

Reborn in the Spirit

An Infant Baptism Preparation Program

Session 1

NAMING A CHILD OF GOD AND CLAIMING YOUR CHILD FOR CHRIST

Introduction: God has known us and loved us from all the ages. Now through your love another child of God is entering the world. Yet Christians are made, not born. On the day of your child's Baptism, you and the community will claim him/her for Christ. You are called to be the "first and best teachers" both of life and of the faith for this child. Know that he/she will also challenge you to grow in your own life and relationship and in your faith.

1. *Reading: What's in a Name?* (below) and "Reception of the Children" from *Order of Baptism of Children*.

What's in a Name?

Being born is a terrifying experience. After months of being carried in the warm, dark, quiet waters of the womb, there comes the uncomfortable entrance into the chilly and disturbingly bright and loud outer world. Yet a warm blanket soon enwraps the newborn, gentle but strong arms cradle and nurture the infant, and for the first time the baby hears, spoken in love, the name that will re-echo through its life.

That name might otherwise be shortened to a nickname, but any child knows to be prepared when a parent calls out: "Full Name, get in here now!" Its sound will also fill the gym when he or she walks across the stage at graduation. And it will fill the heart of their spouse as they pronounce their wedding vows.

What name do you give (*or*: have you given) your child? What do you ask of God's Church for [your child]?

—*Order of Baptism of Children*, #76

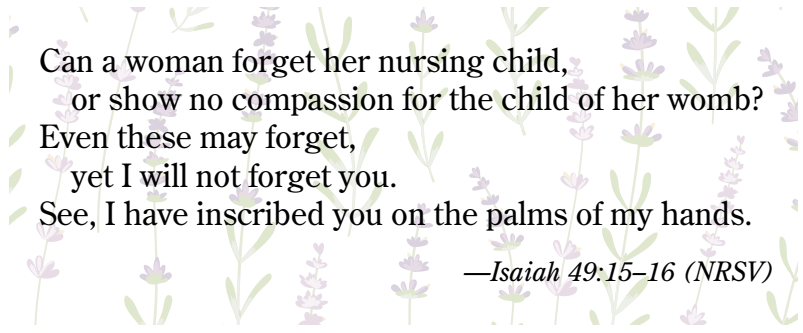
Naming Your Child

Catholics traditionally pick a saint's name for baptism. You choose this "patron saint" as a model that you hope your youngster will imitate and as a heavenly advocate for the child. Canonized saints are the Church's greats, but the heavenly population includes many smaller lights—less-famous folks who have touched your own life with their goodness.



That given name, though, bears not just the child's uniqueness but often its heritage. My middle name is my father's first name. My sister is named for her two grandmothers and has gone through life with a double name. Our mother was named for her father and his mother. Other names reflect a family's ethnicity, a legacy that the parents want preserved as part of their child's upbringing.

Other names are chosen to honor friends or out of respect for someone in history in the hope that the child will grow up to embody that person's values. Yet whatever the reason for the choice, this little stranger is being welcomed to its family and its heritage when called by its name.



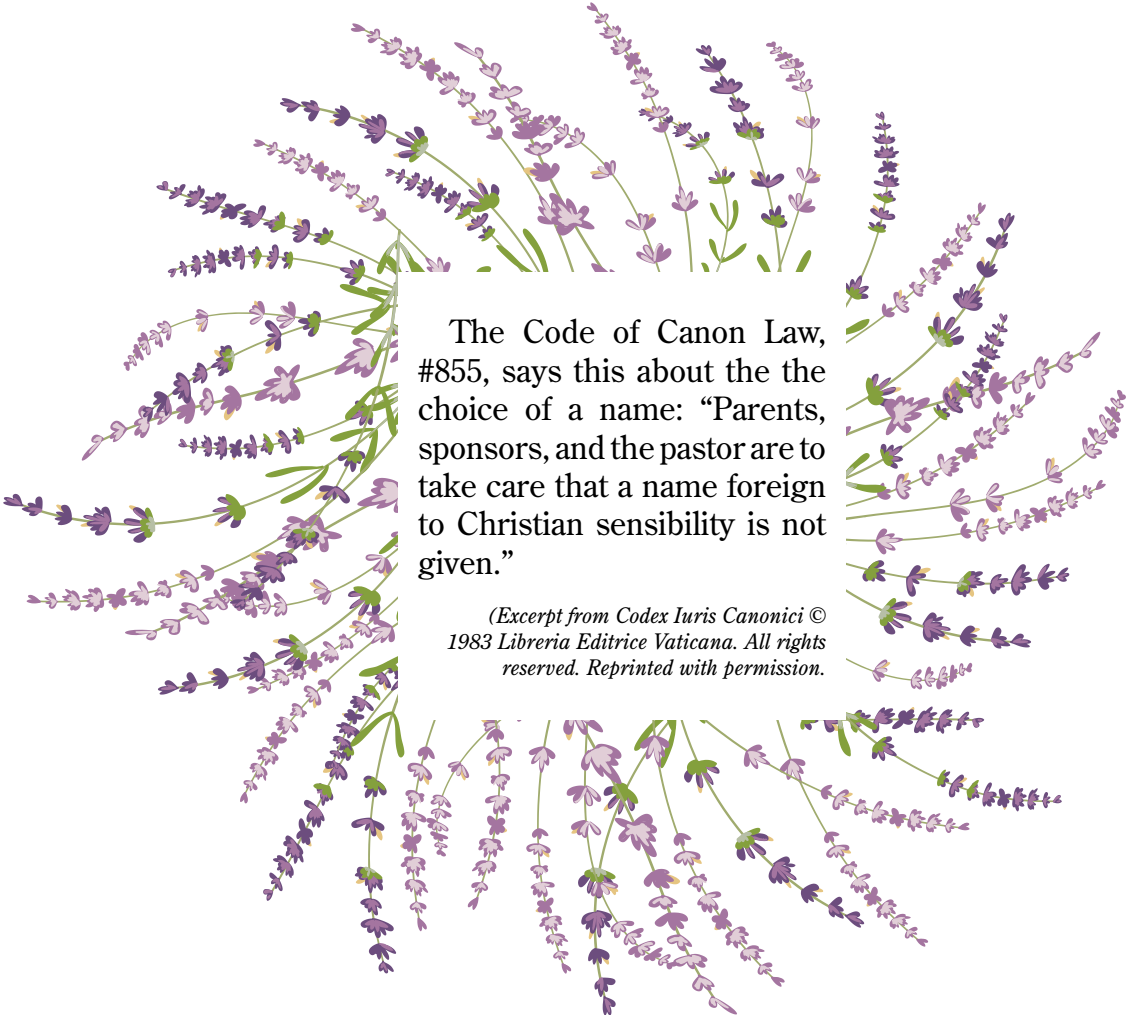
Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.

—Isaiah 49:15–16 (NRSV)

By naming and claiming this child as their own, the parents are also claiming a new name for themselves. Because of their relationship with this new person, they will be for eternity Mom and Dad, with all the responsibilities, joys, and anxieties that are built into those identities. In any language those two sounds, or their equivalents, are among the first words a child will speak.

God has a Name as well. To the Jews God was revealed as Yahweh, I Am Who I Am, the transcendent and mighty Creator who had chosen them in love as a personal possession. For Jesus (God Saves!), Yahweh was Abba (Daddy), the sound Jewish children use to address their father.

Each of us has a Name for God as well, a Name that reflects our experiences of life and prayer. How will you share that Name as well with your child?



The Code of Canon Law, #855, says this about the the choice of a name: "Parents, sponsors, and the pastor are to take care that a name foreign to Christian sensibility is not given."

(Excerpt from Codex Iuris Canonici © 1983 Libreria Editrice Vaticana. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.)



The [priest or deacon] first asks the parents of each child:

What name do you give (*or*: have you given) your child?

Parents: N.

[Priest or Deacon]:

What do you ask of God's Church for *N.*?

Parents: Baptism. [the parents may use other words: e.g., Faith or The grace of Christ or Entry into the Church or Eternal life.]

Then the [priest or deacon] addresses the parents in these or similar words:

In asking for Baptism for your children, you are undertaking the responsibility of raising them in the faith, so that, keeping God's commandments, they may love the Lord and their neighbor as Christ has taught us. Do you understand this responsibility?

Parents: We do.

Then turning to the godparents, the [priest or deacon] asks in these or similar words:

Are you ready to help the parents of these children in their duty?

Godparents: We are.

Then the [priest or deacon] continues, saying:

N. and N. (or: Dear children), the Church of God receives you with great joy. In her name I sign you with the Sign of the Cross of Christ our Savior; then, after me, your parents (and godparents) will do the same.

And, without saying anything, he signs each of the children on the forehead. Afterwards he invites the parents, and if it seems appropriate, the godparents, to do the same.

—Order of Baptism of Children, 37–41

