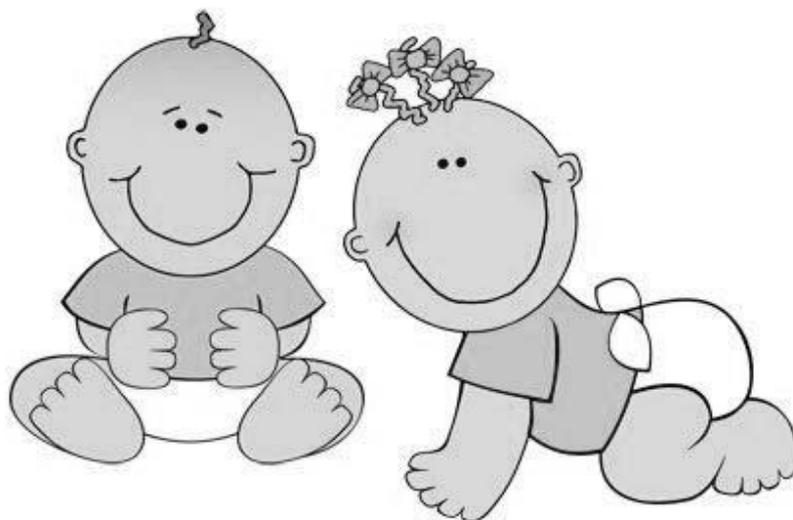


***ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, HEATH HAYES.***



# **THANKSGIVING & BAPTISM**

**A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND  
GODPARENTS**



***Issued February 2013***

## **WELCOME**

Dear parents and godparents, welcome to St. John's church, Heath Hayes.

We're delighted that you are thinking of baptising your child at our church. Your child is precious to you and to God, and it will be our pleasure and privilege as a church community to baptise your child in the presence of your family and friends if that is deemed appropriate.

The birth or adoption of a child is a cause for celebration, and many people feel the need to mark the birth with a special church service. Many people are overcome by a sense of awe at the creation of new life and simply want to express their thanks to God. Others decide that they want to start the child on a journey of Christian faith right away, and so come to the church to make declarations and promises and to ask the Christian community for support.

Two kinds of Christian services are offered to people who wish to mark the birth of a child, and the one you choose will depend largely on your own Christian faith and what you are prepared to declare and promise publicly.

A '**THANKSGIVING FOR THE GIFT OF A CHILD**' service provides an opportunity for parents and families to give thanks to God for the birth or adoption of a child, and to pray for family life. People gather to support the parents in their new responsibilities with prayer and love, and to ask God's blessing for the future. It may be a private celebration at home or in hospital, or it may be a public celebration in church, sometimes with a number of other children. It differs from a Baptism service in that it does not ask for a public commitment to the Christian faith.

A **BAPTISM** service (which is sometimes referred to as a **CHRISTENING** service) is a service to welcome someone into the church and to mark the start of his or her Christian journey. Baptism is seen as a first step in response to God's love. The '*Pastoral Introduction*' to the Baptism service says that 'for all those involved ... it is a joyful moment when we rejoice in what God has done for us in Christ, making serious promises and declaring the faith. The wider community of the local church and friends welcome the new Christian, promising support and prayer for the future'. In other words, the child's parents and godparents make promises to raise the child to know God and to

allow them to follow Jesus as a member of the church. The service marks the start of a journey of faith – which involves turning away from all evil, turning towards Christ, and becoming a member of the local and worldwide Christian family.

A Baptism service normally occurs shortly after the child's birth, but can happen at any point in a person's life. Sometimes, those who have not been baptised as young children are baptised as teenagers or as adults much later in life.

It is possible to have both a 'Thanksgiving' service and a 'Baptism' service for your child. If you choose to have a 'Thanksgiving' service now, you may also have a Baptism service for your child at a later date. Keep in touch with your priest at all times, and let him/her know your needs as they change.

## MAKING THE CHOICE

Is a service of Baptism right for you at this time?

We hope that the following pointers will help you reach a decision.

Please make your intentions very clear to the priest and/or the church office staff, and please ensure that the application form that you complete is legible. Please ensure that all personal names are printed clearly.

### **THANKSGIVING SERVICE FOR THE GIFT OF A CHILD**

- You will be expected to acknowledge that your child is a special gift for which it is appropriate to give thanks to God.
- You will not be required to make a public commitment to the Christian faith, although there is an expectation that you will engage with the Scripture readings and prayers used during the service. The priest will pray for you (the parents), during the service, and you may be invited to offer thanks to God in prayer for the gift of your child. The service ends with the priest saying a suitable Christian blessing.



- You do not need to have godparents, but you may have supporters instead. Your supporters need not be baptised themselves.
- You will be required to complete the form (*at the back of this Guide*) and return it to the church office in person. A mutually appropriate date can be agreed for the service and booked at the Church Office. No booking – even a provisional one – will be made without a completed application form.
- You will not be required to attend a Baptism Preparation event at the church.



## HOLY BAPTISM SERVICE

- The priest will ask the parents and the godparents to make declarations of faith on behalf of the child. On behalf of the child, you will be asked to declare publicly that you believe in God and that you will bring your child up to follow Jesus. You will be asked to answer on the child's behalf that you have decided to turn away from everything which is evil or sinful and instead turn towards Christ. Such declarations and promises will be spoken publicly in front of the family members and friends that you've invited to attend the service.
- Godparents need to be selected to attend the baptism service. They must all attend the service, and they all need to have been baptised themselves. Godparents may also attend the Baptism Preparation event at the church.
- You need to complete the form (at the back of this Guide) and return it to the church office in person.
- You need to attend a **Baptism Preparation event** at the church alongside a small group of other parents intending to have their children baptised. Godparents are welcomed to attend too. Baptism services will not be booked into the Church diary until parents have attended a Baptism

Preparation event. No booking – even a provisional one – will be made without a completed application form.

## **WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE SERVICE AT CHURCH?**

Our 'Thanksgiving' and 'Holy Baptism' services normally follow the approved format and liturgy of the Church of England's 'Common Worship' material.

A '**Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child**' service normally adopts the following format:

- Introduction
- Reading(s) and Sermon
- Thanksgiving and Blessing
- Giving of the Gospel
- Prayers
- Ending

A '**Holy Baptism**' service normally adopts the following format:

- The Greeting
- Introduction
- The Collect Prayer
- Bible Readings and Sermon
- Presentation of the Candidate(s)
- The Decision
- Signing with the Cross
- Prayer over the Water
- Profession of Faith
- Baptism
- Commission
- Prayers of Intercession
- The Welcome and Peace
- The Blessing
- Giving of a Lighted Candle
- The Dismissal

Full detail of the service content of both types of service can be obtained from appropriate websites [*please use Google to search for 'Thanksgiving and Baptism Services in the Church of England'*]. The officiating priest will be pleased to discuss any aspect of service content with you – and this would normally take place at the Baptism Preparation event.

Neither of the services normally involves the singing of hymns.

Our church offers services of this kind on the first, third and fifth Sundays of each month, and you will be booked for one of these once the completed application forms have been returned and, in the case of Baptism services, the Baptism Preparation event has been attended. Services can, on rare occasions, be held on other days of the week, upon request.

As outlined above, Thanksgiving and Baptism services are quite different and will not, therefore, be booked for the same date.

The officiating priest and his/her supporting lay colleagues will make sure that you have all the necessary service leaflets. They will make sure that you know where to sit and when you need to stand and move about during the service. Some parts of the service will be for the whole congregation to join in, and some parts will be for parents, godparents and/or sponsors only – and the officiating priest will make this clear to you.

In the case of Baptism, part of the service will normally take place at the front of the church. For the actual act of baptism itself, parents and godparents are usually asked by the priest to gather around the font at the back of the church.

The priest will issue prayer cards to the godparents that will help them to remember their new responsibilities to the baptised child. If previously requested, the parents will be given an official Certificate of Baptism by the priest (for which a small fee is payable).

## **HOLY BAPTISM**

The Baptism service paints many vivid pictures of what happens on the Christian way and uses a number of powerful symbols to help us understand the way in which God's presence will change our lives.



## **THE SIGN OF THE CROSS**

During the early part of the service the priest will use anointing oil to make the sign of the cross on your child's forehead. This is like an invisible badge to show that Christians are united with Jesus Christ and must not be ashamed to stand up for their faith in him. The cross is a sign of the way in which God adopts those who are to be baptised as his own children. God's children then bear the mark of Jesus – the Cross.

The priest may also invite you (parents and godparents) to make a sign of the cross on the child's forehead.

## **THE PROMISES**

At the centre of the Baptism service are a number of promises made (by parents and godparents) in God's presence. These are witnessed by your family and friends, and they are made on behalf of the young child that is to be baptised.

Parents and godparents promise to:

- Pray, and draw the child by example into the community of faith.
- Walk with the child in the way of Christ.
- Care for the child
- Help the child to take his/her place within church life and worship.
- Reject the devil and all rebellion against God.
- Renounce the deceit and corruption of evil.
- Repent of all sin
- Turn to Jesus as Saviour and submit to him as Lord.

By making promises on behalf of the child, parents and godparents are saying that it's important for them that the child is a part of the church, and that they will help the child to understand the Christian faith into which they have been baptised. They also promise to help bring the child to the point where he/she would be able to make those promises personally.

It is important that parents and godparents fully understand and acknowledge these promises. The Baptism Preparation event will provide an opportunity for all the promises to be made clear to you by the priest.



## BAPTISING WITH WATER

At the font, the priest will pour water on to the child's head. Water is a sign of washing and cleansing. In baptism it is a sign of being washed free from the sin that keeps us apart from God, and the beginning a new life with Jesus.

The priest may invite the parents and the godparents to make a sign of the cross on the child's forehead with water drawn from the font.

## GIVING AND RECEIVING A CANDLE

During the service a candle burns to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World and that, in his resurrection, he conquered death and lives forever.



A smaller baptismal candle is given to those who have been baptised as a sign that they live in Christ's eternal light. That light has entered into the child's life.

It is up to the parents and godparents, and the entire Christian community, to help the child to reject the world of darkness and to follow a way of life that reflects goodness and light, and shares this light with others.

## A SPECIAL NOTE FOR GODPARENTS

Congratulations on being asked to be a godparent – they are very important people! It means that your friends or relations think that you'll be a good example and role model for their child. They trust you to pray for them, speak to them about God and to encourage them in their Christian faith.

Here are some comments and frequently asked questions (and answers) about being a godparent. We hope that you find them helpful:

- ***What does being a godparent involve?***

You have a special role. It's about helping the child to know God and to support them in their membership of the local church. You will be expected to attend the child's baptism service and to make promises to help to bring him/her up in the Christian faith. It's a role that will

develop over time as your godchild grows up and develops his/her own faith.

- ***Being a godparent feels like a big responsibility!***

It is! Have a look at the questions you will answer in the baptism service (please see above). Take some time to think through the commitments that you make when you answer them. But don't forget that the church community can and will support you in encouraging and praying for your godchild.

- ***I'm not sure if I can make these decisions; what if I've not thought much about my faith and don't go to church regularly?***

Most people have doubts at some stage, and no one's asking you to be perfect. However, being asked to be a godparent is a good opportunity to think about your own faith. Godparents must have been baptised themselves, and it's best if you are also confirmed. Baptism or confirmation preparation can help you with your own questions about the Christian faith. It will also help you to support your godchild in developing their own faith.

If you feel that you are unable to make these promises in God's presence and publicly before witnesses inside a church, perhaps you ought to tell the parents – and the priest – how you feel.

- ***Does being a godparent mean that I'm a legal guardian as well?***

No, your role as a godparent is a spiritual one – to encourage and pray for your godchild. Perhaps you will be asked to be a guardian too, but that is separate from being a godparent.

- ***I'm worried about doing the right thing on the day!***

The priest and the lay team will make sure that the service goes smoothly, and that everyone knows what to do – and when!

- ***What should I give as a gift to the child?***

The most important gifts you can give your godchild are your time, presence and prayers – but you will probably also want to mark the

baptism by giving a special gift. Godparents don't have to buy expensive gifts. A simple, meaningful present is a good choice. Here are some suggestions:



*Bibles*

*Books of Bible stories*

*Books of prayers*

*A silver or gold cross or chain (although your godchild may not be able to wear these for some time)*

*A small wooden cross*

*Drawings, paintings and posters of Christian stories*



- ***What happens after the baptism service?***

The church normally gives you a special card to remind you of your godchild's baptism and the promises that you made. Keep the card safely and in a place that you'll see it every day – so that you can remember your godchild and ask God to bless him/her daily.

- ***How do I build a relationship with my godchild?***

The important thing to ensure is that the relationship with your godchild is kept alive. Children love to get letters, postcards, e-mails and other forms of electronic messages. Keep in touch with your godchild in a way that shows that you care for him/her, and that the relationship with you is a special one. Don't forget birthdays! Don't forget important dates and events in his/her life. Send good wishes when exams and other kinds of challenges are to be faced!

As your godchild gets older, he/she may want to ask questions about faith or Christian life. If you've kept in touch, he/she may direct these questions to you – what a privilege it will be to help them discover and explore their own faith. Ask your priest for assistance if necessary.

Hopefully, later on your godchild will want to make his/her own declaration of faith at a **CONFIRMATION** service. At that stage, your

godchild will confirm the promises that you made for him/her at the baptism service.

- ***Is there a prayer that I can use for my godchild?***

You could use the following prayer:

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the gift of [child's name] - and for all the joy that he/she brings to us. Be with him/her on his/her Christian journey so that he/she may come to know our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and friend.*

*I pray that you will guide and support me in being a godparent. Give me your wisdom and your love. Help me to be a good example of Christian living and keep me ever mindful of my precious godchild. Amen.*

## **MEET THE TEAM**

A number of people from the church work hard to ensure that your child's special thanksgiving/baptism service goes smoothly. Some of them will have been involved behind-the-scenes well before the service actually takes place.

### **THE CLERGY TEAM**

The team consists of:

Revd. Dr. Glynne Watkin	Vicar of Heath Hayes
Revd. Robert Heath	Curate (from July 2013)
Revd. Steve Reynolds	Associate Minister
Revd. Joyce Stewardson	Curate
Revd. Debbie Watkin	Associate Minister (from May 2013)

### **THE LAY TEAM**

Several members of the church congregation are involved in some way in organising and managing our services. You may already have met some of them during the Baptism Preparation event, or when you visited the church office to make an initial enquiry. Some of them record your service bookings, some complete all the legally-required Registers, whilst others ensure that the

church has the necessary resources to hand – candles, cards, certificates and, of course (in the case of our baptism services) some water! Some may be the voice that you hear at the end of the telephone when you call the church office!

There are too many of them to be named individually – but they're all united in the belief that it's our collective pleasure and privilege to welcome you to the church of St. John's and to offer thanks to God for your child.

## **CONTACTING THE CHURCH**

You can contact the church in a number of ways:

By letter: St. John's Church,  
Hednesford Road, Heath Hayes WS12

By e-mail: [office@stjohnsheathhayes.co.uk](mailto:office@stjohnsheathhayes.co.uk)

By telephone: 01543-278478

The Vicar: St. John's Vicarage,  
226 Hednesford Road,  
Heath Hayes WS12

Vicarage Telephone: 01543-274104

Vicar's e-mail: [revglynnne@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:revglynnne@hotmail.co.uk)

## **FEES**

Whilst our church makes no charge for baptism services, you are invited to make a financial gift that will help meet the ever-growing costs of church maintenance. A special box/basket will be made available for this purpose inside the church.

If you are a UK taxpayer, you are encouraged to place your gift offering inside a 'Gift Aid' envelope (freely available at the church) – this will enable us to claim an additional tax refund from the Government which can be used to meet the costs of Christian ministry within the parish.

A fee of £12 is payable for a Certificate of Baptism that is completed, signed and issued at the time of baptism. Please ensure that you indicate, in advance of the service, whether or not you wish such a certificate to be issued.

## **OTHER ENQUIRIES**

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need more information about any aspect of the thanksgiving/baptism service.

It's very important that you ensure that the officials at the church are informed if there needs to be a last-minute change of plan. Sometimes these are unavoidable, and the church will always do what it can to meet your reasonable requests.