

Baptism in the Parishes of St. Columb Minor and St. Colan
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Introduction.

The chances are, you are reading this because you are going to be attending a Baptism service, either as a candidate, a parent or God-parent. This is a wonderful occasion and through this pamphlet we hope that you may be able to get more out of the baptism service. Anybody can be baptized at any age. The Church of England, being the state Church (the head of the Church is Queen Elizabeth 2nd), cannot refuse a baptism although a minister can ask for a baptism to be delayed in order that some teaching be given. If the baptism is an emergency at a hospital then clergy, will baptize your child automatically.

Baptism is free of charge, although almost all Churches have a bowl for donations after the service.

Although this pamphlet, and any future discussions you may wish to have, is meant to help you understand what baptism is in the Christian context there is no intellectual requirement. All Christians are on a journey, struggling to understand, desiring to learn more, and if there were a theological exam to pass first, most would fail, including the clergy!

Sometimes it is hard for us to put our faith into words, as it is often an uncommunicated faith. That is fine. Faith is about the guts and the heart. It is about feelings rather than proof. If you have a gut feeling that you want your child to be baptized but you can't really explain why, then that is quite natural. All clergy though will try and tease out of you and help you formulate into words these gut tensions we call faith.

The aim of this pamphlet is not to be the definitive work on baptism; that would take 20 volumes. Instead it is just meant to be helpful in explaining and removing some of your concerns regarding the service and also serving as a catalyst for any questions you've always wanted to ask. We are always around should you ever want to chat you're your thoughts, concerns, worries and hopes. If you think you're going to get

answers- don't. Religion doesn't have too many answers, what it does have is the resources to enable us to live with the questions.

Christianity

Here follows a very basic and potted history. Christianity grew out of Judaism. Jesus, called the Christ, was a Jew, very much of his time. He was a prophetic teacher, had no fear of challenging the establishment, and during his earthly ministry specifically taught for his fellow Jews. Only occasionally did he talk with foreigners (Gentiles) and sometimes this seemed to catch him off guard. (Mark 7) Jesus was important because his teaching and his way of life inspired many of his time. His style and method are timeless and we can see the general truths he taught are timeless 2000yrs later.

His life was important but it was the manner of his death and the belief in his resurrection that has meant that Jesus is believed to be, not just a "holy man" but the closest earthly person to God; that is why one phrase we call him by is Jesus "The Son of God." This is known as the incarnation- God becoming human and living with us. The most explicit example of this is Jesus Christ. The significance of the incarnation though is not confined to 2000years ago. Rather the incarnation demonstrates to us that God loves us enough to share our pain, he knows our sorrows and our weaknesses, he understands our temptations; right here and now, today. God is not something now divorced from his creation. Rather God became incarnate in the world, and as the Christ, understands our everyday lives, including our dying for Jesus died on the cross.

Jesus died willingly in that he did not need to be in Jerusalem at that time, for he knew he was putting himself in danger. Yet he knew he needed to stand up for his beliefs and everything that he had taught. For these were more important than his life: for what he believed in affected all of us, not just one person.

To have this faith, though Jesus was scared of dying (Mark 14) is an inspiration to us. Jesus fervently believed we would all be resurrected and achieves eternal life because of God's infinite loving nature.

Without this faith Christianity would be vastly different to what it is today.

Now the written word makes faith seem so simple. The resurrection is mentioned in a very matter of fact way as if it is easily understandable. It isn't, in fact intellectually it is very hard to handle. And most Christians at some point in their lives struggle with many of the beliefs in our religion at times-: that is how we grow. Always though, the bottom line is we will never be able to prove God's love, but we know it is there because our souls feel it and see it even through the most bleakest times. Faith is essentially unexplainable.

Most of what we know about Jesus comes from the Bible. Particularly, the 4 Gospels in the New Testament- Matthew, Mark (quoted twice already), Luke and John.

Christians do believe that some select texts in the Old Testament point towards Jesus as being the Messiah. The Bible is the most sold book in the world. Unfortunately some people understand this to mean that all there is to Christianity is in the Bible. Certainly all that is necessary, the essentials, are, but Christianity is much more than that. First of all you have millions of years of history before the Bible was ever started, and then the hundreds of years since it was completed. For the Bible isn't one book but several.

It is at the same time, historical, ethical, thought provoking, informative, challenging, loving, subversive, violent, erotic, demanding, taxing, spiritual and physical. It is a living collection of books. One day a passage will mean something-different dependent on what has happened to you. Whenever we read parts of the Bible we take ourselves to it, this affects how we read it. What we read we then bring back to ourselves, and let it affect us. It is a 2 way process making the Bible a living, vitalizing book.

It doesn't end there though. Since the Bible was authorized in its present form hundreds of years ago, people have reflected on the nature of Christianity. Reflecting on their own situations and their own understanding of God. Using many tools including the Bible and their own conscience these people (e.g.: St. Thomas Aquinas) have helped develop Christianity into what it is today.

Christianity will always evolve, as we hope that all of us will spiritually mature, taking what has been learnt in the past and moving forward into the future.

That is why the decision of baptism is such a momentous one. You are making that step towards the future of Christianity, and how it develops in you, your (God)child is down to you and those close to you. You have 2000yrs of history to help you, and you have the ever-present help of all clergy to assist you and your family to achieve spiritually what it can achieve.

Christianity is about this exploration of faith within a framework of beliefs. It would be easy to talk about what Christians don't believe. It is always very tempting to dispel the common misconceptions that many non-Christians have about Christianity. But that would not help you understand more. Rather your questions should provide a springboard for dispelling long-held misconceptions. , Within the confines of this pamphlet it is better to state what we do believe.

We believe in a God with love at the core of all that we know. God is right there and yet God is so far away. It is not a fluffy white beard on a cloud God. No, the pure love that is God is only partly understandable by our finite knowledge. For God is infinite.

There is a very specific form of love in the Bible known as Agapè. It is a form of love by which we discover our true selves through inter-relationships. An essential part of this is getting the right priorities. And more than our life, for love breaks down all barriers making it eternal. If a loved, That is, if your child goes on an exchange to Australia for a year the love for that child extends across the physical distance. Christians believe that love extends across every kind of distance. For Christians the epitome of love is the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Baptism

A little later we are going to go through the service, outlying what happens and commentating on it. For the moment through, rather than what happens, What is Baptism?

It is the call and identity of the Christian community. In Judaism the identity of the Jewish community is marked by the physical sign of the circumcision of males. In Christianity the mark does not need to be physical, but is spiritual. The acceptance of God's love. In baptism there are 3 movements-

From Dark to Light
 Death to Life
 Self-centred to God-centred.

This does not mean that suddenly hurtful things won't happen to us. Rather that we have a few more tools to help us cope. Baptism moves from the darkness of despair, the darkness of Good Friday to the light of hope. The hope we have in the resurrection of Easter Sunday. The movement from death to life is the belief that Christians have that death is not the ultimate. Death is a painful experience for those who are left behind, but for those who pass away, it is a removing of the mirror, so we see God face to face. By baptism we share in the death of Jesus Christ, in that by it we acknowledge that there is always a personal cost to our faith. This cost is love; love is painful. Love puts others first.

And this brings us to the final movement from self to God.

It is obvious; to put others first we don't need to be baptized. On the other hand it is very hard to put others first all the time. Should we put our family first? Our neighbours? Our friends? Our enemies? If we put God first then we put everyone else first. And when there is conflict about who specifically we should put first, we try and prayerfully look at the situation through God's eyes, then we'll know whom to put first. That is why baptism is a movement from self to God. Of course it is very easy to say, "Look at the situation through God's eyes", but how do we do that? Well it is not easy but we do have stories of how God has loved in the past. We do have our own journey of faith, Christian or other to draw upon. And we do have the community of the Church within which we are loved and cherished.

This is why the role of the congregation is so important at each service of baptism. The congregation at each baptism are reminded they are responsible for helping and encouraging each baptismal candidate, so that all learn "to know God in public worship and private prayer, to follow Jesus Christ in the life of faith, to serve his/her neighbour after

the example of Christ, and in due course come to confirmation. As part of the Church of Christ we all have a duty to support him/her by prayer, example and teaching.”

Baptism is about three things.

- Journey
- Story
- Pattern

Journey

Baptism is not so easily described as a movement, although of course at its core are the movements from dark to light, death to life, self to God. Baptism itself is more a part of a process, a journey. To get to where you are today you have journeyed physically and spiritually. Baptism is a service station on the way. A specific service station which is going to lead you into a more focused direction, although none of us know what the final destination is really like. We are all on a journey in our faith. Baptism is not the end. It's not really the beginning. It's certainly a new start. This is true even for babies. The world can sometimes be caught up with “very important issues”, which in the larger scheme of things are pretty **un**important. Infant baptism is the conscious decision of the parents to help the baby's/child's/teenager's/adult's journey be prioritized by the real important things in life not the inconsequential of the world. We share each other's journeys, and the journey we are on is full of challenges, where we continually learn. Baptism is the acceptance of this spiritual journey where we strive to learn more and more, engaging more and more with the world, growing closer and closer to God.

Story

We all have backgrounds and futures, which are the nature to our journey. The story is the details. The how's and why's. We all have a story. The Church has a story. A story that stems back pre-Church thousands of years. A story that we can draw upon. Goethe the German philosopher said- “If man (meaning humanity) cannot draw upon

3000yrs of history, he is living hand to mouth.” The story each person brings to the Churches story, illuminates the wider story further. Because baptism is part story, each individual, no matter how small or how old is an integral part of the wider story- a jigsaw is not a jigsaw if there is a piece missing.

Pattern

Christians adopt a similar pattern of life. This does not mean that Christianity is about how you live your life, not at all. Christianity is a recognition of God’s loving forgiveness and creating energies; this recognition may well lead us to change our lifestyles. Christians do have a pattern of life. How many different types of check shirt are there? Yes lots! Different colours, styles, size of check, dog tooth, square, triangle etc. A variety of types though the pattern is always check.

The Christian pattern is one of belief. Because we are all on a journey, none of our beliefs are exactly the same, at the same time as everyone else. The details of some things are important to others at other times. Though the details may be different, the pattern of love, reconciliation, creating, sustaining, engaging and transforming are the same. The pattern is one of prayer. We are all committed to prayer. Not just “asking prayers”, but thanksgiving, confessing, adoring and perhaps most importantly listening. Prayer is a lot wider than you may think. For instance; is in itself cutting grass a prayer- can it be?

The pattern is one of behaviour. Or rather committed to trying behaviour. A married couple, married for 59yrs, were asked, “so you think marriage works?” The husband responded; “we’re still working at it”. It is not recorded whether his wife hit him at this point! The behaviour pattern is something we all work at; very few of us achieve it 100% of the time. If we strive to remain loving, according to Jesus, everything else will slot into place.

Baptism is a stage on our journey of faith. A stage where our story is joined to the wider story and where we adopt a pattern of life. Baptism is about “being made a Christian”, it is a recognition of a desire,

whether our own or that of our parents on our behalf, to grow closer to God. Baptism is a free gift of God- there is no exam just some gut inkling that it is the right thing to do. Of course baptism is only part of the journey, and the Church will continually be in contact encouraging you along as new members of the Church community.

Alternative to Baptism

“Is that what I’m doing by having my child baptised?”

“I’m not so sure; I thought it was just the thing to do to please my in-laws.”

This is a commonly heard phrase.

Certainly the Church does not want to turn anybody off. Baptism after all is a God-given gift open to all. And by baptism you join a community committed to the well being of your child. Your story becomes part of the wider story and this can only be a good thing.

There are alternatives though. The Church of England provides services of-

- Thanksgiving for a child
- Blessing of a child
- Prayers for pregnancy
- Prayers for Child-birth

Ask your Priest about one or all of these alternatives.

Godparents

“Baptism is the service we would like.”

So you’ve made up your mind and plumped for Baptism. Now the choice of the Godparents (sponsors in the case of older candidates) should be a very difficult one. The Church of England has requirements on such matters. Canon B23 states-

1. For every child to be baptised there shall be no fewer than 3 God-parents, of whom two shall be of the same sex as the child and of whom at least one shall be of the opposite sex; save that when three cannot conveniently be had, one god-father and one god-mother shall suffice. Parents may be god-parents for their own children provided that the child have at least one other god-parent.

1. This means that at a bare minimum you need to choose one godparent of the same sex as your child to join you as godparents.

2. The godparents shall be persons who will faithfully fulfil their responsibilities both by their care for the children committed to their charge and by the example of their own godly living.

2. This means, make your decision wisely.

3. When one who is of riper years is to be baptised he shall choose three, or at least two, to be his sponsors, who shall be ready to present him at the font and afterwards put him in mind of his Christian profession and duties.

3. Everyone needs support and guidance on their Christian journey, whatever age they are.

4. No person shall be admitted to be a sponsor or godparent who has not been baptised and confirmed. Nevertheless the Minister shall have power to dispense with the requirement for confirmation in any case which in his judgment the need to requires.

4. In this day and age, it is increasingly difficult to find friends who are confirmed. Although the ideal godparent is one who is a member of the family of the Church, many ministers understand that other factors may mean that you choose a godparent who is not confirmed. You will be able to make this clear on the form. It would be a good compromise to have at least one godparent who has been confirmed. This is an ideal

way to have the support and encouragement from someone who has taken their Christian faith seriously.

Godparents become part of the family. That is why it is always more appropriate to have friends as godparents who are not already family members. Why not leave Aunts to act as Aunts, and Uncles as Uncles, letting them fulfil these particular roles in full. You can of course have relations as godparents but this narrows the net of support for your child and really what you would like to do is widen it.

It is not always wise to be your own children's godparents. There are times in their spiritual journey when your child will need extra-familial support and all of us need to turn to others, especially when we are younger.

Make up your own mind, not bow down to family pressures or decorum. Being a godparent is a very onerous task and cannot be taken lightly just to please or keep the peace.

There is a common misconception that godparents become the automatic Guardians of the children if something should happen to the parents. This is not the case. It maybe co-incidentally the case, but that is not the role of baptism. Just imagine in a three-child family. Each child having three different godparents and several sets of Aunts and Uncles- whom should then be guardians? No, being a guardian is a totally different role.

The godparents are responsible for the spiritual up bringing in Christianity, and a primary role is to bring their godchildren to confirmation.

Confirmation

Is part of the journey after baptism where the child (who maybe an adult by now) is ready to undertake the vows that were taken on their behalf at baptism. It is literally a re-affirmation, a confirmation.

If we are baptised as adults, confirmation usually follows immediately afterwards. Sometimes in the same service. That is because, as an adult, the candidate has taken the vows at their baptism on behalf of themselves. Jesus got baptised at the start of his ministry, and it is through his baptism that we can gain a clearer understanding of what

confirmation is. When Jesus was baptised by John (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3 John 1)

the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove. At our confirmation the Bishop asks God for the gift of the Spirit for each candidate. So confirmation is not only a

re-affirmation it is also a conferring of the Spirit of God.

This baptism and confirmation of Jesus also marked the start of his ministry. Our confirmation (and baptism if adults) really does signify our acceptance of Jesus' commissioning to us to proclaim repentance and forgiveness throughout the world (Luke 24). By our baptism and confirmation as adults we are accepting this commission and we receive the Holy Spirit to comfort, aid and inspire us as we fulfill this commission.

The Service

So you have decided who are to be godparents and the great day arrives. You may well be having the baptism within the normal Sunday service at your Church, or maybe it is after the service. Either way, the minister will make your service special, and the whole Church will hold you and your family in their prayers.

You arrive at Church. Don't worry about where to sit. You will either be shown, or you can sit where you like. Get comfortable, and if you have toddlers don't straight jacket them to the pew but let them explore. As you long as you are aware of their own safety, all congregations in this day and age welcome little ones exploring the Church. An inquisitive mind is better off quietly exploring, than screaming because it can't move.

And if there is some noise don't worry about standing up and walking round the Church to comfort the child.

The service begins and this collect is said-

*Our Lord Jesus Christ has told us
that to enter the kingdom of heaven
we must be born again of water and the Spirit,
and has given us baptism as the sign and seal
of this new birth.*

Here we are washed by the Holy Spirit and made clean.

*Here we are clothed with Christ,
dying to sin that we may live his risen life.
As children of God, we have a new dignity
and God calls us to fullness of life.*

This washing of sin is important even for children. We are born into a world in which humanity has got too big for its boots; try to imagine that baptism is a washing away of these delusions of grandeur that are given to us by the world by our very birth. The world has a lot to answer for, and when we are born into it we become part of its story. Baptism washes away the sins of the world story in our lives.

*Faith is the gift of God to his people.
In baptism the Lord is adding to our number
those whom he is calling. People of God, will
you welcome these children/candidates and
uphold them in their new life in Christ?*

With the help of God, we will.

The minister then says to the parents and godparents;
*Parents and godparents, the Church receives
these children with joy. Today we are trusting
God for their growth in faith. Will you pray
for them, draw them by your example into the
community of faith and walk with them in the
way of Christ?*

With the help of God, we will.

In baptism these children begin their journey in faith. You speak for them today. Will you care for them, and help them to take their place within the life and worship of Christ's Church?

With the help of God, we will.

The congregational, and parent/god-parent responses illuminate how we approach the whole of our lives as Christians. **With the help of God, we will.**

This is a recognition, that what we are called to do, how we are to fulfil our vocation as members of the Church is very onerous and we need all the help we get from God. We cannot possibly manage to be a proper god-parent/parent without God's help.

Priests at their ordination have the same response. We cannot live up to God's standards without God's help.

It is at this point that a large candle is lit and the minister says-

In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The symbol of light, which is re-iterated at the end of the service when the candidates are given a candle of their own, is very important. It demonstrates the movement from darkness to light. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the light of the world illuminating our journeys before us.

Think of this light like a lighthouse and you are the ship. A ship encounters tempestuous seas regardless of the lighthouse. You can choose to ignore the Lighthouse and some people do get away with it and don't dashed upon the rocks. But how much easier it is to follow the guidance of the Lighthouse and escape the rocks. Of course it doesn't make the sea calmer, but we can avoid the eternal dangers of rocks.

Then the minister will ask these questions-

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

I repent of them.

If you have a problem with these three than speak to your minister immediately!

The next three questions are more difficult.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

I turn to Christ.

Do you face Christ with humility?

I am humbled before Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

I come to Christ.

This really is a commitment to further your own journeys and explore within yourselves. These questions are not easily understandable, but you are promising to find out what they could mean for you. In a very basic way, these questions ask do you accept that Jesus Christ's teachings on love, peace and forgiveness are teachings that you wish your family to adopt.

SIGNING WITH THE CROSS

The minister makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of each candidate, saying

Christ claims you for his own.

Receive the sign of his cross.

The sign of the cross is a daily sign to remind Christians of their faith. It is a sign to help them in times of persecution; which during the 2nd century was pretty horrific. The sign is made by the minister on the babies head like a police identification mark- it is invisible but indelible- in our case as a mark of our belonging to Christ.

The oil that is used by the minister to make the sign of the cross is blessed by the Bishop on Maundy Thursday and unites the whole of Christendom. In the Old Testament, Kings were anointed with oil when they were made king. (Saul, David, Solomon) We are reminded of St. Paul's metaphor of an athlete running a race; and the oil is used as part of our preparation for our race.

Water is an essential part of life and our baptism. God has used water at significant points in the story of creation, and the prayer over the water in preparation for the baptism reflects this. The prayer speaks for itself, but if you have any questions please ask your minister.

We thank you, almighty God, for the gift of water
to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life.
Over water the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.
Through water you led the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land.
In water your Son Jesus received the baptism of John
and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us from the death of sin to newness of life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism.
In it we are buried with Christ in his death.
By it we share in his resurrection.
Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.
Therefore, in joyful obedience to your Son, we baptize into his fellowship those who come to him in faith.

Now sanctify this water that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, they may be cleansed from sin and born again.

Renewed in your image, may they walk by the
light of faith
and continue for ever in the risen life of
Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom with you and the
Holy Spirit
be all honour and glory, now and for ever.
Amen.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

The minister addresses the congregation
*Brothers and sisters, I ask you to profess
together with these candidates the faith of the
Church.*

*Do you believe and trust in God the Father, who
made the world?*

**Parents and God-parents: I believe and trust in
him.**

*Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus
Christ, who redeemed humanity?*

**Parents and Godparents: I believe and trust in
him.**

*Do you believe and trust in his Holy Spirit who
gives life to the people of God.*

**Parents and Godparents: I believe and trust in
him.**

This is the faith of the Church

**All: This is our faith. We believe and trust in
one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

The Christian Church believes in the Trinity.
One God, three persons Father, Son and Holy
Spirit. Volumes and volumes have been written
regarding what the doctrine of the Trinity may
be. Essentially you can see the Trinity as one

family and what is important is how they relate to one another. Or you can see the Trinity as believing three ways in one God- a recognition that our knowledge of God has been received in three different ways- Creator (Father), Redeemer (Son- Christ Jesus), Sanctifier (Holy Spirit). You are affirming that you believe in this Trinitarian God. Now this may be a bit of a shock to the system. But don't worry. Part of the journey of faith is wrestling within ourselves how we see God. It is important though that these vows are taken, at the very least as an acknowledgement that we recognise that there is a higher power (we call God), creating, redeeming and sanctifying the world.

Then it is the baptism of your baby using these words which again re-iterate the Christian faith in the Trinitarian God-

N, I baptize you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The service continues and we are all reminded of our commission, to help and encourage all those who are baptised in their journey of faith.

It is the role of every Christian and in particular the godparents to help your baby grow up exploring their own spiritual journey. The best way of doing this is for the godparents to be open about their own journey. The best way is not just to tell their godchild what should be believed but help the child explore what they believe. After all we are all different, have a different view and outlook on life based on our own experiences. These journeys are of course joined together in the one story.

The Candle is given as the final act of the service to lead your little baby back into the world, with the light of Christ shining before him, illuminating their path.

God has delivered us from the dominion of
darkness
and has given us a place with the saints in
light.
you have received the light of Christ;
walk in this light all the days of your life.
Shine as a light in the world
to the glory of God the Father.

Conclusion

Now is the time to ask those questions. But above all enjoy your baptism service and always remember this is a new beginning on all our journeys. For by the baptism of your child the Churches story has been enriched.

Just because the baptism service has now occurred, that is not the end of the story.

Every Church of England minister is always available for anyone at anytime. Together the big story is made up of our interwoven journeys with the Christian pattern of life as we move not only ourselves, but the whole world from the darkness to light, death to life, self to God.

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