


St. Paul's

EPISCOPAL  CHURCH

BAPTISM CUSTOMARY

Information and Planning Guide

Preparation for the Baptism of Adults

“Holy baptism is full initiation by water and
the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church.
The bond which God establishes in baptism is indissoluble.”

(The Book of Common Prayer, p. 298).

We are excited that your spiritual journey has brought you to desire to be baptized, and we are delighted to have it take place at St. Paul’s. You have always been a child of God living in His love, but baptism is your opportunity to say “Yes” to that relationship, and that will allow you to participate intentionally and fully in His work of reconciliation in the world. We look forward eagerly to receiving you into “the household of faith.”

To help you understand the “what,” “why,” and “how” of baptism, we have prepared this guide for you.

WHAT? Holy Baptism is a sacrament, an “outward and visible sign of inner spiritual grace.” In other words, Baptism is an action of the Church using physical substances and objects as signs of God’s blessing us in powerful ways. Using water and holy oil, in baptism God *adopts* us as his children, *welcomes* us into Christ’s Body, the Church, *initiates* us into life lived on behalf of God’s Kingdom, and *gives us gifts* to help us work on behalf of that Kingdom.

WHY? One reason we baptize is because Jesus told us to do it when he commissioned us as members of his Church (see below, ABOUT HOLY BAPTISM). But it is our joy to obey Jesus because we want the very best that life has to offer. Grace and blessing come to us as we join and live in Christ’s family, and that grace flows out to all the people we love—our family, friends, and neighbors.

HOW? At St. Paul’s, baptism takes place as an integral part of a Sunday worship service, because it is not just the priest who baptizes but the entire congregation. We all participate in warmly welcoming the newly baptized into the Christian family. Our Rector will assist you in selecting the day and the service at which you would like this to take place, but in general dates specially designated for baptisms are:

- the first Sunday after Epiphany in January
- Easter Vigil, the evening before Easter Sunday
- the Second Sunday of Easter
- Pentecost Sunday in May or June
- All Saints’ Sunday in November
- during the Bishop’s annual visitation to the parish

We typically do not baptize during Advent and Lent.

Baptism requires three elements—an ordained person (except in extraordinary circumstances), living (flowing) water, and the name of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). While some denominations baptize by immersion, in the Episcopal Church we baptize by pouring water on the head. To schedule a baptism, please visit our website at stpaulsmurfreesboro.org and fill out the online request form. If you need assistance please email our Baptism Shepherd, Jennifer Dickey, at jtdickey@comcast.net.

WHO? Baptism is for everybody regardless of their condition, their past, or their spiritual history. No one is unworthy to receive it; in baptism, God makes us worthy. As Episcopalian Christians, we believe that baptism only happens once: as our liturgy says, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Any adult who has not already been baptized can be a candidate for baptism. At the service, an adult family member or friend who has already been baptized will stand with you and present you. If you have been baptized previously and want to mark a new season in your faith, you may take part in our Reaffirmation of Baptism that happens each year during the Bishop’s visitation.

PHOTOGRAPHY: We recognize that baptism is a very important moment in the life of a person and family, and we wish to honor the participants’ desire to memorialize it in photographs or videos. A high-quality video of the service is available online. Because the baptism is taking place during a sacramental church service, we ask that there be no flash and that no picture-taking interfere with or disrupt the dignity of the occasion. Please arrange with the Rector the proper way to do this.

ABOUT HOLY BAPTISM

Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-19)

In his last statement to us, Jesus commands us to baptize and to teach about everything he has said, and then he promises to be with us as we do these things, forever. Why was baptism so important to him? Because in baptism God receives us as God’s beloved children and joins us together as members of the Church, the presence of Christ in the world. Thus, as His children we begin the journey towards becoming mature followers of Christ and living up to our baptismal vows, all with the help of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. At the root of it all is God’s unconditional love, reaching out to us, working within us before we are aware of its presence.

JESUS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD

While Jesus has revealed himself to us in many ways, the image of the Good Shepherd is particularly rich in relation to the sacrament of baptism. At baptism Christ the Good Shepherd comes to meet us and claim us as his own: he “calls his own sheep by name” (John 10:3) and invites us into loving relationship with him. We are marked with his sign, the cross, to show that we belong to him; through water and the Word of God, we receive his light and life. As we enter his sheepfold, the Church, we promise to trust, follow, and obey him throughout our lives.

THE VOWS: “I WILL WITH GOD’S HELP”

During your baptism, you will promise God to do five things: to renounce Satan, the evil powers of the world, and all sinful desires, and then to turn to Jesus, trusting in his grace and love, in order to follow and obey him. In all this you promise to seek God’s help in living these out because you can’t do it alone—no one can. Then, the entire congregation will join you in renewing their own baptismal vows promising together to say “No” to evil and “Yes” to Christ, living as faithful witnesses to his life and work in the world, all with God’s help.

WATER

The outward and visible sign of baptism is water. Jesus says, “The water that I will give will become a well of water springing up within him for eternal life” (John 4:14b). The water of baptism is essential to our spiritual life, quenching the thirst for God within all of us and providing for the cleansing of our sins. This does not mean that we will never sin again; rather, when we sin, we have assurance through our baptism that God will forgive us and free us from shame and guilt to move forward on our journey in God’s love.

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES

Water: When the priest blesses the baptismal water praying the Holy Spirit to enter into the life of the person being baptized, the water becomes holy. When the water is poured over your head the Holy Spirit enters into your life with the promise that the Spirit will never leave. In this way you receive grace and power to live the life God has given.

Holy oil: God anointed his Son Jesus Christ (Christ means the anointed one) with the Holy Spirit to do his saving work. The newly baptized has become a member of Christ’s body, the Church, and so is anointed with the Holy Spirit to carry on Christ’s ministry in our world. The anointing at baptism is with chrism, an oil mixed with perfume, that the bishop has consecrated making the Bishop symbolically present at every baptism that takes place in an Episcopal Church in this diocese. Tracing a cross on your forehead with the chrism, the priest says, “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.” (BCP p. 308)

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Throughout the Easter season, the majestic paschal candle is lit as a reminder of the presence of the living Christ. At every baptism, a small candle is lighted from the paschal candle and given to the newly baptized person symbolizing our sharing in the life of the risen Jesus. (Paschal is derived from the Hebrew word for Passover.) This paschal light will continue to shine even in the darkest of life’s challenges. The paschal candle is also lighted at funerals reminding us that baptism is eternal and that even in death, “Life is changed, not ended.” The life in Christ initiated at baptism will have no end. Alleluia!

WHAT’S NEXT?

In baptism we enter into a new life, a life that can change how we see the world and act in it. As we grow in Christ’s love, that love compels us to respond, and the response we make is ministry, doing the work for which Jesus commissions us using the gifts the Holy Spirit has given. The blessing we receive thus becomes blessing to the people around us, and the Kingdom of God becomes visible to them, spreading hope and drawing others to God.

THE CHURCH’S ROLE

Because no one can become a Christian in isolation, our baptism surrounds us with faithful Christians from the parish who pray for, support, and disciple us on our pilgrimage. Here is where we center our worship on Sundays and through the week, our learning through Christian Education and discipleship programs of many kinds, our fellowship as a loving community of faith, and our work of ministry in the world. We hope you will accept our invitation to become a vital part of this exciting work. In all this we will help you stay connected to Christ and live out your baptismal covenant.

Baptism is the beginning of a journey. Throughout this journey, God intends us to enjoy the Good Shepherd’s presence in our lives, to experience his care and protection, and to grow in love for him and in our knowledge of his endless love for us. Because in baptism we are “marked as Christ’s own forever,” he will never stop loving us even if we were to repeatedly turn away from him. St. Paul tells us that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). “With God’s help” we strive daily to deepen our friendship with him. We invite you to walk with all of us who are on the same journey. Together we can make the Kingdom of God more and more a reality in our time and place.

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