



St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church

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Dear Parents and Families,

I'd like to offer my heartfelt congratulations as you prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism for your child! This is a beautiful and sacred moment not only for your family, but for the entire Church. In baptism, your child will be reborn in Christ, freed from original sin, and welcomed into the family of God. What a tremendous gift!

Thank you for saying "yes" to this step of faith. In doing so, you are committing to raise your child in the love of Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Baptism is not simply a ritual or a tradition, rather it is the beginning of a lifelong journey of grace, faith, and community. Your witness as parents, godparents, and family members is essential. Children learn what it means to know and love God first and foremost through the example of those closest to them.

This moment is also an invitation: to reflect on your own faith, to renew your relationship with Christ, and to take your place more fully in the life of the Church. Our parish is here to support you not only in preparing for the baptismal day itself, but in walking with you as your family grows in faith. I encourage you to stay close to the sacraments, to be active in the life of our parish, and to find joy in teaching your child to pray, love, and serve.

To the godparents, I extend a special word of gratitude. Your role is important, spiritual, and lasting. Your encouragement, prayers, and example of Christian living will be a vital support to this child for years to come.

May this time of preparation be filled with grace and joy. I look forward to celebrating this sacrament with you and welcoming your child into the family of faith.

Peace to you and your family,

Fr. Matthew Duclos
Pastor, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish

Purpose of Baptism

Baptism is the first of the seven sacraments and the “gateway to the Christian life” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1213). It is the foundational sacrament by which a person is freed from original sin, reborn as a child of God, and incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church. Through baptism, one receives sanctifying grace and becomes a sharer in the divine life of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan River by John, not because he needed repentance, but to sanctify the waters and to show us the way. Before his Ascension, Jesus commissioned his followers:

“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.” (Matthew 28:19)

This commission remains at the heart of the Church’s mission today.

Baptism is more than a ritual; it is a spiritual transformation. It imprints a permanent mark, or “character,” on the soul, identifying the person as belonging to Christ forever. This is why the Church teaches that baptism can never be repeated. It is a once-for-all gift that opens the door to a new identity in Christ and a lifelong call to holiness.

The Symbolism of Baptism

Every element of the baptismal rite is rich in meaning:

- **Water** symbolizes cleansing, death to sin, and the birth of new life.
- **Oil** signifies the sealing of the Holy Spirit and the strengthening for Christian living.
- **The white garment** reflects the purity of a soul cleansed of sin.
- **The baptismal candle**, lit from the Paschal candle, represents the light of Christ given to the newly baptized to shine in the world.

These symbols express outwardly what God is doing inwardly: making the person a new creation, filled with divine life.

Baptism and the Christian Life

Baptism is not the end of a spiritual moment, it is the beginning of a journey. It leads to the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confirmation, and commits the baptized to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Parents and godparents promise to raise the child in the faith, but ultimately, baptism calls the person to a life of ongoing conversion, participation in the sacramental life, and service to others.

In a world that often defines people by what they achieve, acquire, or appear to be, baptism reminds us of our true identity: beloved sons and daughters of God. That identity is the source of our deepest dignity and hope.

What Baptism Leads to in Faith

Baptism is a profound beginning, not a one-time event or a mere tradition. It opens the door to a life lived in Christ. To fully appreciate its meaning, it helps to understand what baptism is not, as well as what it truly is.

What Baptism Is *Not*:

- **Not a cultural or social ritual:** Baptism is not simply a way to celebrate a new baby or fulfill a family tradition. It is a sacred sacrament with eternal significance.
- **Not a "get into heaven" guarantee:** Baptism removes original sin and offers sanctifying grace, but it also calls for a lifetime response of faith, love, and discipleship.
- **Not an isolated moment:** It is not a one-time religious event disconnected from the rest of life. It begins a relationship that must be nurtured.
- **Not just for the child:** The sacrament involves a commitment by parents and godparents to live and model the faith.
- **Not a private affair:** Baptism incorporates the person into the wider Church. It is always a public act of becoming part of the Christian community.

What Baptism *Is*:

- **The gateway to the Christian life:** Baptism is the first sacrament of initiation, leading to the others (Confirmation and Eucharist) and a life of full participation in the Church.
- **A cleansing from sin:** It removes original sin and, if applicable, any personal sin, making the person spiritually new (cf. Acts 2:38).
- **A spiritual rebirth:** The baptized person becomes a beloved child of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- **A call to discipleship:** Baptism marks the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith, in which we are called to follow Christ and live out the Gospel.
- **A vocation to holiness and mission:** The baptized share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly roles and are called to bring His light to the world.
- **An incorporation into the Body of Christ:** Through baptism, one becomes a member of the universal Church—the People of God—and shares in its mission and communion.

For Parents

Welcoming a child into the Catholic Church through baptism is a sacred responsibility. The Church takes seriously the roles of parents and godparents, not as formalities, but as people who will help the child grow in faith and in relationship with Christ. Because of this, the Church has established clear guidelines to ensure that the promises made during baptism are supported by a life of faith and lived witness.

Parents

As parents, you are the first and most important teachers of your child in the ways of faith. Your love, your example, and your commitment to Christ and the Church are what will shape your child's spiritual life in the years to come. When you bring your child forward for baptism, you are also professing your own intention to raise your child in the Catholic faith: bringing them to Mass, teaching them to pray, forming them in virtue, and helping them prepare to receive the other sacraments.

Parents seeking baptism for their child must:

- Be willing to raise the child in the Catholic faith.
- Be practicing Catholics, attending Mass and living a life consistent with Church teaching.
- Attend a parish Baptism Preparation Session, unless they already attended.

For Godparents

Choosing a godparent is not just about honoring a close friend or family member, it is about choosing someone who will be a strong spiritual companion and role model for your child. The Church requires that godparents be practicing Catholics who live their faith with integrity and are able to serve as authentic witnesses to the Gospel.

Sometimes, families may wish to name someone who is deeply loved but does not fully meet the requirements set by the Church. For example, someone who is not Catholic, or not fully practicing. While we understand these desires, we ask you to prayerfully choose someone who can truly fulfill the spiritual role of a godparent. A beloved friend or relative who is not Catholic may still take part in the celebration as a Christian witness, but only a practicing Catholic who meets the Church's criteria may serve as a godparent.

This is not meant to exclude or diminish anyone's importance in your family, rather it's meant to ensure that your child has at least one godparent who can confidently guide and support them in their journey as a Catholic. The role is not honorary, but missionary. The Church hopes that the godparent will be a steady source of encouragement, wisdom, and faith in the life of your child.

According to Canon Law (can. 872–874), to serve as a godparent:

1. Only one male or one female godparent is required, or one of each (can. 873).
2. A godparent must:
 - Be at least 16 years old, unless an exception is made by the pastor (can. 874 §1, 2°).
 - Be a fully initiated Catholic, having received Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist (can. 874 §1, 3°).
 - Be a practicing Catholic living a life in harmony with the faith, free of any canonical penalties (can. 874 §1, 4°).
 - Not be the child's parent (can. 874 §1, 5°).
3. A baptized non-Catholic Christian may serve as a Christian witness, but not as a godparent, and only alongside a Catholic godparent (can. 874 §2).

If the godparent is married, the marriage must be valid in the eyes of the Church (i.e., married in the Church or with canonical permission). Godparents are encouraged to be active in the child's life not only at the ceremony but throughout the years as guides, supporters, and examples of Catholic Christian living.

The Baptismal Rite: What Happens During the Sacrament

The Rite of Baptism includes the following elements:

1. **Reception of the Child** – The priest or deacon welcomes the child and asks the parents what they seek for the child.
2. **Sign of the Cross** – The celebrant, parents, and godparents trace the sign of the cross on the child's forehead.
3. **Liturgy of the Word** – Scripture is proclaimed, and a short homily may be given.
4. **Prayer of the Faithful** and **Litany of the Saints** – The community prays for the child, family, and Church.
5. **Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens** – The child is strengthened against evil and prepared for the sacrament.
6. **Blessing of the Baptismal Water**
7. **Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith** – Parents and godparents profess faith on behalf of the child.
8. **Baptism with Water** – The child is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
9. **Anointing with Chrism** – The child is anointed to share in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king.
10. **Clothing with the White Garment** – Symbol of purity and new life in Christ.
11. **Lighting of the Baptismal Candle** – Sign of the light of Christ now present in the child's life.
12. **Final Blessing** – A blessing is given for the child, parents, and all present.

Expectations After Baptism

Baptism is a beginning, not an end! After the celebration:

- **Parents are responsible for raising the child in the faith:**
 - Regular Mass attendance.
 - Teaching prayer and Christian values at home.
 - Continuing faith formation through Catholic education or parish religious education.
- **Participation in parish life:** Families are encouraged to become active in parish ministries and community life.
- **Preparation for the next sacraments:** The baptized child should later prepare for First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation.
- **Witnessing by example:** Children learn faith most powerfully by the daily witness of their parents and godparents.

On the date of the baptism, we place an angel with the baptized person's name on the back wall of our church. All families are invited and welcomed to a Mass the weekend of January 10-11, 2026 as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, at which time all the angels will be given back to their families. This will happen at each weekend Mass: Saturday 5:00pm, Sunday 7:30am, 10:30am, and 5:00pm.

Scheduling Baptisms

The Church teaches that baptism should take place as soon as possible after birth. Canon Law states:

“As soon as possible after the birth, or even before it, parents are to go to the parish priest to request the sacrament for their child and to be prepared properly for it.”

This early timing reflects the Church’s deep belief in the gift of baptism, that it is not just a symbolic gesture, but a real encounter with God’s grace that brings spiritual rebirth. Delaying baptism without serious reason unnecessarily postpones this vital beginning of a child’s life in Christ.

A Welcoming Church

No matter a person’s age or background, the Church receives each one with joy. Baptism is never too late, it is always a beginning. If you or your child is over the age of 7 and seeking baptism, we invite you to speak with a member of the parish staff. We will walk with you in faith and guide you through the preparation process, step by step.

Scheduling the Celebration

While the baptism itself can be celebrated on various days, the Church recommends:

- **Sundays:** Since Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, it is especially appropriate for baptism, which unites us with Christ’s death and resurrection.
- **Within the Mass** (if possible): Baptizing during weekend Mass emphasizes the connection between the newly baptized and the parish community. However, baptisms outside of Mass are also common and fully valid.
- **During the Easter Season:** The season of Easter, especially the Easter Vigil, is a powerful time for baptisms because of its strong themes of new life, light, and resurrection.

At St. Thomas, baptisms are scheduled during the first Saturday of each month at 10:00am and the first weekend of the month during these Masses: Saturday at 5:00pm, or Sunday at 10:30am and 5:00pm.

Contact

Louise Schrecongost is responsible for scheduling baptisms, please contact her with any questions: 518-439-4951, or lschrecongost@stthomas-church.org.

Baptism Preparation

As part of the baptismal process, parents are asked to attend a Baptismal Preparation Class, especially if this is their first child being baptized. This session provides an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the sacrament, review the symbols and prayers used in the rite, and understand the promises you will make on behalf of your child. Even for those familiar with the faith, this class offers a fresh perspective on the grace and responsibility of raising a child in the Catholic tradition. It's also a chance to ask questions, connect with other families, and become more involved in the life of the parish community. We encourage parents to attend with open hearts, ready to deepen their own faith as they prepare to share it with their child.

These classes are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm in the Parish Office at St. Thomas:

35 Adams Place
Delmar, NY 12054

Godparents are also welcome!

Baptism Preparation for People Over Age 7

While infant baptism is common in the Catholic Church, many people come to the faith later in life. The Church joyfully welcomes children, youth, and adults who seek baptism at any age. When a person has reached the age of reason (generally considered to be age 7 and older), the Church recognizes that they are capable of personal faith and understanding. As a result, the preparation and celebration of baptism looks different than it does for infants.

Children (Ages 7–High School)

Children who are over the age of 7 are no longer baptized as infants. Instead, they are prepared through a process called the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children (OCIA). This includes:

- Age-appropriate catechesis (religious instruction)
- Participation in the life of the parish community
- Regular attendance at Mass and prayer opportunities
- Involvement of their parents or guardians in the preparation process

This is an individualized process that is tailored to the family. Please contact the office to arrange these details: office@stthomas-church.org.

Adults

Adults who have never been baptized enter into the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA). This is a more extended journey of formation, prayer, and discernment, often lasting several months or even a full liturgical year. OCIA typically includes:

- Regular catechetical sessions on the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith
- Spiritual formation and opportunities for personal prayer
- Participation in the liturgy and life of the parish
- A supportive community of sponsors, catechists, and fellow seekers

Adult baptisms are usually celebrated at the Easter Vigil, the most sacred night of the Church year. At this liturgy, adult candidates receive all three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Please contact the office for additional details: office@stthomas-church.org.

A Welcoming Church

No matter your age or life experience, the Church welcomes you with open arms and joy. Baptism is never out of reach. If you or your child is older than 7 and interested in being baptized, we encourage you to connect with a member of our parish team. We're here to journey with you in faith and support you through each step of the preparation.