

Q Does it matter how old our child is?

A Babies and young children are baptised on the basis of their parents' faith and the promises made by parents and godparents. Once a child passes a certain age, it is better to wait until they can make their own mind up properly. The rule of thumb would be that once a child is old enough to say 'no' for themselves, we need to wait till they can understand what the promises mean and can properly say 'yes' for themselves! Each case needs to be looked at carefully, but if it seems as though they've passed the age for infant baptism the best option may be to have a thanksgiving service now, and think about baptism in a few years' time.

Q Can we take photographs and a video?

A Yes, and no! We feel it is important to help you catch the happy event on film without it intruding into the ceremony. However, there should be no distractions at all during the service – for the baptism party, the minister, or the congregation.

Everyone should be able to participate fully, without worrying about taking photos (which often don't come out well anyway). For that reason we don't permit use of any type of camera by members of the congregation during the ceremony: still or video, conventional or digital, with or without flash. Instead, after the service has finished we encourage you to come to the font and take group photographs then. The minister will usually be available if needed for group shots.

Q We'd prefer a 'family christening' in the afternoon. Is that possible?

A In fact, the pattern varies from church to church, but ideally all baptisms would be in our main services. This is because baptism is essentially a public occasion, not a private ceremony. The baptism service is all about receiving the child into the church, and so it makes most sense to do it in the presence of the normal congregation. In return, one of the promises in the service is that we as the church will support you as parents. Practically speaking, however, we sometimes find that the only realistic option is for the baptism to be at a separate service, usually at around noon.

Contact Details

Rector of the six parishes:

David Brooke
01740 630810
david@revd.co.uk

Local Parish contact:

Harrison and Edith Mullen
01429 293265



Thinking about Baptism?

Congratulations on becoming parents, and thank you for approaching us about the possibility of baptism. The miracle of new life often overwhelms parents with gratitude, as well as making them seriously re-think what they believe about why we're here on earth. Perhaps that is why you want your child baptised, or perhaps you've simply been persuaded by relatives that you should 'have the baby done'. Whatever your reasons, it is natural to want to do your best for your child, and we want to help you do that in whatever way we can.

Baptism is a very significant step – whether you are regular churchgoers or not – so the first thing we can help you do is to think through the issues before committing. There will be lots of questions you've already thought of, and some that you perhaps haven't. From years of meeting new parents in your situation we know most of the concerns people have, and this leaflet should help you to benefit from all that experience. It is meant to help you think through things clearly so that you are ready and prepared when we meet to chat. Please take the time to read it through carefully and talk about it together.

Q How do we arrange a date for our child's baptism?

A The first thing to do is to make contact with one of us by telephone or email (see details on the back of this sheet). The sooner you can do that, the better, so that there is plenty of time to plan and prepare. We'll usually invite you along to a Sunday service where we can give you some more information, and then arrange for you to come to a preparation meeting (usually held on the second Monday of each month), where we'll explain about baptism and try to give you all the information you need to make the best decision. After that meeting we can talk about what you would like to do, and what dates would be possible.

Q How far ahead do we have to book?

A It's best to contact us as soon as you start thinking about baptism. You'll certainly need to do this before you make any other firm arrangements, in case it isn't possible to hold the ceremony on a given day. Because we are a group of six churches, baptism services can't be held every week and the arrangements vary from church to church. On average the time from making first contact to the service itself is between two and three months.

Q What kind of preparation happens before the baptism?

A There are normally two preparation meetings. The first one is a group meeting with other families from around our group of parishes (see above).

After that meeting we agree what kind of service would be best and set a date. The second meeting happens in the church where the service is going to take place, and is usually just a couple of days before the service at a time to suit you. Some people also find it helpful to come to a service with baptism in an earlier month to see what happens.

Q Who can be a godparent?

A Anyone can be a godparent as long as they have been baptised and are over 16. At the preparation meeting we explain what being a godparent is about and how to choose, and we'll provide information for you to pass on to the people you ask. If you've got anyone in mind who isn't baptised, or who wouldn't feel able to make the promises in the service, please speak to us about it. They may still be suitable as a 'sponsor'.

Q How many godparents can our child have?

A There should be at least two and not normally more than four, although exceptions can be made. The tradition is to have three, with two being the same sex as the child, although many people these days choose two couples.

Q What if one of the godparents can't come to the baptism service?

A Being a godparent is a great privilege and when people are asked they tend to make every possible effort to be present. However there are occasionally circumstances which get in the way, and if this happens, it doesn't stop someone from being a godparent.

Q What if one of us isn't baptised?

A All parents and godparents need to have been baptised themselves, and preferably also confirmed. If one of you hasn't been baptised, we should talk about what can be done as soon as possible – it isn't unknown for a parent or godparent to be baptised at the same time as the child!

Q What happens if I'm a single parent or we're not married?

A People's personal circumstances differ, and whatever your particular situation, we want to offer you all the support we can to do the best for your child. For some couples who are living together, bringing a child for baptism takes a lot of courage, but it often turns out to be a real turning point in their relationship. Don't be afraid to apply – just make sure we know which surname(s) are being used by the child and parents so that we can put the right information in the registers and on the certificates.

Q We don't live in the parish – can we still have our child baptised?

A It's usual to have your child baptised in the Church of England parish where you live or where you are a regular member so that he or she can be

welcomed and grow in your local church family. However, if there are other strong links with one of our six parishes, or special circumstances, we may be able to make arrangements, with the agreement of your own local minister. However, we would normally expect to see a pattern of commitment to church membership, either here, or in your local church. **N.B.** Within our group, if you live in any one of the parishes, we will normally be happy to take the baptism at another neighbouring church if that is most appropriate.

Q We think we live in one of the six parishes – how can we be sure?

A There's only one way to be sure, and that's to ask us. Although they sometimes have the same names, Church of England parishes do not cover the same areas as the Parish Councils that appear on Council Tax bills, and this can cause confusion. Also, you may find that your closest church isn't actually your parish church – either because the church is not in the centre of the parish, or because the pattern of roads has changed over the years.

Q Is there a fee for baptisms?

A Baptism is offered free of charge, but obviously there are costs involved. A collection is taken at all services and you and your guests are invited to contribute generously!

Q What is the difference between baptism and christening?

A This is one of the questions we deal with fully at our preparation meetings, but here's a quick summary. Christening is really just another name for baptism, but we do find that people have different ideas about what is involved. Some people think of it as a kind of naming ceremony (that's why people often say things like "I had her christened Amy"), while other people mainly want prayers said for the child in church. In fact, baptism is more than anything about a child's introduction into the church, and it involves serious promises by parents and godparents on behalf of the child. In other words it isn't just a ceremony – like a marriage service it's the beginning of a journey. If that sounds like more than you'd bargained for, don't be put off – you're obviously serious about being good parents, so we'd love to help you make and keep those promises.

Q Is there an alternative if one or both of us doesn't feel comfortable saying the promises?

A Yes! If you don't feel comfortable saying the baptism promises, there are other options worth considering. The Church of England has a thanksgiving service that includes all the aspects of celebration and thanksgiving that most people associate with baptism, but leaves the option open for baptism at a later date, perhaps even when your child is old enough to decide for itself. Discussion of this option forms part of the initial preparation meeting.