

# Welcome

Jesus shows us that God welcomes all those who come to him. God wants us to know his love from the minute we are born and for us to walk in that love for the rest of our lives. Children are therefore an important part of the church family and we welcome them warmly. We are delighted to share with parents and carers in giving thanks for them, praying for them and helping them grow as individuals.

As a Parish we are an inclusive church, welcoming all children, parents and carers who wish to have their children christened (also called baptism) or to have a service of thanksgiving for the gift of a child. This guide explains more about what it means to have your child christened and how to go about it.

You will find the following information;

- The steps you need to take to arrange and prepare for baptism.
- All you need to know about the Baptism Service.
- Why you might prefer a Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child Service and what that means.
- Where to find out more about baptism and children's' activities at All Saints', St Nicholas' and St Mary's Churches in the Parish of Harpenden.

Baptism or Christening – the terms mean the same thing – is the beginning of a life-long journey in the Christian faith. Baptism is the starting point of that journey and marks the entry into life as a Christian and into the Christian family. Jesus Himself was baptised in the river Jordan. You can read the story in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 3. At the end of his earthly life Jesus instructed his followers, his Church, to go out and baptise all people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He finished by promising to be with us until the end of the age.

This journey is about getting to know God as shown to us in the life of Jesus, and we never actually stop travelling. And it is a journey for the whole family and the church. So we seek to make the start, the christening, a joyous event and as welcoming and positive for you as possible.

Please read this guide carefully and if you have any questions please do ask any of the clergy whose names and numbers you will find at the end.

***We hope that your child's christening will be a wonderful and memorable occasion and that it will mark the beginning of a long and happy journey.***

***Let's begin that journey with a prayer***

Eternal and loving God,  
You have promised that those who seek you will find you;  
we pray for your blessing on all families  
as they prepare for their children's baptism,  
that they may walk together in the way of Christ.  
By your grace, may they become your children  
and take their place within the community of your church  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

# First Steps

Before setting out on any journey there are plans and preparations to be made. Your child's Christening is no exception and so we have a six step process in place which we ask you to follow.

## **Step 1 Get in touch with our Parish office**

When you have made the decision to have your child christened, in the first instance you may like to look at our website [www.parishofharpenden.org](http://www.parishofharpenden.org) for information (you may already be reading this guide on the website). When you are ready, please contact our Parish office whose details can be found in the practical info section at the back of this guide. The Parish office will offer you a preliminary date for the Christening and book your place(s) on to one of our Christening Preparation Sessions.

## **Step 2 Attend your Christening Preparation Session**

In order to make the Christening as meaningful as possible, we offer everyone a preparation event and these take place every three months. We ask that all families attend the Christening Preparation Session in respect of the first two children<sup>1</sup> they wish to have christened in this parish.

The Christening Preparation Session takes place on a Saturday morning at St Nicholas Church Hall and lasts for up to two hours. Families are welcome to bring children. A crèche will be provided. Refreshments will be served as you arrive providing a social time for you to meet other families. The Parish office will send you a reminder by email shortly before the session you have booked.

The Christening Preparation session is designed to be an opportunity for you to find out more about christening, thanksgiving and the church and ideas for bringing your child up in the Christian faith they will be baptized into. You'll be able to explore this together with other families in a relaxing atmosphere.

## **Step 3 Complete Your paperwork**

After attending your Christening Preparation Session<sup>2</sup> you should confirm the Christening date by contacting the Parish office. Please complete the required paperwork and return it to the Parish office as soon as you can. A baptism cannot take place unless all the necessary paperwork is filled out and received in advance.

You can book the baptism or thanksgiving service at your district church. This will be one of the three churches in the parish that looks after the area and address you live at.<sup>3</sup> This will be All Saints, East Harpenden, St Mary's Kinsbourne Green or St Nicholas' Harpenden. The Parish Office can advise you of your District church.

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<sup>1</sup> *Those who wish to have a third, or subsequent child baptised at one of our three churches should miss out Step 2.*

<sup>2</sup> *Personal and pastoral situations may be considered by the clergy for any non-attendance at Christening Preparation*

<sup>3</sup> *Unless you are a regular worshipper at or have special links to a particular church in the parish.*

Please note: if you do not live in the Parish of Harpenden, but elsewhere in the UK, we ask that you contact the clergy of the parish where you live, for their consent before organising the christening with us. You can use the website, [www.achurchnearyou.com](http://www.achurchnearyou.com) to locate your parish church by post code.

Please note: if you are living abroad but wish to organise a christening in this parish, we will ask that you have contacted your local clergy and undertaken some form of christening preparation in your local church before confirming the christening with us.

## **Step 4 Meet the clergy**

After you've attended the Christening Preparation and had the date of the christening or thanksgiving confirmed by the Parish office, you will meet the clergy person who will be taking the service. A week or two before the service, they will arrange to meet you, either meet in your own home or at a suitable alternative venue. They will talk through the details of the service itself and answer any questions you may have.

## **Step 5 Your Christening or thanksgiving service**

Your Christening or thanksgiving service can take place during a main Sunday morning service or at a separate service on a Sunday afternoon.

Sunday afternoon baptism services are held on the second Sunday of each month at St Nicholas and also by arrangement with the clergy at All Saints and St Mary's churches<sup>4</sup>.

Sunday morning baptisms take place in each church as follows;

All Saints at the 10.30am Worship Service, date by arrangement.

St Mary's at the 9.30am services by arrangement.

St Nicholas' 9.30am Sung Eucharist Service arrangement three times a year and

11.30am Morning Praise Service by arrangement twice a year.

Baptism and Thanksgiving Services are free, although you and your guests may like to make a donation to the church.

## **Step 6 What next?**

Following your child's Christening, you and your family and, of course, the newly baptised child(ren), are welcomed into the wider worshipping community and family of God of which they have become a member at their baptism. Our three churches all offer regular activities for children on Sundays during the church services. You can also find out more about them and meet those who organise our Sunday Clubs and Schools at any Sunday service. A list of those services which are particularly suitable for children are to be found in the practical information section at the back of this guide.

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<sup>4</sup> *There can be more flexibility of dates/times if you are holding your service at All Saints or St Mary's churches*

# What is baptism about?

## Baptism is:

- to thank God for the child and for family life.
- a sign that God loves children, even when they are too young to respond to him for themselves and that he wants to be involved in their life
- to pray for them, that they will grow up to know God's love and in due course choose for themselves to be Christians
- to join the family of the Church and involve the Church in helping the parents bring up children to know and love God.
- to pray for parents and the important task of parenthood.

## The role of parents

Baptism is your child's first step on the Christian journey, and if you are on the journey yourself, you are in the best possible position to support your child and be an active guide.

Specific things you may do include:

- Praying with your child and helping them to pray
- Reading the Bible and later encouraging your child to read it too
- Living in Jesus' way and teaching your child to do the same
- Taking your child to church with you so that you can worship and learn about God together.

## The role of Godparents

Historically, Christian Godparents spoke for the baptised person and helped him or her to grow in their Christian faith. The role does not involve becoming a legal guardian, but it is really important that you should choose your child's godparents carefully. It is their ongoing relationship with the child, and their own Christian faith, that you must consider.

- Will they be able to form a loving and caring relationship with your child as he or she grows up?
- Will they help him or her to grow in the Christian faith and to be part of the family of the Church? Will they pray for him or her?
- Will they be able to offer help and advice as the child grows up and considers Confirmation?

Traditionally three godparents were appointed, two of them being the same gender as the child. However there is no hard and fast rule or limit to the number of godparents, but ideally they should be adults and can include a parent or grandparent. Godparents must have been baptised themselves and should, ideally, also have been Confirmed. They should also be mature enough to understand their role and be ready to commit themselves to it. Therefore they should attend the Christening.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As a specific Christian rite and sacrament, non-Christians and those not baptised would not be eligible to be God parents. Speak to the clergy person officiating at the Christening for further detail.

## The Sacrament

Christians describe baptism as a sacrament – a visible sign of God’s love. At baptism we are thanking God for the gift of life and acknowledging his love for us. We are turning away from evil, sin and darkness and turning towards Christ.

During the service itself, parents and godparents will be asked to stand to make the following four declarations:

- Do you turn away from sin? I do.
- Do you reject evil? I do.
- Do you turn to Christ as Saviour? I do.
- Do you trust in him as Lord? I do.

**Symbols** The baptism service comprises a number of important symbols:

### ***The sign of the cross***

This cross is like the badge or logo of the followers and friends of Jesus. Like a school logo on a jumper it is a sign of belonging. Like a football team’s badge it is a sign of loyalty. Like a national flag it is a mark of identity. It is a sign to show that Christians are forever united with Jesus.

The minister will make the sign of the cross on your child’s forehead. This shows he or she belongs to Jesus and are part of the people of God, his church

### ***Water***

Water is an important sign of life. In the same way that our bodies need water to drink, our spiritual lives need the cleansing and refreshing love of God. The minister blesses the water which is symbolic of this and which will be poured on your child’s head in the name of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The font – the bowl and water – is placed near the entrance to the church. This emphasizes that baptism is just the start of a journey of learning and growing as a follower of Jesus, about his teaching and actions, about the Bible. Baptism means accepting Jesus and following his life as a pattern for our life.

### ***Oil***

The minister will anoint your child with holy oil. Anointing is a very special act linked in the Bible to those who are to take office as king or queen. It is also identified as a protection from evil, as well as asking the Holy Spirit to come into the lives of the newly baptised. The Oil, usually plain olive oil, originates from the Bible lands and is blessed specially by the Bishop on Maundy Thursday each year.

### ***The welcome***

Baptism is a ‘membership ceremony’. It is an official sign that your child is one of the people of God. Being a Christian is not an isolated activity. We need each other: to learn, for encouragement, to work together to create something good. The minister will say some formal words of welcome to acknowledge that your child has joined the church and how pleased they are to have you among them.

### ***Candles***

One of the strongest symbols in the baptism service is light and of living in the light. Jesus is called the Light of the World because he represents all that is good. A large candle will be lit in church during the service. The minister will light a smaller candle to keep as a reminder of the light which has come into your child’s life and that they are to be that light for others too. The candle is given as the service draws to a close to symbolise the taking of the light out into the world to make a wider difference. It’s up to you to help your child reject the world of darkness and follow a way of life that reflects goodness and light.

## Why you might prefer a thanksgiving service

A special church service, different from a Christening, can be used as a way to say thank you to God for your child. It is called a **Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child**. An example of the words of this service is given below for you.

It's possible to have this service instead of a Christening if you decide that now isn't the right time to have your child baptized. Or, you could even have the Thanksgiving service as well as a Christening. You might choose this service when your baby is just born, or if you have adopted a child into your family and you simply want to celebrate this with special words in church.

In baptism, the child is baptised with water and welcomed into membership of the body of Christ, the Church. There is some form of obligation whenever anyone becomes a member of an organisation, and, in this Baptism Service, parents and godparents undertake to bring up their child within the family of the Church, and to play their full part in its life.

A christening is a very important occasion involving serious decisions and promises. You have to say that you will 'support your child as they begin their journey of faith' and 'to live and grow within God's family'. You will have to answer questions on your child's behalf, stating that you have decided to turn away from everything which is evil or sinful and turn instead towards Jesus Christ.

You do not have to be a perfect Christian to want to follow Jesus Christ and it would be surprising if you never had any doubts or questions in your mind. The baptism declarations show that you intend to do your best. However, you may not feel ready to make such strong vows.

The Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child provides an occasion for parents to join with their families and friends and members of the church, in recognising that there is more to the birth of their child than just themselves, and that God is the maker of all that is living.

A thanksgiving service could be a first step towards baptism. It is a valid service in its own right and usually takes place during a main Sunday morning church service.

## After the Christening-what's next?

### Going to church

You've made these promises for yourself and/or for your children, most likely because you really want to pass your faith on to them. For Christians, passing on their faith to their children is very important and becoming part of a church is a good way to help you do this.

Families are warmly encouraged to come along to church together whenever you can. To help with this, we will send you special Baptism anniversary cards for two years. We'll also regularly invite your family to various special services and events.

Some of the best times to come to church are around Christmas and Easter, Mothering Sunday and Harvest and Church Festival Days (like St Nicholas Day in December, St Mary's Day in September and All Saints Day in November). On all these special times, there are lovely things to do and see (as well as parties) and worship for all the family. All of our churches operate Sunday Clubs during Sunday Morning Services in term time with special teaching and activities for children from age 3-4 upwards.

Join us to support your own Christian journey as well as that of your child. You'll be able to worship God together, talk to God, thank him and learn more about him. You'll be able to get to know and enjoy the company of other Christians. Even if you move there will be a Church of England church in your local area. Christian life is a lifelong learning process: there is always more to see, to find out, and to do.

Please do not be put-off taking your child to church for fear that any sound may cause a disturbance or be greeted by lots of tut-tutting. All the clergy people working in this Parish and the services listed in the practical information section at the back of this guide really do welcome children. We understand there are times when you have to go in and out with baby or very young children. All of our churches provide crèche facilities for 'time out' for you in some of our services. It's ok to bring along a toy, book and snacks. The more often your child goes to church, the more comfortable your child will feel and the more able they will be to join in the service.

All Saints', St Mary's and St Nicholas would far rather have a bit of noise during a service than feel a family was staying away.

### **What is 'Admission to Holy Communion before Confirmation'?**

As your child travels on their faith journey and grows in understanding, you and they might give consideration to receiving Holy Communion before they are confirmed.

This is called; 'Admission to Holy Communion before Confirmation', but is also more well known as First Communion and has been an option since 2006. There is evidence to suggest that in the early church children were included in Holy Communion. First Communion allows that the whole family of the church to worship and receive bread and wine together. Many children, even those of a very young age have a genuine faith and it is unreasonable to exclude them on the basis of a lack of understanding when we do not question adult members of the church about their faith.

In the Parish of Harpenden First Communion follows a fun but comprehensive preparation course held each autumn. Children must be 7 years of age. There is a special short ceremony held on or near Advent Sunday (last Sunday in November or first Sunday in December) during a Service of Holy Communion at which the children are 'admitted' and receive Holy Communion bread and wine for the first time together with their families and their church family.

### **Considering Confirmation? What is it?**

Many people who bring their children to church for a thanksgiving service or baptism are not themselves baptised, nor have they been confirmed. Is this true for you? If so, may we encourage you to think about it?

Infant baptism makes the child a member of the Church. At Confirmation you re-affirm for yourself, before the bishop and your family, the Christian faith into which you were received-- when baptised as a child and Godparents spoke for you and made declarations and promises on your behalf. Confirmation is another step on the journey with God of growing in the faith which began with baptism. People who were not baptised as children may be baptised and confirmed in the same Confirmation service if they wish.

There is a lower age limit of 10 years for young people, but it is never too late to be baptised and/or confirmed. People wishing to be confirmed take part in a number of preparation sessions beforehand which focus on the Christian faith and life. There are separate groups for children and adults. The Confirmation Service itself is held in local churches.

# Practical information and contacts

## Services which especially welcome children

Children and young people are welcome at **all** our church services throughout the parish, but the following services are especially suited for youngsters to worship or join in Sunday Clubs at the three churches.

### All Saints'

Sundays 10.30 Worship Service with Crèche and Sunday Clubs

### St Mary's

Sundays 9.30 Sung Eucharist with Sunday Club

First Sunday in month 9.30 Family Worship

Third Sunday in month 16.30 Simply Worship

### St Nicholas'

Sunday 09.30 Sung Eucharist with Crèche and Sunday School

Sunday 11.30 Morning Praise with Toddler Corner and Sunday Club

First Sunday in month 16.30 Simply Worship

## Contacts

### Clergy

#### All Saints'

The Reverend Linda Williams Tel; 01582 713007  
email; [associate.vicar@allsaints.parishofharpenden.org](mailto:associate.vicar@allsaints.parishofharpenden.org)  
non working days Friday and Saturday

#### St Mary's

The Reverend Sally Goodson Tel; 01582 966068  
email; [associate.vicar@stmarys.parishofharpenden.org](mailto:associate.vicar@stmarys.parishofharpenden.org)  
day off Thursday

#### St Nicholas'

The Revd Canon Dr Dennis Stamps Tel; 01582 712202  
email; [rector@parishofharpenden.org](mailto:rector@parishofharpenden.org)  
day off Thursday

## Dates of Baptism Preparation Sessions

*These are held every three months at St Nicholas Church Hall from 10 to 12noon on a Saturday morning.*

## The Parish Office

The Office is situated to the rear of St Nicholas' Church, off Church Green in Harpenden.  
Opening hours are: Monday(excluding Bank holidays) to Friday 10am – 2pm

Tel: 01582 765524

Email: [office@parishofharpenden.org](mailto:office@parishofharpenden.org)

Parish Website: [www.parishofharpenden.org](http://www.parishofharpenden.org)

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