

First Steps



The baptism of your
child



A guide prepared for you from
The Churches of All Saints',
St Mary's and St Nicholas'



Welcome

We are delighted that you have asked about having your child baptised.

This pack has been designed to explain more about what it means to have your child baptised and how to go about it.

It comprises the following:

- Six steps to arrange and prepare for baptism
- All you need to know about the baptism service
- Why you might prefer a thanksgiving service
- Where to find out more about baptism and activities at All Saints', St Nicholas' and St Mary's

The Christian faith into which we are baptised is a life-long journey. This journey is about getting to know God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and we never actually stop travelling. Baptism is the starting point of that journey and it is a journey for the whole family and the church. Now is a good time for you to think about questions such as:

- How important is God in your life?
- What do you think about Jesus?
- Do you think of yourself as a Christian?
- How do you feel about the church?
- How will your child learn about God and how to live in a Christian way?
- Who else do you know who could set your child an example of Christian living?
- What practical plans do you have for bringing your child up in the Christian faith?

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

We hope that your child's baptism 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 to be made and preparations to be done. Your child's baptism is no exception. There are six steps to arranging and preparing for a baptism or thanksgiving service in this parish.

Step 1 Book a place on our baptism preparation evening

Contact our parish baptism coordinator, whose details can be found at the back of this pack, and book your place on one of our baptism evenings. These take place each month. We ask that parents attend the baptism preparation evening in respect of the first two children* they wish to have baptized in this parish.

**Those who wish to have a third, or subsequent child baptised at one of our three churches should begin at Step 3 below.*

Step 2 Come to a baptism preparation evening

The evening is designed to be an opportunity for you to find out more about baptism, 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 couples in a relaxing atmosphere.

Step 3 Book your service

After this evening, you can book a date with the Parish Office, for 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*. 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.

Please note that if you do not live in the Parish of St Nicholas Harpenden, but elsewhere in the UK, we ask that you contact the clergy of the parish where you are resident, for their consent before booking the service with us. You can use the website, www.achurchnearyou.com to locate your parish church by post code.

Please note that if you are living abroad but wish to book a baptism in this parish, we will request that you have contacted your local clergy and undertaken some form of baptism preparation in your local church before booking the baptism service with us. Such baptisms can be arranged, but subject to availability.

To finalise your booking and be sure of your preferred date, please visit the Parish Office within a week of any telephone booking to complete the necessary paperwork.

**Unless you are a regular worshipper at or have special links to a particular church in the parish.*

Step 4 Meet the clergy

After you've been on the baptism preparation evening and booked the baptism or thanksgiving at the Parish office, the clergy person who will take the service will meet you to go through the service with you. If your service is on a Sunday afternoon, you will also book to attend a main Sunday morning service in the church where the baptism took place at this meeting. (See Step 6)

Step 5 Your baptism or thanksgiving service

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

Details of our churches' Sunday services where baptism can take place can be found at the back of this pack.

Sunday afternoon baptism services are held on the second Sunday of each month at St Nicholas and by arrangement with the clergy at All Saints and St Mary's churches*.

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 either the 9.15am or 11am services by arrangement.

St Nicholas' 9.30am Sung Eucharist quarterly by arrangement and 11.30am quarterly.

There are no baptism services in December.

**There can be more flexibility of dates if you are holding your service at All Saints or St Mary's churches.*

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

Step 6 Welcome at the main Sunday morning service

If you choose an afternoon service you will have booked with the clergy (see Step 4) to attend a main Sunday service at the same church where the baptism took place.

There, you and your family and, of course, the newly baptised child (ren), will be welcomed into the wider worshipping community of God of which they have become a member at their baptism. You will receive the Baptism Certificate at this time. You can also find out more about and meet those who organise our Sunday Clubs and Schools at this service.

What is baptism about?

Baptism involves:

You and the Godparents

- Thanking God for his gift of life
- Deciding to start your child on the journey of faith and asking for the Church's support
- Joining the church in expressing your belief in God and praying for your child

Your child

- Beginning a journey of faith
- Becoming a member of the local and worldwide Christian family
- Sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus in a symbolic way

The Church

- Promising to welcome, support and pray for you and your child
- Being reminded of the importance of baptism for every Christian
- Providing a worshipping community where everyone can grow in faith

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.

In doing this, you should seek to raise your child in a way that is pleasing to God. 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

Having thought about yourselves and your own faith, it is also important to consider carefully who should be a godparent to your child.

Godparents go back to the days when most adult converts to the Christian faith had no Christian parents. Godparents spoke up for the baptised person and, if necessary, helped him or her to grow in the faith. The role does not involve becoming a legal guardian.

Traditionally three godparents were appointed, two of them being the same sex as the child, but what is really important is 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. Godparents are to help your child to grow in the Christian faith - not just to give good presents!

- Will they be able to form a loving and caring relationship with your child as he or she grows up?
- Will they help your child to grow up in the way you want?
- If your child is to be baptised, will the godparents 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?

In the baptism service the 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 prepared to commit themselves to it.

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. 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 six declarations:

- Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God? I reject them.
- Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil? I renounce them.
- Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour? I repent of them.
- Do you turn to Christ as saviour? I turn to Christ.
- Do you submit to Christ as Lord? I submit to Christ.
- Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life? I come to Christ.

Symbols

The baptism service comprises a number of important symbols:

The sign of the cross

The minister will make the sign of the cross on your child's forehead. This is like an invisible badge to show that Christians are united with Christ and must not be ashamed to stand up for their faith.

Water

The minister blesses the water which will be used to baptise your child. 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. This is symbolised in the water of baptism poured on your child's head in the name of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism means accepting Jesus who died and rose again for us, and making this a pattern of our life. It's a vivid way of saying that we are accepting his help to live a generous life and not a self-interested one.

Oil

The minister will anoint your child with holy oil. Anointing is a 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

The congregation 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

Light is an important symbol. 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 and you will be given a smaller candle to keep as a reminder of the light which has come into your child's life. 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.

The Baptism Service

Details of the Baptism Service that is usually used for Sunday afternoon baptism services are on the next page. Your own child's baptism may vary a little if it takes place during a Sunday morning service at any of the three churches in our parish.

The Baptism Service

THE GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **All: and also with you.**

Words of welcome and introduction are said, followed by an opening prayer and the Collect for Baptism prayer. A Reading and short talk are given.

PRESENTATION OF THE CANDIDATES

Those being baptized are presented to the congregation using the following words;

Faith is the gift of God to his people. In baptism the Lord is adding to our number those whom he is calling.

People of God, will you welcome *these* children/candidates and uphold them in their new life in Christ?

All: with the help of God, we will.

Parents and godparents, the Church receives *these children* with joy. Today we are trusting God for *their* growth in faith. Will you pray for *them*, draw *them* by your example into the community of faith and walk with *them* in the way of Christ?

All: with the help of God, we will.

In baptism these children begin their journey in faith. You speak for them today. Will you care for them, and help them to take their place within the life and worship of Christ's Church?

All: with the help of God, we will.

THE DECISION

In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him.

Therefore I ask:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

All: I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

All: I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

All: I repent of them.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

All: I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

All: I submit to Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

All: I come to Christ.

SIGNING WITH THE CROSS

The minister makes a sign of the cross (oil made used) on the forehead of each candidate for baptism, saying

Christ claims you for his own.

Receive the sign of his cross.

Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

All: Fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ against sin, the world and the devil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life.

May almighty God deliver you from the powers of darkness, restore in you the image of his glory, and lead you in the light and obedience of Christ. **Amen.**

PRAYER OVER THE WATER

This is one example of the Prayer over Water. The minister may use an alternative version.

Praise God who made heaven and earth,

All: who keeps his promise for ever.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

We thank you, almighty God, for the gift of water to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life.

Over water the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.

Through water you led the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.

In water your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us from the death of sin to newness of 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 baptise into his fellowship those who come to him in faith.

Now sanctify this water that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, they may be cleansed from sin and born again.

Renewed in your image, may they walk by the light of faith and continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

All: Amen.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Let us affirm together our common faith.

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

All: I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

All: I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

All: I believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All: This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

BAPTISM

The Minister pours water on each candidate;

N, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

May God, who has received you by baptism into his Church, pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit, and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory. *(Oil may used)*

PRAYERS

The Minister leads the prayers, ending with The Lord's Prayer;

**All: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread;
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the
glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

THE WELCOME

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. N, by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.

All: We welcome you into the fellowship of faith; we are children of the same heavenly father, we welcome you.

The congregation may greet the newly baptised.

GIVING OF A LIGHTED CANDLE

The Minister gives all the newly baptized a lighted candle and when all have received a candle, says;

God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and has given us a place with the saints in light.

You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life.

All: Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

BLESSING

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, establish, strengthen and settle you in the faith; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always.

All: Amen.

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Why you might prefer a thanksgiving service

Is a baptism or a thanksgiving service right for you?

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 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 baptism is a very important occasion involving serious decisions. You have to say that you will help your child 'walk in the way of Christ' and 'take their place within the life and worship of Christ's church'. 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 Christ.

You do not have to be a perfect Christian to want to follow 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.

The Thanksgiving Service for the Gift of a Child

Those who bring the child to the service will be asked to stand at the front with the child. There may be more than one family taking part in this act of thanksgiving.

Introduction

We are here today to give thanks for this child, with their family and friends, and to support the parents in their responsibilities with prayer and love. God became one of us in Jesus, and understands all that surrounds the arrival and upbringing of children. It is God's purpose that children should know love within the stability of their home, grow in faith, and come at last to the eternal city where his love reigns supreme.

Loving God, you hold all things in life and call us into your kingdom of peace; help us to walk the path of your truth and fill our lives with gratitude and faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

A hymn may be sung

Reading(s)

Thanksgiving and Blessing

Parents with the child and supporting family/friends stand at the front with the Minister

Do you receive this child as a gift from God?

We do.

Do you wish to give thanks to God and seek his blessing?

We do.

God our creator, we thank you for the wonder of new life and for the mystery of human love.

We thank you for all whose support and skill surround and sustain the beginning of life.

We thank you that we are known to you by name and loved by you from all eternity.

We thank you for Jesus Christ, who has shown to us the way of love.

We praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Blessed be God for ever

What name have you given this child?

A parent or supporting friend replies

Their name is

As Jesus took children in his arms and blessed them, so now we ask God's blessing on

Heavenly Father, we praise you for his/her birth; surround her/him with your blessing that s/he may know your love, be protected from evil, and know your goodness all his/her days

May they learn to love all that is true, grow in wisdom and strength and, in due time, come through a life of faith to the fullness of your grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The minister prays for the parents

May God the Father of all bless these parents and give them grace to love and care for this child.

May God give them wisdom, patience and faith, help them to provide for the child's needs and, by their example, reveal the love and truth that was seen in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Giving of the Bible

A copy of a Bible is presented, with these words

Receive this book. It is the good news of God's love.

Take it as your guide.

(These questions may be used as appropriate)

The minister addresses the supporting family/friends

In your commitment to be a special help and support to this child, will you do all that you can to help and support these parents in the bringing up of this child?

With the help of God, we will.

The minister addresses the wider family and friends

As family and friends, will you do all that you can to help and support this family?

With the help of God, we will.

Prayers

God our creator, we thank you for the gift of this child, entrusted to our care. May we be patient and understanding, ready to guide and to forgive, so that through our love they may come to know your love.

Amen.

The minister may say additional prayers

Jesus taught us to call God our Father, and so in faith and trust we say:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Another hymn may be sung

Blessing

The Lord bless you and watch over you,
the Lord make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you,
the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace;
and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

After Baptism

Going to church

Your child has been born with some of your features and has probably already begun to reflect some of your personality and characteristics. In a similar way, your faith will influence your child as he or she gets older. For Christians, as for people of all religions, passing on their faith to their children is something that is very important. Involvement in the life of the Church is something they welcome, for themselves and for their children.

For many people the Church is a rather forbidding organisation. The buildings can sometimes seem daunting, and what goes on in them can feel strange and unfamiliar. Our experience is that the Church offers something extremely valuable, and we hope you may sense something of this too. Perhaps it is helpful to think about it in this way:

Churches often have stained glass windows. You can look at them from two sides. From the outside the details are usually dark and obscure. Yet step inside the church on a fine day and the effect is a total transformation. The window shines in all its multi-coloured beauty. Every detail of the scene is clearly displayed. Lit by the sun it becomes a shining picture.

Those who become Christians have often used this example to describe how their appreciation of their faith has changed and blossomed with their entry into the Church. It is from within the Church community that the full richness of Christian living can be experienced and enjoyed.

We would strongly encourage you to join a church, to support your own Christian journey as well as that of your child. There you'll be able to worship God together, talk to God, thank him and learn more about him. You'll be able to enjoy the company of other Christians who will be able to help you handle harder parts of the journey. The Christian life is a 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. The services listed at the back of this pack really do welcome children and you'll find many other parents there who can pass on survival tips: such as bringing a few toys, books 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.

Considering Confirmation

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, and at confirmation a person re-affirms, before the bishop and the church, the faith into which they were received when they were baptised as a child. Confirmation is another step in the process of growing in the faith which began with baptism. People who were not baptised as children are baptised and confirmed in the same service.

People wanting to be confirmed take part in a period of preparation in a small group, and confirmation services are held in your local church.

It is our hope that those who bring children to baptism are both baptised and confirmed members of the Church. If you would like to know more, please ask one of the clergy.

Extracts from The National Society (Church of England) for Promoting Religious Education 1998. Fourth impression 2001.

Information and contacts

Services which especially welcome children

All Saints'

Sunday 10.30 Worship Service with Crèche and Sunday Clubs

St Mary's

First Sunday in month 10.00 Family Communion Service with Sunday Clubs

Other Sundays 11.00 Morning Praise with Sunday School

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; associatevicar.allsaints@stnicholasharpenden.org.uk
day off Friday

St Mary's

The Reverend Becky Leach Tel: 01582 966068 or 07806 530656
email; associatevicar.stmarys@stnicholasharpenden.org.uk
day off Thursday

St Nicholas'

The Revd Dr Dennis Stamps Tel: 01582 712202
email; rector@stnicholasharpenden.org.uk
day off Thursday

Parish Baptism Co-ordinator: Please contact Parish Office for details.

Dates of Baptism Preparation Evenings

These are usually held once a month in the Cunningham room at St Nicholas Church Hall from 2000 to 2130ish. Numbers per Preparation Evening are limited.

The Parish Office

The Office is situated to the rear of St Nicholas' church, off Church Green in Harpenden.
Opening hours are: Tuesday to Friday 10.30-15.00.

Tel: 01582 765524

Email: office@stnicholasharpenden.org.uk

St. Nicholas Parish Website: www.stnicholasharpenden.org.uk