

Holy Baptism Guidelines

Saint James Episcopal Church • West Dundee, Illinois

(Please complete the Baptismal Information Sheet at the end of the guidelines)

Introduction

This guideline or customary has been written to provide answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about the sacrament of Holy Baptism. It is also our intention to state clearly the customary procedures of our parish. Please do not hesitate to ask the Priest if you have additional questions or need more specific information.

Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. It is a public statement of one's intentional decision to follow the way of Jesus. In the case of infant baptism, it is the parents' declaration of their intent to raise a child in the way of Jesus. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble, so baptism is only administered once. When you choose to be baptized yourself or to have your child baptized in the Episcopal Church, it means you are choosing to live out the ***Baptismal Covenant*** in the context of an Episcopal community, taking your part in the worship, mission and ministries of the local parish. Baptism is open to all people, regardless of age or background.

If you feel called to be baptized, or to have your child baptized, the first steps are to attend a local parish regularly and to talk to the clergy about baptism. Most churches require candidates for baptism to undertake some intentional preparation. That preparation should include study of the Baptismal Covenant and what it contains, and what it can mean for your life. One should also learn about the symbol of water, about the importance of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in whose name the baptism is administered, and about the Scripture stories that illuminate the meaning and symbolism of Baptism.

Baptism can be regarded as the beginning of a spiritual path and not the culmination of one. It is not necessary that a candidate for baptism fully understand nor be comfortable with every word of the Christian Creeds and doctrines from the outset, but rather be ready to embark on the rich path of discovery into the way, truth and life of Jesus Christ.

If you are new to the Episcopal Church and have already been baptized in another denomination, you may wish to renew your faith life. If this is the case, you may be Received or Confirmed in the Episcopal Church; rites which your local parish can help you learn about and discern whether they are appropriate for you. Wherever you come from and whatever your faith background, the Episcopal Church welcomes you!

What is Holy Baptism?

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”

(1 Corinthians 12: 12 - 13)

“Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.” (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 298) Holy Baptism is the foundational sacrament of the Christian Church. The primary agent in Baptism is God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In baptism,

- *God declares to us electing love and confers to us forgiveness.*
- *God unites us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

- *God pours out upon us the Holy Spirit, bringing new life and empowerment for ministry.*
- *God incorporates us into the Body of Christ, the community of the New Covenant.*

Because Holy Baptism signifies the full reality of salvation, the entirety of Christian living is baptismal, an actualization of our new identity in Christ. Baptism is administered with water, using the Triune Formula, “In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” The Scriptural warrant for Trinitarian Baptism is Matthew 28:19. ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”***

Baptism, the rite of initiation into the Body of Christ, is essential for the life of the Church, but it is not absolutely essential for salvation. Christ died for all and the work of redemption is complete.

Baptism and Communion

Since Holy Baptism is full initiation into Christ’s Body the Church, ***every baptized person, regardless of age***, is welcome to receive Holy Communion. Baptized infants and young children, are, therefore, admitted to Communion.

Our understanding of who should be baptized, and when, has created controversy throughout the Christian world. There are denominations that are much more comfortable with adult baptism because, according to their theology, adults can make a public statement of their faith. This public confession grants them “permission” to receive the sacrament of Holy Baptism as they confess Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior. This statement, some denominations argue, is a requirement of all people who seek to become Christians. Baptism cannot be given to infants, they continue, since they are not old enough to make this pronouncement on their own. As a consequence, many Christian denominations refuse to give children the benefit of becoming official members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Furthermore, these denominations, in defense of their actions, state that there is no biblical support that endorses infant baptism as an act of Christian initiation. Therefore, instead of baptizing infants, the leaders of these institutions present the child to God in a special worship service as an act of dedication or thanksgiving to the creator.

The word Baptism comes to us from the Greek word meaning “to dip,” “to immerse,” and “to wash.” In the books of the Old Testament there are many manifestations of this sort of rite, although they are not called baptism. These actions were acts of purification done by people entering or approaching holy ground, or performing rituals offered to God. In the book of Exodus, for example, God instructed Moses to bring “Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting,” to be washed with water during the ceremony of their ordination to the priesthood (29: 4). In the book of Numbers, water was also used for ritual purposes in the ceremony of the Red Heifer as purification, where the priest would have to be washed before he touched the ashes offered to God (see 19:9).

In the New Testament, the concept of baptism was introduced in the time of Jesus by his cousin John, who came to be known as John the Baptist. John baptized his followers in the waters of the river Jordan, and invited the people to repent of their sins. This same John is also responsible for the baptism of our Lord who was not only baptized with water, but also with the Holy Spirit that descended upon Him as a dove. However, there is no record in the Bible of Jesus himself performing baptism, only records of the account of his disciples performing the sacrament to the new believers. This sacrament was instituted by Christ at the River and instructed his disciples, before His ascension into heaven, to do the same. This action is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 28:19, where Jesus commanded his disciple to baptize all people in the name of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Episcopal Church, 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” (Book of Common Prayer, 858). Anyone who receives the sacrament of Holy Baptism receives the gift of God’s Holy Spirit and is admitted into the community of faith. Through the water of baptism and the pronouncement of the baptismal formula, “N. I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” we die to the world and receive a new birth into the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Despite the fact that there is no clear evidence of the Apostles performing infant baptism in the New Testament, we Episcopalians believe by faith that a child may also become a member of the Body of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, and be called a Christian, just as we call a person born in the U.S. an American. Infant baptism in the Episcopal Church is based on the story in the book of Acts 16:33, when Paul and Silas were invited into the jailer’s house where he and his entire family were baptized. We can assume that most families, even in Biblical times, had children as well as adult members. This leads us to the conclusion that when Paul and Silas baptized the jailer’s family there may have been children and infants among the new believers. It is true that there is no evidence of infant baptism in the New Testament. However, we can also say, with the same emphasis, that there is also no evidence in the Bible that prohibits the practice of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism to infants. Baptism, therefore, is the sacrament through which we become members of God’s Holy Family. It is the act that enables us to become adopted children of God through Christ. ***IT IS THE SACRAMENT THAT ALLOWS YOU AND ME, AND ALL ADULTS AND INFANTS TO BE CALLED CHRISTIANS AND HEIRS OF GOD’S ETERNAL KINGDOM.***

Receiving Baptism

Persons eligible to be baptized (or their parents and sponsors) are those who express a desire to be baptized, confess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, show evidence in their life, work and participation in the worship of the Church, of their commitment to Christ. Further, in the case of infants and small children, the Church requires evidence that the child will continue to be raised in the Christian life and faith. Baptized persons are expected to be faithful to the Promises found on pages 302-303 of the Book of Common Prayer, and the Baptismal Covenant on pages 304-305, include belief in the statements of the Apostles’ Creed, and the living out of the five Baptismal promises. Baptism is normally conducted at the Church during a principal celebration of the Eucharist. Because Baptism is the sacrament of incorporation into the church, Holy Baptism is the rite of incorporation into the whole Church, of which this worshipping community is the local expression.

Preparation of Candidates for Baptism

Because Holy Baptism implies a lifelong relationship, preparation is required. (In the first centuries of the Church a three year catechumenate was normative.) It is the expectation of this parish that persons desiring to be baptized, or parents / sponsors / godparents of infants and young children, will meet with the Priest prior to the Baptism to discuss the purpose and intention of Baptism and attend the Priest’s class on “Preparation for Holy Baptism” held prior to each of the recommended baptism dates.

Conditional Baptism

The sacrament of Holy Baptism is received only once. If a person is uncertain about whether he or she has been baptized, that person is not baptized again. Rather, if there is a reasonable doubt, that person is baptized with the following words: “If you are not already baptized, N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (BCP, p. 307)

Role of Parents, Godparents and Sponsors

A Sponsor is “a baptized Christian who presents a candidate for Baptism, thereby endorsing the candidate and signifying an intention to support the new Christian by prayer and example.”(An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church). Parents, sponsors, and godparents are expected to promise that they will do their best to insure that the baptized person will be supported and upheld in the faith and that, if a child, that person will be raised in the

Church. Choosing Godparents is a serious matter and persons who are unable or unlikely to fulfill the expectations of the Church should not be chosen for this responsibility.

Celebrating the Event

A baptism is an important event in the life of the individual, the family, the parish and the whole Church. During the service itself, it is important to recognize that worship is taking place. **Photography during the service is discouraged**, because it prevents the photographer from worshiping, and distracts others. **Non-flash pictures and natural light videos may be taken as long as designated person is not distracting to others.** It is appropriate to mark the occasion with cards, gifts, and family traditions, such as the use of an heirloom Christening Gown. The family may choose to sponsor the Coffee Hour following the service, or to have a party at home. While there are no fees charged for baptisms, the family may choose to make a special donation to the work of the Eucharist and mission of the Church. Please check with the Priest with any questions you may have.

Participants

Members of the baptism party may participate in the service as lectors and/or oblation bearers, provided there is sufficient notice to allow scheduling. Clergy not on the staff of this parish may, at the discretion of the Rector, be invited by them to assist at baptisms.

How can I Observe the Anniversary of my Baptism?

Every Sunday is a reminder of your Baptism, but it is especially appropriate to mark the occasion on a Sunday when Baptism and the Renewal of Baptismal Vows is scheduled. Persons who have been away from the Church for some time, or who have experienced a significant event in their spiritual life, may choose to participate in a Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows when the Bishop visits. Such reaffirmation requires significant preparation with the Rector.

Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows

The Book of Common Prayer provides the opportunity for Reaffirmation and laying on of hands by the Bishop. The rite is designed to allow mature baptized persons to reaffirm their Baptismal Covenant. This action is appropriate for:

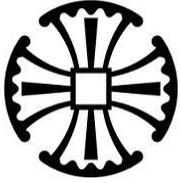
- Confirmed persons who wish to enter a time of disciplined renewal of the Baptismal Covenant
- Individuals who have been inactive in the Church and wish to renew their commitment
- Persons baptized as adults who have not yet received the laying on of hands by the Bishop.
- The Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows should be preceded by a period of reflection and preparation. Please contact the Rector if you have any questions.

I want to arrange a Baptism. What do I do Next?

Call the Parish Office or speak with the Priest and arrange a time for a meeting to discuss your decision and to begin preparation. The Priest will be glad to talk to you about any additional questions. Please call the Office at 847-426-5612 and request a Holy Baptism brochure. Complete the information page and return to the parish when you meet with the Priest.

The Appropriate time for Baptism in the Episcopal Church

According to The Book of Common Prayer, “Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast (page 298).” The rubrics also state that Baptism is “especially appropriate at the **Easter Vigil**, on the **Day of Pentecost**, on **All Saints’ Day** or the **Sunday after All Saints’ Day** and on **the feast of the Baptism of our Lord** (page 312).” The Book of Common Prayer, calls for Baptisms to be done normally on the five days reserved for Baptism during the Church Year. Baptisms can be observed on other Sundays at the discretion of the Priest based on personal pastoral reasons.



Baptismal Information Sheet

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Please print information clearly returned form to the Parish Office prior to attending Baptism Preparation Classes. Be assured that all information is kept strictly confidential. Thank you.

Date requested for baptism _____

Candidate's Name _____

Address _____

Birth Date _____ Sex (*Please Circle*) M / F

Place of Birth (City & State) _____

Father's Full Name _____

Present Church Affiliation _____

Baptized (Denomination) _____

Mother's Full Name _____

Present Church Affiliation _____

Baptized (Denomination) _____

Email address: _____ Phone: _____

Reason for selecting Saint James _____

Sponsors (*You can select two or four sponsors*)

1. Full Name _____

Address _____

Baptized (Denomination) _____

2. Full Name _____

Address _____

Baptized (Denomination) _____

3. Full Name _____

Address _____

Baptized (Denomination) _____

4. Full Name _____

Address _____

Baptized (Denomination) _____