Together in the Goodness of God

We're excited to celebrate the gift of baptism with you! May this renew the whole family's commitment to Christ! We commit to being present with you as we raise our kids in the way of the Lord and uphold each other in our baptismal life. We invite you to attend our Sunday worship service regularly and get connected with a Table Group to continue to grow in your relationship with Christ. We want that baptismal life given to us in Jesus, which we describe as Life Together in the Goodness of God and we invite you to participate with us by practicing our faith in a way that changes us and benefits others.

This is a brief guide designed to help the parents and family better understand the sacrament of Holy Baptism and give some ideas of how to teach and live into their baptismal identity. Our hope is to help your family, and the rest of our church family, raise your kids in the way of the Lord. May God grant us his blessing and peace as we live into this together.

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What is the Gospel?

To understand Holy Baptism we have to first understand the Gospel. The Gospel is the announcement that the Kingdom of God is breaking into the world through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.¹ It's time to rethink everything and put our trust in this news that God is making a home with us and setting everything right.

The Gospel is ultimately an announcement of what God is up to in the world and in our lives. He is reconciling us to himself, freeing us from captivity to sin, filling us with knowledge of him, making us citizens of his Kingdom, and enabling us to worship, serve, and glorify him now and forever.²

How does God save us?

God saves us by grace, which is his undeserved love given to us in and through Jesus. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph 2:4-6)

Who is Jesus Christ?

Jesus is the Messiah, our Rescuer, fully divine and fully human. He bore our sins, dying in our place on the cross, then rose from the dead to rule as anointed king over us and all creation. (Colossians 1:15-26)

How can we respond?

We can repent and have faith. "Repent" means that we have a change of heart, turning from sinfully serving ourselves to serving God as we follow Jesus Christ. We need God's help to make this change. (Acts 2:38; 3:19) To have faith means that we believe the Gospel is true; We acknowledge that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead to reign in our lives; We entrust ourselves to him as our Savior; and we





How can we respond? (...)

...align ourselves with him as our Lord above all else. As the Apostle Paul said, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Anyone may repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ at any time. One way to do this is by sincerely saying a prayer similar to the following. (John 15:16; Acts 16:31-34; Romans 10:9; Hebrews 12:12)

Lord Jesus Christ, I confess my faults, shortcomings,
sins, and rebellious acts, and ask you to forgive me.
I embrace you, Lord Jesus, as my Savior and Lord.
Thank you for your atoning death on the cross
in obedience to your Father's will to put away my sins.
I enthrone you, Lord Jesus, to be in charge of every part of my life,
and I ask you to indwell and empower me with your Holy Spirit,
so that I may live as your faithful follower from now on. Amen.³

What should we do once we have put our faith in Jesus?

Jesus invites us to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and thus into membership in his Body, the Church. (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 12:13)

When we put our faith in Jesus, God grants us reconciliation with him (2 Corinthians 5:17-19), forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14), adoption into his family (Galatians 4:4-7), citizenship in his Kingdom (Ephesians 2:19-21, Philippians 3:20), union with him in Christ (Romans 6:3-5), new life in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-5), and the promise of eternal life (John 3:16; 1 John 5:12).

God desires to transform us into the image of Jesus by the power of his Holy Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

He will transform us over time through corporate and private worship, prayer, and Bible reading; fellowship with God's people; pursuit of holiness of life; witness toward those who do not know Christ; and acts of love toward all. The first Christians set this pattern as they “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:23-25)



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Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin:
Grant that we, being reborn to new life in him,
may live in righteousness and holiness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.⁴

This prayer expresses what we believe is happening in baptism. On the one hand, baptism is a humble ritual: a bath which we accompany with the telling of our story and a series of prayers. On the other hand, we proclaim the mystery that is at work in baptism: the translation of God's people from death to life by being plunged into Christ's death and resurrection and being incorporated into his church.

Baptism is one of two sacraments, the other being the Eucharist, which are "ordained by Christ, and...generally necessary for our salvation."⁵ A sacrament is, in the simplest terms, God miraculously bringing life where there is death by working through the material means he has appointed: water, and bread and wine. As Christians, we believe that these meager rites are mighty acts of God. In Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, he inaugurated the kingdom of God, and he commissioned the church to be a beachhead of the kingdom.



As Christians who live in the United States, we are often tempted to think of the church as a club or a voluntary society that exists to help us grow in our personal relationship with Jesus. Actually, the New Testament teaches us to think of the relationship in much different terms: the church is the visible body of Christ that prolongs his presence in the world (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Col. 1:24). The church is the visible temple of the Lord being "built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22). The visible church precedes us, and we only belong to Christ insofar as we belong to his church. And baptism is the means by which we move from outside to inside of the



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church. The church's response to the newly baptized emphasizes this move: "We receive you into the fellowship of the Church."

Baptism, in this sense, takes on a much deeper meaning than merely joining Kiwanis or a country club. It is more like passing through death into life (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Peter teaches us to think about the church as if it were Noah's ark (1 Pet. 3:20-1). If we are not inside the ark, the waters will kill us. But in order to get into the ark, paradoxically, we have to pass through the waters. We have to be drowned before we can be recreated and given new life in Christ's church. That is why Peter tells us that "baptism now saves you." Similarly, Paul likens baptism to the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea. The Israelites were "baptized into Moses" by passing through it, even as Christians are baptized into Christ by passing through the waters of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1-2).

Our baptismal liturgy sums up the Scriptural witness to baptism in the Thanksgiving over the Water. It highlights the momentous role that water has throughout the canon of Scripture; in fact it tells our story as Christians through the lens of this element of water. And it connects baptism to our new life and our new creation by the Holy Spirit through our entrance into Christ's church:



We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life. We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.⁶



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Baptism is thus a remarkable privilege. But the prayer with which we started this discussion points us to another dimension of baptism, moving us beyond privilege to responsibility. As baptism is the entrance into the life of the church and the passage from death into divine life, it is also the principle by which we may live “in holiness and righteousness all our days.” Baptism puts us to work, inviting us into the tasks of the kingdom: working for justice and mercy, feeding and clothing the hungry, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, caring for widows and orphans.

We are invited into a life of continual conversion in which we are conformed to what our baptism declares us to be. As the Anglican theologian Francis Hall says, “Baptism makes us branches of the true vine, members of Jesus Christ...But the branches may none the less remain unfruitful, and finally be cast out for burning.”⁷ So we must not think that baptism will save us independently of a life lived in faith and lived faithfully.

Fourth century church father, Cyril of Jerusalem, brings this all together well as he describes the waters of baptism: “Great is the baptism that lies before you: the ransom of captives, the forgiveness of sins, the death of sin, the regeneration of the soul, the garment of light, the holy perpetual seal, a chariot to heaven, the delight of paradise, a welcome into the kingdom, the gift of adoption.”⁸ Given the gravity of what we are doing when we come to the baptismal font, let us approach it with earnest and humility. Let us prepare our hearts to receive the mystery. Let us express in our lives what we have been declared to be in our baptism.





What does Baptism mean for the family?

As we have already seen, Paul has a number of images that he draws from to talk about the nature of the church. One image we haven't touched on yet that is unique to Paul is the image of adoption. Paul says that when we are brought into the church through baptism, we are adopted as sons of God (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). By using this term, Paul is drawing on social and legal conventions of the Roman world to show what the Christian's relationship is like with God. Adoption in the Roman world cut off relationship with one's old family and created new obligations with one's new family - it is as if the adopted person were the biological child of the new family. Adoption was also irrevocable: although one could disown one's biological children, one could not do so with an adopted child.

Through our adoption in baptism, we are given a new family in the church. Indeed, the church becomes our *principal family*, more important even than the biological ties of kinship (Mark 10:29-30, Luke 9:59-60). Blood is not thicker than water for Paul; water is thicker than blood! In Christianity, the biological family is placed at the service of the church family, and in the church family every adult, married or single, becomes a parent, a spiritual father or mother. As Stanley Hauerwas writes, "All Christian adults have a parental responsibility because of baptism. Biology does not make parents in the church. Baptism does. Baptism makes all adult Christians parents and gives them the obligation to help introduce these children to the gospel."⁹ So the biological family, relativized as it is in light of baptism, becomes, as John Chrysostom put it, a "little church," at the service of the church's mission.¹⁰



The Catholic tradition, of which Anglicanism is a part, gives institutional expression to this reality by appointing godparents for children who are baptized. The office of godparent is not a formality, nor is it something we ask someone to do just because that person is a close friend. The godparent has a responsibility, along with parents, to raise children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). At a minimum, this means that the



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...godparent must be among the baptized. But more than that, the godparent should be a person of wisdom and spiritual maturity. In our baptismal liturgy, both parents and godparents who present children to be baptized, and both parents and godparents who take oaths on the child's behalf.¹¹

What we affirm theologically has real world consequences. When adults other than biological parents in a congregation take an interest and get to work making “spiritual apprentices” of the young people in our congregations, young people flourish more, and they remain Christians and joyfully transmit their faith to others at greater rates, than when baptized adults shirk this responsibility.¹² Parents carry the burden of apprenticing our kids in the faith, but we need the baptized family, both its single and married members, to step up and be spiritual fathers and mothers to our children as well.

Why do we baptize infants?

You might be wondering now about something this discussion has presupposed: infant baptism. Why do we baptize those who are incapable of taking vows for themselves? The principal answer to this question is that we believe that it is the practice of the New Testament. The New Testament records the baptizing of entire households when the head of household converts (Acts 16:33; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16). Based on family structures during this time period, these households would have included not only children who could not take vows for themselves, but also slaves and retainers that belonged to the household.¹³

More importantly, however, the New Testament explicitly connects baptism to circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). Baptism is a “circumcision made without hands” that is performed not just upon infant boys alone, but on infant girls, demonstrating the universality of the new covenant in Christ. In discussions in the early church, this was understood as express warrant for baptizing babies: the only question was whether priests had to wait to baptize until the eighth day (Lev. 12:3)! The North African bishop Fidus posed this question to





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...Cyprian of Carthage in the third century, and Cyprian responded that “we think that no one is to be hindered from obtaining grace by that law which was previously established, and that spiritual circumcision ought not to be hindered by fleshly circumcision, but that absolutely everyone is to be admitted to the grace of Christ.”¹⁴

Moreover, from the New Testament, we know that infant baptism was widely recognized as a legitimate practice. Hippolytus, a bishop of Rome in the third century, in giving instructions on baptism, writes “first baptize the small children. And each one who is able to speak for themselves, let them speak. But, those not able to speak for themselves, let their parents or one belonging to their family speak for them. Afterward, baptize the the grown men, and finally, the women.”¹⁵ Origen, another third century theologian, writes that “since the baptism of the church is given for the remission of sins, that, according to the observance of the church, that baptism also be given even to infants; since, certainly, if there were nothing in infants that ought to pertain to forgiveness and indulgence, then the grace of baptism would appear superfluous.”¹⁶ He writes elsewhere that “the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to little children.”¹⁷

Our own catechism says it this way: “Because it is a sign of God’s promise that they are embraced in the covenant community of Christ’s Church. Those who in faith and repentance present infants to be baptized vow to raise them in the knowledge and fear of the Lord, with the expectation that they will one day profess full Christian faith as their own (Acts 2:39).”



So let us bring our children to the baptismal font, and not hinder them from the receiving the grace of this mystery. Let our families be transformed and reconfigured by the new family that God is making from every tribe, tongue, and nation in his one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. And let us all be spiritual fathers and mothers, growing the children that God has given our church family, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.



Understanding the Baptism service

Take some time to read through the baptismal liturgy found on p. 160 of the 2019 Book of Common Prayer. If you don't have a physical copy handy, you can find an online version of the Holy Baptism Liturgy. If you have a family, host a dinner and invite the godparents and other adult friends over to discuss the upcoming baptism. You could take time to unpack the liturgy together. If you are single, meet up with friends to discuss some of these questions. However you do it, think through some of these questions:

- What parts of the baptism service feel especially meaningful to you?
- What practices should you adopt or in what ways should your life change in light of what the liturgy says is happening in baptism?
- What are some of the more difficult things to understand?

Godparents

As we mentioned in section “What does baptism mean for the family” above, if you are baptizing a child, you will need to decide who you want as a godparent or godparents for your child. Again, godparents should be baptized Christians, who are currently following Jesus. Beyond being generally good and trustworthy individuals, you should seek godparents who have displayed spiritual maturity in their own life and who are committed to the spiritual guidance and support of your child.

The Presentation

There's a lot happening in the baptism service. We wanted to help clarify some of the things that we will experience together on Sunday. After the sermon, the priest will invite the church to the back of the sanctuary where the baptismal font is located. All of this will have been rehearsed before the service, so you'll be familiar with where to stand and the order of the liturgy. At the beginning of the baptismal liturgy, the candidates for baptism will be presented (p. 162-163) by their parents and godparents.

The Vows

The candidates, or if they are infants, their parents and godparents, will take baptismal vows. In addition to their vows, the church also takes vows to uphold their baptismal covenant. This is a family affair, and everyone has a part to play. We take these vows very seriously and want to fulfill them faithfully as the baptized community of Christ.



The Baptism

After the vows comes the baptism, by immersion (dunking) or sprinkling with water. At Resurrection, our tradition is to immerse in baptism (even infants) as a way of seeing the reality of our burial in the watery grave and brought to new life in the Resurrection of Jesus. Don't worry parents, you're kids will be fine!

Our priests know how to immerse children without harming them. We blow a short puff of air in their face, which causes them to close their eyes and take a deep breath. After this, we immerse them in water, while the priest says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Then they are handed off to the parents with a warm, dry towel.

The Chrismation

Finally, each of the baptized are marked with Holy Chrism oil, specifically blessed by the bishop to seal the gift of the Holy Spirit on them in baptism once and for all. The priest will say, "you sealed as Christ's own forever" while making the sign of the cross on their head.

The Baptism Candle

After each candidate has been baptized, the priest lights their baptismal candle from the Christ candle, signifying that we have received the light of Christ, passing from darkness to light. We now live in light of the Gospel—the good news that we are children of God living in the light of Christ. The priest will say, "receive the light of Christ, you have passed from darkness into light."

Welcomed into the fellowship of the Church

After all of this, the church welcomes the newly baptized in to the "fellowship of the church"—the family of God! The entire church is sprinkled with holy water so that they remember their own baptism—they are included this family of God, and they have work to do to help these newly baptized grow in their relationship with Christ. Then comes the exchange of peace, where everyone passes the peace of the Lord with each other. This is a great time to go change into some dry clothes and prepare to come to the altar to receive Holy Eucharist.



Next Steps

Once you have determine that you would like to be baptized, or to have your child(ren) baptized, please reach out to us and let us know! Email Fr. Shawn (shawn@rezaustin.com) or Fr. Ryan (ryan@rezaustin.com). We'll set up a time to connect with you to confirm this discernment, and schedule when the baptism will take place.

Preparing for the service

- Send the full name of the person/child(ren) being baptized to Fr. Ryan at ryan@rezaustin.com, along with the names of the parents and godparents.
- Pray with your family and friends during the week prior to the baptism. You could invite your family and friends to reflect on the coming baptism together and share any thoughts or questions they may have.
- For families with young ones getting baptized, we have coloring pages and family activities to share so that you can dig into the reality of baptism together. Let us know if you would like these resources.
- Make sure to invite your family and friends to attend the baptism!
- Traditionally, baptismal candidates wear white clothing for their baptisms, with some parents opting for traditional baptismal gowns for infants. We don't have any specific requirements, but we ask that you wear whatever you feel comfortable getting wet in, as you will be fully immersed in the baptismal waters. If you have questions, feel free to reach out!

The morning of the baptism

- Remember to bring a change of clothes!
- We provide towels for the baptisms, but you may want to bring an extra towel, just in case.
- We try to have someone present to take pictures, but you may want to bring a camera and have someone on hand to take pictures of the baptism for you and your family!
- Please arrive 30 minutes before the service so we can run through the baptismal liturgy with you.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions and get familiar with the liturgy.
- Find a seat that is near the baptismal font, for easy access.



References

- ¹ Mark 1:14-15, 1 Corinthians 15, Romans 5:15; John 1:12; 1 John 5:11- 12
- ² 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; 1 John 5:11-12; 1 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 2:19; 3:19; Colossians 1:9
- ³ Book of Common Prayer, 1979.
- ⁴ Book of Common Prayer, 1979, 254.
- ⁵ To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism, Q. 104.
- ⁶ Book of Common Prayer, 2019, 168.
- ⁷ Francis Hall, Dogmatic Theology, vol. ix, The Sacraments (New York, 1921), 18.
- ⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 16.
- ⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, "Abortion, Theologically Understood," in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 612.
- ¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine Roth and David Anderson (Crestview: SVS Press, 1986), 57.
- ¹¹ Book of Common Prayer, 2019, 163-164.
- ¹² Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 152.
- ¹³ James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 457-8.
- ¹⁴ Cyprian, Letter 64 to Fidus, in *Letters 1-81*, trans. Sister Rose Bernard Donna, C.S.J., *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 218.
- ¹⁵ Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.16.
- ¹⁶ Origen, Homily 8, *Homilies on Leviticus*, trans. Gary Barkley, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 158
- ¹⁷ Origen, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5, trans. Thomas Schenk, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 367.

Further Reading

Would you like to learn more about baptism? Check out these resources:

- *It Takes a Church to Baptize: What the Bible Says about Infant Baptism*, by Scot McKnight
- *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, by Sinclair Ferguson
- "Why Do We Baptize Babies If They Cannot Make a Profession of Faith?" Anglican Compass (online), 2020.



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