

CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations on the new arrival in your family. Of all the gifts that God lavishes upon us, the gift of a child is the most precious and the most awe-inspiring. We are delighted for you and look forward to getting to know you as a family in the weeks and years to come. This booklet is designed to help you introduce your child into the family life of St Mary's Church.

You will find brief explanations of the Baptism Service and the Service of Thanksgiving for the birth of a child - and a summary of how you can set about choosing between them and making preparations for your child's Service.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The immediate priority is to make you and your child feel welcome and comfortable in the Sunday worship of the church family. Church can seem a daunting place to come to - **even for parents!** Indeed, there are plenty of adults whose own childhood experiences of church make them uneasy about bringing their own children today. Will it be cold? What shall we wear? What if baby cries - or needs a feed? Will we know what to do? Anxieties like these can keep people well away from the church door on Sunday mornings! Can we assure you, then, that you will receive a warm welcome from the moment you arrive. We will help you to find a seat, to park the pushchair and to find your way through the service. We have a Tots Team especially to help with this! Our aim is to be child-friendly and to welcome children as fully and enthusiastically as we welcome young people and adults. That means involving children in all of our services - using words they will understand and using activities that will catch their imagination and attention. It also means accepting that there will be a bit of noise and hustle and bustle - and the occasional tears and shrieks - as children make their presence felt! It also means providing special groups for children in which they can learn about the Lord Jesus Christ at their own level.

SOME USEFUL TIPS

- Bring your child to church even as a tiny baby. Even before they can understand a word of the service they will appreciate the sounds and sights and begin to feel at home.
- Come as a family - if you can. It's much easier for two adults to cope with one or more child than it is for a single-handed

- parent !
- Don't worry if you arrive late. We know all about nappies and last minute panics.
 - Do know that you are able to bring prams and pushchairs into church.
 - It's OK to feed your baby in church - either in the pew or in privacy at the back of church. There are nappy changing facilities at the back of church
 - Don't come empty handed! Bring something that will help occupy small children if their attention begins to wander – books, soft toys, even a bag of sweets or a packet of biscuits. Bags of toys and books and colouring sheets are always available in church. Our Tots' Team will gladly provide you with these.
 - As your child gets a bit older help them to join in as much of the service as possible. Tell them what's going on.
 - If it all gets too much don't struggle on - leave early. Nobody will mind.

FOR THE CHILDREN AT ST MARY'S

Tots' team

KFJ (Kids For Jesus) 4 – 11 years

Pathfinders 11 – 14 years

CYFA 14 +

ARRANGING A SERVICE

You may have had a preliminary meeting with the Vicar when he gave you this document. At that time he will have taken some basic information concerning your child and family.

We would encourage you and you family to come to church to get a 'feel' of what it is like

In our church we believe that it is very important that parents and Godparents are properly prepared for the Baptism of their Child.

The Vicar will arrange for you and other parents who are exploring the Baptism of their children to meet for a Baptism Preparation Evening. Our church Baptism team will meet you that evening and will help and support you and your family through the Baptism and as you come along to church in the future.

This is also a good opportunity for you to ask any questions you might have about the Baptism of your child and about the

Christian faith. At this stage you will be able to make a provisional date for your child's service. You will be given a Baptism application form and asked to return this to the Vicar to confirm the provisional arrangements made at the home visit.

THE SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

It is the most natural thing in the world to want to give thanks to our creator God for the gift of a new life and the addition of a new member to a human family.

The Service of Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child is designed to help you do this in a planned and thoughtful way. This short Service can be conducted by the Vicar in your home or it can take place in church as part of a Sunday act of worship. Church members are always glad to rejoice with, and pray for, families giving thanks for the arrival of their baby.

Some families use the Service of Thanksgiving immediately after birth - and in advance of a Baptism that may follow some weeks or months later. Others have a Thanksgiving in preference to Baptism either because they prefer to leave Baptism to the choice of the child in later life or because they feel unable to make the promises and commitments involved in bringing a child to Baptism. It is, as you would expect, a happy event!

SO WHAT IS BAPTISM ?

Baptism is a special Service of welcome into the life of the Christian Church. It is special for the family who make important promises and for the Church who welcomes the child.

Adult candidates are asked to make a public statement of their belief and trust in:

God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist.

God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again.

God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world.

In the service they make declarations of commitment -

To reject the devil and all rebellion against God.

To renounce the deceit and corruption of evil.

To repent of your sins that separate you from God and your neighbours.

Baptism commits us to -

1. Growth in our understanding of the Christian faith
2. Depth in learning to pray
3. Be part of the local Christian Church.

As an evangelical church we do not believe that Baptism alone makes anyone a Christian. At Baptism we place our children on the first step on what we hope will be a journey of faith which we pray will become increasingly important to them. Baptism is a public declaration, a pledge of personal faith in Jesus Christ. At infant Baptism these statements of belief and commitment are made by parents and Godparents, who declare their intention to bring up their children to believe these things for themselves. They also commit themselves to bring up their child, with them, as an active member of a local Christian church. The decision to bring a child to infant Baptism is a serious one. It requires parents to look carefully at their own faith. Can they make the promises and statements of belief asked of them in the service ? It also requires parents to look carefully at their commitment to the local church. Are they willing to bring their child to church from infancy into young adult life ? These are big issues - and raise important questions. The Vicar will help you to consider them carefully and assist you in reaching a decision which is right for you and your family.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Enjoy bringing your child to church.

Get to know other members of the church family - and grow in your own faith and understanding.

Think about the Thanksgiving and Baptism services.

Which is **right** for you?

Remember that Baptism is a sign of entry into God's family of which St Mary's Church is a part.