


# St. Paul's

EPISCOPAL  CHURCH

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## BAPTISM CUSTOMARY

*Information and Planning Guide*

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*Preparation for the Baptism of Infants and Young Children*



“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 you want your child to be baptized and delighted to have it take place here at St. Paul’s. 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 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 love our children and want for them the very best that life has to offer. Grace and blessing come to us as we join and live in Christ’s family.

**HOW?** At St. Paul’s, baptism takes place as an integral part of a Sunday worship service, because the one being baptized is baptized into the life of the entire Christian community. 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.

This is such an important event in the life of a child that you will want to plan it ahead, perhaps even before your baby is born. We do baptize infants, and in the Episcopal Church we generally baptize by pouring water on the head, not by immersion. To schedule a baptism, please visit our website at [stpaulsmurfreesboro.org](http://stpaulsmurfreesboro.org) and fill out the online request form. If you need assistance please call our Parish Secretaries at 615/893-3780.

## **WHO?**

**PARENT(S):** To baptize your child, at least one of the parents needs to have been baptized and be a member of St. Paul's. If one of them is not, that person can be baptized at the same time as your child.

**GODPARENTS:** Godparents are “parents in the faith.” Their role is to form and maintain a Christian relationship with the godchild; to find ways to help her or him to grow up knowing God's love, to remind the child that he/she is baptized, and to explore with the child what that means in daily life. So, it is important that the godparents

- be baptized Christians, regular in church attendance, and godly role models
- be able to talk comfortably with the child about God and his/her relationship with God
- share with parents the work of passing on the Christian faith
- pray regularly for the child
- take an active interest in the child, especially his/her Christian education and life in the Christian community

Because of the responsibilities godparents assume, choosing them requires much thoughtful prayer and discussion. They do not have to be Episcopalian but must be willing to form and maintain a life-long, Christ-centered friendship with the child. There are usually two godparents, but there can be more.

The service of baptism includes vows that the parents and godparents answer on behalf of the infant or younger child who cannot speak on their own behalf. Older children who can speak for themselves have sponsors who present them, but the child responds to the vows.

In preparation for baptism, the priest will arrange to meet with the parents either in their home or in the church. There will be a rehearsal of the baptism service at a time the Rector will schedule. If possible, the godparents should also be present.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** We recognize that baptism is a very important moment in the life of a family, and we wish to honor the participants' desire to memorialize it in photographs or videos. But because it 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. There will be opportunity for photos after the service as well.

## **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 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.

For this reason, in the Episcopal Church we baptize infants because one doesn't need a deep knowledge of God to begin a friendship with him. From the start, the Church baptized infants into the Christian faith along with others in the household. Building on that, the children's broad family of household and Church instructed and nurtured them in the Christian life. Today we follow their example so that at the appropriate age they will be prepared to make their own mature commitment to Christ in an additional sacrament, Confirmation.

God has loved your child from the very first moment, but once baptized this young person and the whole Christian community, not just St. Paul's or the Episcopal Church, will be joined together in love, sharing the blessing and the mission that Jesus brought into the world. This is what we meant by wanting to give them "the very best that life has to offer."

### THE VOWS: "I WILL WITH GOD'S HELP"

A vow is a solemn promise made to God. At the heart of the baptism liturgy, parents and godparents, on behalf of the child, or older children who can speak for themselves, vow before God and the congregation to raise their child as a beloved child of God. And the congregation vows before God to support them in doing this. You are never alone.

In these vows they promise 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.

After taking these vows on behalf of the child, the parent(s), the godparents, and the congregation join together in renewing their own baptismal vows. Now, you not only have God to strengthen, support, and guide you but the Christian community as well. By promising together to say "No" to evil and "Yes" to Christ, we are preparing ourselves to live as role models for the child, teaching them by our words and, more important, our example what it looks like to be a Christian.

*"Direct your children onto the right path,  
And when they are older, they will not leave it."*

(Proverbs 22:6)

### 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 them for eternal life" (John 4:14b). The water of baptism is essential to our spiritual life, quenching the spiritual 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 for the Holy Spirit to enter into the life of the person being baptized, the water becomes holy. When the water is poured over the child's head the Holy Spirit enters into his/her life with the promise that the Spirit will never leave. In this way the child receives grace and power to live in 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 baptisms is with *chrism*, an oil mixed with perfume, that the bishop has consecrated making him symbolically present at every baptism that takes place in an Episcopal Church in this diocese. Tracing a cross on the child's 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 and during baptisms, the majestic paschal candle is lit as a reminder of the presence of the living Christ. At every baptism, a small candle for the baptized child is lighted from the paschal candle and given to the parents symbolizing the child's sharing in the life of the risen Jesus. (*Paschal* is derived from the Hebrew word for Passover; it also refers to the sacrificed lamb eaten on the first night.)

This paschal light will continue to shine even in the darkest of life's challenges. To remind the child of this, the parents and godparents can light the candle every year on the child's birthday and say, "This is the light of Christ. We are here to help you bear it faithfully in the world." 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!

## CELEBRATING THE ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR CHILD'S BAPTISM

Here are some ways you can remember your child's baptism and make it come alive again. Each anniversary of the day the child was initiated into the Church, you can have a second birthday party. Celebrate by lighting the candle you received at the baptism, review the pictures and video of the event, share your family's faith journey, and invite the child to contribute by relating what he/she has learned during the year and how his or her relationship with God has grown. You can read together the story of Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). Godparents can participate by sending a note focusing attention on memories of that special day and saying how it felt to be chosen for this special role in the child's life.

## THE CHURCH'S ROLE

St. Paul's cannot take the place of parents and godparents in raising your child in faith and devotion to God. But we can, and are eager, to help. You have vowed on behalf of your child "to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers" (BCP p. 304). We believe that the Christian formation of the child begins with the formation of the parents. So, the parish makes available many opportunities and vehicles to do this: Sunday worship, Christian education (which begins in our nursery), Bible study, fellowship, and nurture for all ages and stages of life.

Children respond more readily to the Church's teaching when parents are serious about their own Christian growth. The more intentional you are about living out your baptismal promises and deepening your relationship with God, the more you will quite naturally guide your child, with God's help and the Church's, to live into his or her baptism.

The single most important step you can take is to commit yourself and your family to weekly Sunday worship, Holy Eucharist, and when possible Christian formation. In the home you can create habits of regular Bible reading and prayer together. Staying connected to Christ in these ways will help you live out your baptismal covenant.

## 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). 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. He knows us by name and calls us into loving relationship with him. As we enter his sheepfold, the Church, we promise to trust, follow, and obey him throughout our lives.

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. As our pilgrimage continues, we become more capable of hearing our Good Shepherd’s voice, of following where he leads, and of growing and changing to become more like him.

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. During the baptism service, the entire parish enthusiastically promises to help you live out the promises you are making, not just for your child but also for you. 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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#### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

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