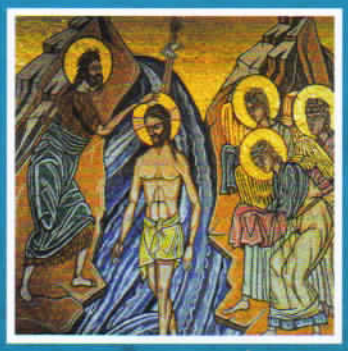
CELEBRATING











YOUR CHILD'S

BAPTISM



WELCOME TO BAPTISM

—the sacrament that opens the door of faith to your child!

God reaches out to us in all kinds of ways. The desire in your heart to baptize your child is one of them. The promises you make for your child on this day will begin to form your child into a faith-filled and faithful follower of Christ. But the day of baptism is only the beginning of your role. Being baptized is literally a life-changing event—and not just for your child.

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WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

When you called your parish to arrange your child's baptism, you may have been surprised to find out how much emphasis your pastor (or his delegate) placed on your own practice of the faith. The Church very reasonably wants to know what kind of a faith example you are going to set for your child, as you become his or her first teachers in faith. Whatever your level of faith commitment at this point, the baptism of your child offers a great opportunity to deepen your appreciation for and experience of the faith.

We Catholics do not worship or witness our faith in a vacuum. As a community, all of us by virtue of our own baptism are called to proclaim the faith and teach it to our little ones. Community—from the smallest domestic church (i.e., your immediate family) to your child's wider world encompassing the godparents, grandparents, relatives, and friends, to the whole parish, and, yes, to the universal Church as the body of Christ—is what we're all about, and what we're eager to share with you.



A little history

In the earliest days of the Church, it wasn't easy to be a Christian. People made the commitment as adults and courageously faced the very real possibility that embracing the faith might mean defending it with their lives, because Christianity was an illegal religion. The elements they used—water, oil, a white garment, and a candle—are the same as we use today.

WATER

In early times, "passing through" the water was a clear sign of dying to one's old life and being reborn as a follower of Christ. Today some parishes celebrate baptism by immersing the baby into the water. Don't worry though if your baby is, instead, dipped into the water three times (in honor of the Trinity). It's the same sacrament.

OIL

Anointing with oil was a common practice for the early Christians and all ancient people. Ancient athletes rubbed themselves with oil to prepare their muscles for competition. In baptism, perfumed oil was rubbed into the skin and hair. For days the newly baptized could be identified by the way they smelled.

WHITE GARMENT

The earliest Christians wore a white garment for eight days after baptism as an outward sign to show the world that they were following a different path. White, of course, is a sign of purity.

CANDLE

Early Christians took the symbol of the light of Christ very seriously. Those awaiting baptism stood facing the darkest part of the night sky (right before dawn) and renounced their past lives and all that had to do with darkness—sin, the glamour of evil, and Satan himself. Then they would turn to face the east as the sun rose on Easter Sunday morning and would make their professions of belief in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the candle was lit from the paschal candle, which had just been lit for the first time, it was clear that the newly baptized now possessed the light of Christ, which would light their paths from then on.









You are your child's first teachers in the faith, the first witnesses of the faith they will see. The pastor (or his delegate) wants to do everything possible to ensure that you understand the faith that we are, as the baptismal rite says, "proud to profess." The words used in the sacrament are significant and full of meaning:

Celebrant: ***"The Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ."*** CLAIM—what a strong and action-filled word! What a responsibility for the parents to ask this for their child!

ASK YOURSELF:

- *What do I like about being a Catholic?*
- *What would I like to better understand about my faith?*
- *How often does my family pray together?*

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

This brief summary is only a small part of what you'll be sharing with your child as he or she enters the Church. If you haven't had any recent formal training in the faith, your child's baptism is a good time for you as a couple to find ways to learn more about the Catholic faith yourselves. Don't be reluctant to ask for sources of information. No one knows everything about his or her faith.



Baptism cleanses

What about original sin? The Church still teaches that we are all born with original sin, and baptism cleanses us and strengthens us to resist sin. But another essential aspect of this sacrament is that it welcomes and celebrates new members of the family of God.



You too are a sacramental sign

Children also learn about Catholicism in faith formation classes or in Catholic school. They also learn about their faith when they're preparing for first reconciliation, first communion, or confirmation. However, these sacraments are not endpoints, but rather steps along the way, and learning to live as Catholics will continue throughout their lives.

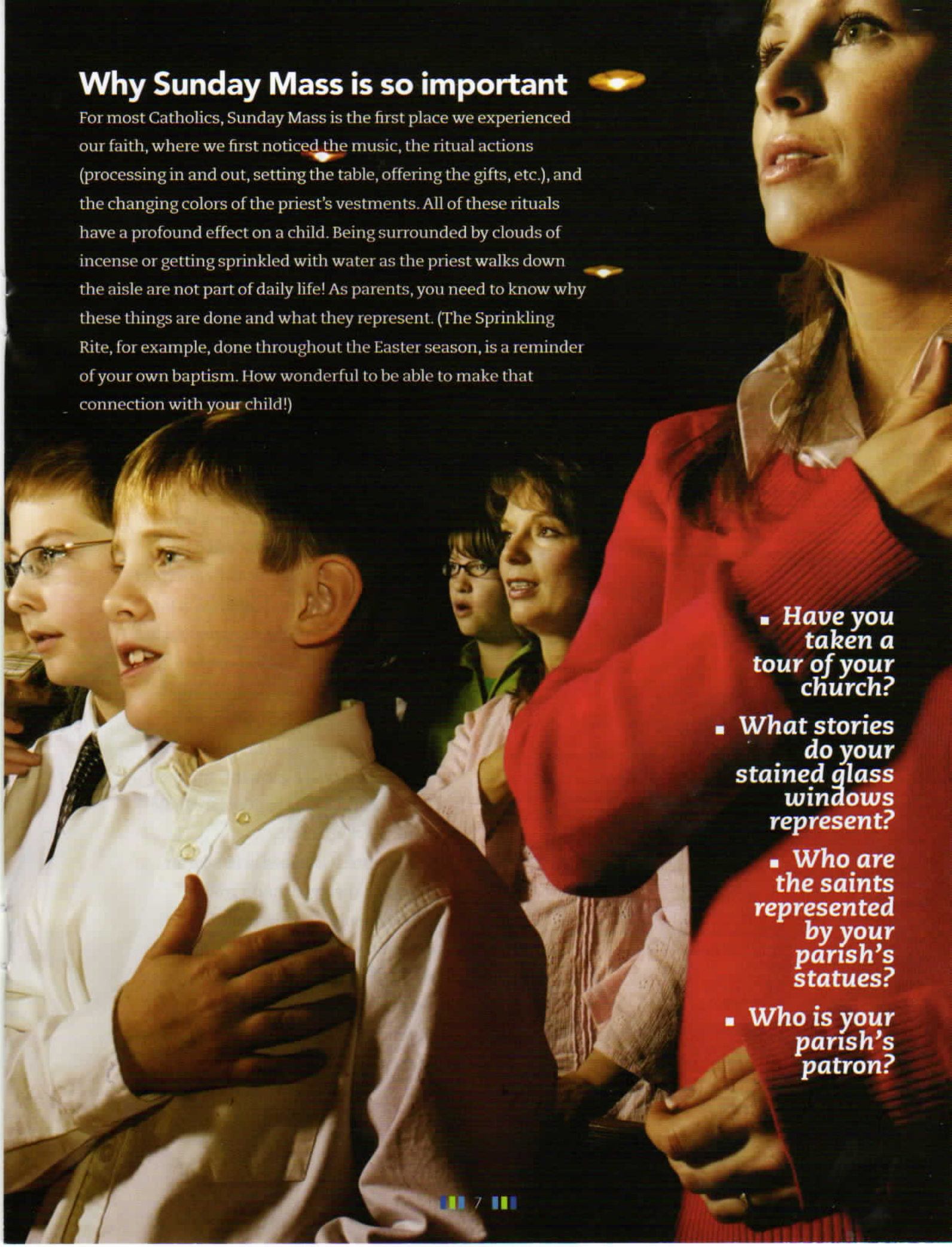
The Church teaches that a sacrament is a way of using everyday things to make the holy visible. Your union as a married couple is one such sacramental sign; your child is another. Remember that you, as parents, state in the baptism rite that you are proud to profess your faith.

WHAT **CATHOLIC TRADITIONS** OR **CUSTOMS** DO YOU OBSERVE IN YOUR HOME?

- *Do you have pictures of the Blessed Mother or the saints?*
- *Do you say grace before meals?*
- *Do you have a family Advent wreath?*
- *Do you set up a manger scene at Christmas?*
- *How do you commemorate Good Friday or Easter?*

Why Sunday Mass is so important

For most Catholics, Sunday Mass is the first place we experienced our faith, where we first noticed the music, the ritual actions (processing in and out, setting the table, offering the gifts, etc.), and the changing colors of the priest's vestments. All of these rituals have a profound effect on a child. Being surrounded by clouds of incense or getting sprinkled with water as the priest walks down the aisle are not part of daily life! As parents, you need to know why these things are done and what they represent. (The Sprinkling Rite, for example, done throughout the Easter season, is a reminder of your own baptism. How wonderful to be able to make that connection with your child!)



- *Have you taken a tour of your church?*
- *What stories do your stained glass windows represent?*
- *Who are the saints represented by your parish's statues?*
- *Who is your parish's patron?*

YOUR ROLE AT THE CEREMONY

Not that long ago, the godparents were the most important witnesses at the baptism. Now the role of the parents is much larger. As the first teachers of the faith for your child, you are the ones who will make the promises on his or her behalf. You and your child are the ones who will be blessed and prayed for. Don't be nervous, your parish leaders will help you fulfill this task with joy and confidence.



WHAT IS THE GODPARENTS' ROLE?

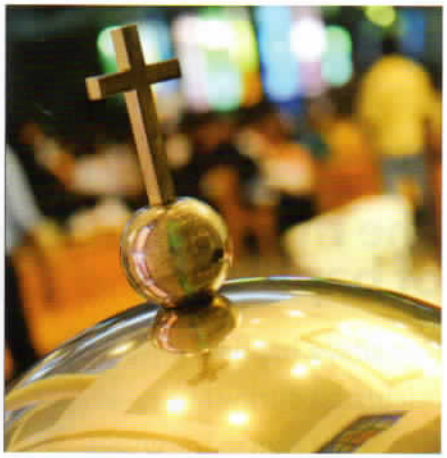
The ones you choose to be godparents or sponsors for your child should be people who are good, patient, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic witnesses of the faith. Both godparents should be Catholics who have received the sacrament of confirmation. A non-Catholic Christian can also stand as a witness for a Catholic child, as long as the other sponsor is a confirmed Catholic. Non-Christians cannot stand as sponsors, because the rite calls for affirming belief in the Trinity, and non-Christians do not have that belief. Godparents should expect to take part in the parish preparation for baptism, either where the sacrament will be celebrated or at their home parish.

During the ceremony, the godparents make the promises of faith along with the parents. For example, the godmother will present the white garment, and the godfather will light the baptismal candle from the paschal candle.

Godparents, it is hoped, will take an active role in their godchild's growth in faith and build a loving, trust-filled relationship with the child. As your child grows, there may be issues he or she might not want to discuss with you as parents; godparents can be the perfect sounding board on these occasions.







THE BIG DAY: WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

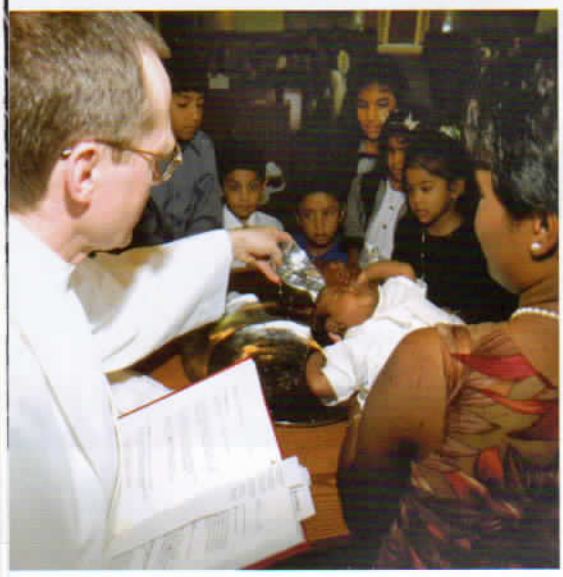
Parishes typically have their own schedules for baptisms, and it's necessary to abide by them because of the number of children being baptized and the other activities of the parish or duties of the priest.

Baptisms are traditionally not celebrated during the season of Lent, because Lent is observed as a time of repentance and growth that leads toward Easter, the season of resurrection, rebirth, and new life in Christ.

The rite of baptism

Nowadays, baptism is frequently celebrated during Mass—a wonderful sign to the whole assembled community of the vibrancy of our faith. If this is the case for you, a welcoming will likely take place right as Mass begins.

The priest or deacon will welcome you and your child at the door of the church and will ask you first what name you have given your child. This is to remind you that God calls us by name. We are very important in God's eyes!



Priest: *(to parents)* What name have you given your child?

Parents: *(Name)*

Priest: What do you ask of God's Church for *(Name)?*

Parents: Baptism.

Priest: *(to parents)* You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?

Parents: We do.

Priest: *(to godparents)* Godparents, are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?

Godparents: We are.

Priest: *(Name)*, the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name, I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of his cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead and invite your parents and godparents to do the same. *(Sign child in silence.)*



Sharing Scripture at baptism

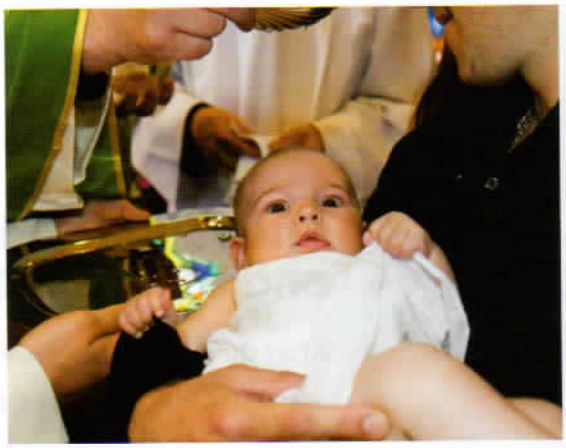
All the events of our lives, including baptism, are enriched by hearing stories of faith. The Bible is our storybook, and as we prepare to commit our children to God, we need to hear what the Bible says about the passage from death to new life in Christ.

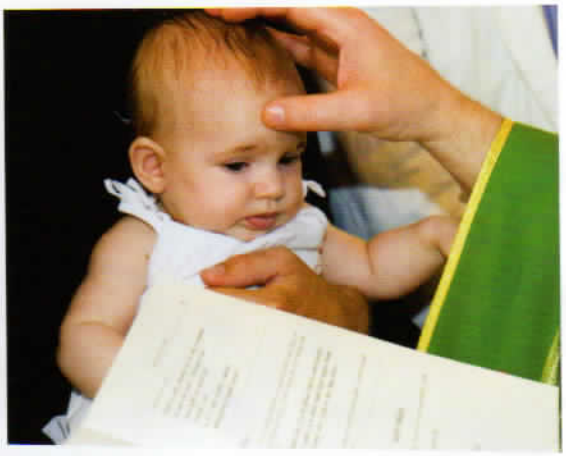
The renunciations and the promises

After the homily, the priest will ask you to come forward, and the priest or deacon will ask three questions of the parents and godparents about the renunciation of sin.

"Do you reject Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises?" The response to each question will be "I do."

Three additional questions will then be asked about your belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as well as other aspects of our faith. Again, the response is "I do." After the questions have been answered, the celebrant will say, "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church, which we are proud to profess." Then, and this is very important, he will ask again if it is still your wish to have your child baptized. Why does he do this? Because you have just affirmed your faith. Part of your affirmation of the faith is raising your child in the faith, a very serious matter.





Water

If it is still your wish to have your child baptized, the baptism rite continues.

The priest or deacon will already have blessed the water. Now he will pour water on your child's forehead three times, representing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you have a baptismal pool in your parish, your child might, instead, be immersed three times. Sometimes, a parent or godparent holds the newly baptized child up for all in the church to see. Don't be concerned if your child cries during the baptism itself or during any part of the baptism. Crying is normal.

Blessed oil

Next comes the sacred chrism, the oil that consecrates your child as "priest, prophet, and king." While towels are provided to dry off the water, the chrism is meant to stay until it evaporates. This moment of anointing is what "seals" the baptism, marking your child as a true member of God's family.

White garment

The garment symbolizes your child's rebirth as a follower of Christ, and the white color is a sign of purity. The parish usually provides such a garment to remind you that baptism is a profound moment in your child's life, one that remains long after the ceremony itself.

The Church is consistent in its emphasis on the importance of baptism. The parish provides the white pall that covers the casket at every funeral. The pall is the end-of-life complement to the white garment of baptism. At every funeral, too, the introductory prayers remind the mourners that baptism was the moment when their loved one died in Christ, so that now they may be reborn.

Baptism truly influences your child's entire life!



Baptismal candle

The candle symbolizes the light of Christ that is now aglow within your child. This light will always be there, because Christ will always be there to guide and inspire your child to live as a Catholic Christian. You are encouraged to celebrate the anniversary of your child's baptism by lighting the candle on the anniversary day. (This tradition, by the way, gave rise to the practice of birthday candles.)

Blessings and good wishes

If your child is baptized at Mass, the rest of the Mass might follow the baptism, with blessings at the end of Mass. In some parishes, the blessings are done immediately after the presentation of the baptismal candle. These blessings are for the child, for the parents, for the godparents. All are reminded that this is the beginning of the child's faith journey. It won't be long before the child is walking down the church aisle to receive first reconciliation, first communion, and later confirmation, and perhaps eventually matrimony or holy orders.



DOWN THE ROAD ON YOUR FAMILY'S FAITH JOURNEY

Congratulations on your child's baptism! May the welcome your child has experienced today infuse your family's faith life for all time!

During your preparation, you heard a good deal about the solemn promises you and the godparents would be making on your child's behalf. Now that the promises have been made, your child has journeyed through the water, been anointed, clothed in a white garment, and given the light of Christ. What will this mean to you as life goes on?

It's up to you now to begin sharing the story of the amazing communion of saints, which is the spiritual solidarity that binds us together with the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the same mystical body with Christ at its head. Stories of canonized saints make up part of this, of course, but equally important are the stories of holy people, past and present, who have touched your life—parents, grandparents, teachers, and other role models.

Remember that the Church stands ready and able to help you along the way. Your child has been welcomed as a member of this family of faith and initiated as a member of the Catholic Church for life. There's so much left to learn about celebrating and living this faith!

May God bless you on your journey, and may your child's baptism open the eyes of your heart to live the faith more fully!

FAQs

Why can't the baptism be on my child's birthday?

Baptisms are customarily celebrated on Sunday, the Lord's Day, because every Sunday is a "little Easter," the day when Christ rose from the dead and fulfilled the promise of eternal life for us all. Because this is the day that welcomes your child into the family of God, it's important that it be celebrated on the day when the Christian community gathers.



What does baptism cost?

Sacraments are a gift of God. Gifts aren't gifts if they cost something, so no price can be set on a baptism. Nonetheless, it is perfectly acceptable to make a donation to the church in gratitude.

Should we worry about limbo?

Some people are concerned about limbo. It was once thought to be a place of peace and contentment that isn't quite heaven, where those who haven't been baptized dwell if they should die. But please note: Pope Benedict XVI himself has stated that limbo is not an official teaching of the Church.

I want my brother and his girlfriend to be the godparents. How come they can't be godparents just because they're living together?

The Church takes your child's initiation into the faith very seriously. For that reason, the people you choose to be godparents need to be faith-filled and faithful. It's important that the people you choose as your child's spiritual guides be practicing Catholics.

What happens if one of the godparents can't make it on the day of baptism?

Because of distance, illness, military obligations, or a myriad of other reasons, it is sometimes impossible for a chosen godparent to be present on the day of baptism. In this case, you can invite a family member or friend to stand in as a proxy for the godparent, but the name of the actual godparent will appear on the certificate.

My husband and I want some close friends from church to be our child's godparents, but our families are giving us grief that we're not picking anyone from the family circle. Should we be picking family members?

The essential role of godparents is to be spiritual guides for your child. If you've formed close friendships with people you know to be faith-filled people, you should be very content with that choice. It's always an honor to be chosen to be a godparent, but it's more of an honor if one is chosen for one's faith witness and not just because one is a relative or close friend. That being said, if your siblings or close friends are living a sacramental life, they could certainly be considered as well.



FAMILY PRAYERS

The Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Guardian Angel Prayer

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and in failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

Blessing Before Meals

Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts which we are about to receive, from your bounty, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN BY **Deborah McCann.**

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Published by
TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS
One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200 ■ New London, CT 06320
(860) 437-3012 or (800) 321-0411
www.twentythirdpublications.com

Also distributed by
CREATIVE COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE PARISH
1564 Fencorp Drive ■ Fenton, MO 63026
(636) 305-9777 or (800) 325-9414
www.creativecommunications.com

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ISBN 978-1-58595-818-4 ■ Printed in the U.S.A.

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