

Guidance for Parents on Thanksgiving, Baptism and Dedication Services

Introduction

Many of you reading this will have recently experienced the joy of becoming parents. And maybe you're wondering about whether to celebrate this fact in a way that involves God and faith. In this document we'll attempt to outline the various options available: all of which are special, but perhaps one of which will be most appropriate for you. We welcome all enquiries, and are delighted you're thinking about these things! Once you've read the information below, please don't hesitate to contact us via the details at the end of this document.

Note:

Walton Churches Partnership is formed from the congregations who meet at the three church buildings of All Saints, Milton Keynes Village, St Mary's, Wavendon and Christ the King, Kents Hill, which has two congregations (Catholic and Anglican/Free Churches). We also sponsor [Church Without Walls](#) in the Broughton area. So if you're considering a baptism, thanksgiving or dedication at any of these churches, you've come to the right place!



Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving service

The birth or adoption of a child is a cause for celebration. Many people are overcome by a sense of awe at the creation of new life and want to express their thanks to God. Thanksgiving is a service used by a number of denominations including the Church of England (Anglican) and the Methodist Church. This service provides an opportunity for parents and families to give thanks for the birth or adoption of a child and to pray for family life.

This service is provided for a number of different occasions and is designed to meet the needs of:

- those who do not ask for Baptism, but who recognize that something has happened for which they wish to give thanks to God;
- parents who see this as a preliminary to Baptism;
- parents who do not wish their children to be baptized immediately.

If you choose to have a Service of Thanksgiving, you may later have a baptism service for your child when you have had time to talk through the deeper commitments that involves. Alternatively baptism is something your child can decide for him/herself when he/she is older.

If you are interested in exploring the Christian faith, or finding out more about preparation for Baptism, please speak to one of our ministers who can give you guidance.

What happens during the service?

When you bring your child for Thanksgiving, you will be asked to declare publicly that you will do all in your power to provide a secure, stable and loving home for your child. But you do not have to make public declarations regarding your own personal faith. This is the key difference between a thanksgiving and baptism/christening – there are no strings attached!

A thanksgiving service highlights the importance of each individual child to God, irrespective of your faith, or lack of faith. Your friends and/or relatives may wish to stand with you to declare their support for you in your responsibilities, with prayer and love. Their role would be similar to that of Godparents, but would not require them to make declarations of their own faith in the way that they would be required to do in a celebration of Baptism. Note: *although in a thanksgiving, there are no 'official' godparents, we recognise that you may wish to have friends and family members who effectively fill that role in your child's life: we are very happy for them to see themselves as such. So we would expect to have such people as part of the ceremony as much as for a baptism.*

Baptism

What is Baptism?

Baptism (sometimes called Christening), begins from the same place as a thanksgiving, in that you as parents are thanking God for his gift of life. However, you are making a conscious and public decision to start your child on the journey of faith and asking for the Church's support in doing this. As part of, say, a typical Church of England baptism, you make specific promises – in public, before God – to pray for your child, teach them the ways of the faith and connect them with a church community.

We are always delighted whenever parents decide to pursue this course: but we do expect them to make good on these promises! In baptism we welcome the child (and by extension, yourselves as parents) into membership of the Church, the Body of Christ. We are thanking God for his gift of life and publicly acknowledging his love and forgiveness. We are choosing to follow Jesus, sincerely and joyfully, for the rest of our lives.

As part of preparation for baptism, we do expect people who are making this commitment attend worship regularly at your preferred church. All of our churches provide for children and families, so this is not as scary as it may seem! Once you have begun attending services, we can arrange for you and your family to meet a minister. It is particularly important to be sure that any older children understand what will happen to them in baptism.

What happens during the service?

There will be someone available to make sure you know where to sit and when you need to move. Some parts of the service will be for everyone to join in with, and some will be for you and the godparents.

Part of the baptism service will normally take place at the front of the church, but for the Baptism itself, parents and godparents will usually be asked by the minister to gather around the font. (The font is a large basin on a pedestal, containing the water for baptism.) The minister will ask the parents and godparents to make declarations on behalf of the child.

Making decisions and promises

When you bring your child for baptism, **you will be asked to declare publicly on behalf of your child that you believe in God and that you will bring your child up to follow Jesus.**

You will be asked to answer, on your child's behalf, that you have decided to turn away from everything which is evil or sinful and instead to turn towards Christ.

The congregation (including your guests and often members of the local Christian community) will also make promises to support you and pray for you and your child.

Symbols and actions used during the service

A number of important symbols and actions will be used during the service itself:

- **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 in him.

The minister says: ***“Christ claims you for his own. Receive the sign of his cross. Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified”.***

- **Water** - the minister will pour water on your child's head. Water is a sign of washing and cleansing. In baptism it is a sign of being washed free from sin and beginning a new life with God. Water is a sign of life, but also a symbol of death. When we are baptized, it is as though our old life is buried in the waters (like drowning) and we are raised to new life with Christ.
- **Candles** - Jesus is the Light of the World. A large candle may be lit in the church and you may also be given a lighted candle at the end of service as a reminder of the light which has come into your child's life.
- **The welcome** - the church congregation will say some formal words of welcome to acknowledge that your child is a part of the Church community and to show how pleased they are to have you among them.

The role of godparents

It is important to understand that the role of godparents is not symbolic, but active and ongoing throughout the child's life. It means that you believe those friends or relations you've chosen will be a good example to your child, taking an interest in your child's spiritual welfare, and, being trusted to pray for them, will also speak to them about God and encourage them in their Christian faith. This is not a role to be undertaken lightly.

Godparents must have been baptized themselves if you wish to have your child/children baptised into the Anglican faith, and it's best if they are also confirmed. Baptism or confirmation preparation can help your chosen godparents with their own questions about the Christian faith. It will also help them to support their godchild in developing his/her own faith. If you have any questions at all, why not speak to one of our ministers, or another Christian you know.

Traditionally three godparents were chosen (two of the same sex as the child and one of the opposite sex), but you can choose from between two to four godparents for your child.

Dedication

What is dedication?

Dedication is a Free Churches' celebration and can be carried out by our Baptist Minister, usually at Christ the King church. In dedication, you as parents are thanking God for his gift of new life, making promises regarding how you will bring up, care for, and nurture your child, and asking for God's blessing upon your child and family. There is also opportunity for the church congregation to make promises to surround both you and your child with prayer and love, as your child is welcomed and introduced to the church community. For your child, this celebrates not only the beginning of their life but also of their individual journey of faith. This will involve them coming to believe in and know Jesus Christ for themselves, having the freedom to make their own choices regarding their faith, baptism and membership of the church.

Dedication can be seen to draw on the example of Jesus Christ, who was presented by his parents in The Temple as a baby, and who in turn took young children in his arms and blessed them.

What happens during the service?

The service will contain:-

- a welcome and explanation of the meaning of dedication
- a reading from the Bible
- a prayer of thanks to God for the birth of your child
- a time of promises made by you as parents, made by godparents and also the church congregation concerning the protection and nurture of your child
- a prayer of blessing for your child, for you and for your family.

Making decisions and promises

This is where dedication differs from baptism in the Free Church tradition. In dedication you do not speak on behalf of your child, and do not have to make public declarations regarding your own personal faith. This can be seen to highlight the importance of each individual child to God, irrespective of your faith, or lack of faith. It also grants to your child the freedom to make their own choices regarding faith and baptism. There is a great freedom within this service for the promises that parents and godparents make to be accommodated to your situation and circumstances.

Contact Us

For Catholic baptisms, please contact Sister Yvonne Pilarski on 01908 671342.

For all other enquiries, please contact Rev. Matt Trendall on wcp.baptisms.mk@gmail.com or 01908 582839 – he may arrange for another minister to visit you (the full list is overleaf), but is the first point of contact.

On the following page, you can find a list of our service times and ministry team.

At present our service times on Sundays are:

Christ the King, Kent's Hill	9.30 am
St Mary's, Wavendon	9.30 am
All Saints, Milton Keynes Village	11.15 am
Christ the King (Catholic Mass), Kent's Hill	11.30 am

The Ministry Team is:

Revd Ruth Maxey (URC) – with oversight of Church Without Walls
The Rectory, London Road, Broughton. 07791901468

Revd Matt Trendall (Church of England) – with oversight of St Mary's Wavendon and All Saints MK
The Rectory, Walton Road, Wavendon. (01908) 582839. Village

Revd Keith Straughan (Church of England) – works across Church without Walls, All Saints & St Mary's
Broughton. (01908) 683102.

Sister Yonne Pilarski (Roman Catholic) – Pastoral Administrator, based at Christ the King, Kent's Hill
1 Frithwood Crescent, Kents Hill. (01908) 671342

Revd Lou Webber (Baptist) – with oversight of Christ the King's Anglican/Free Churches' congregation
38 Twinflower, Walnut Tree. (01908) 397131

Revd Joseph Ribeiro (Methodist)
47 Buckingham Rd, Bletchley. (01908) 373660

Generally we plan so that the ministry team member who first meets you guides you through the process to your ceremony, Occasionally, however, you may find that it is another member who actually takes responsibility for your chosen service. This will depend on the date, church and service you choose and on our holidays. Should this happen, we will let you know in good time which one of us will actually be taking the service, and from then on that person will be in touch about all the necessary arrangements.

