

REFLECTIONS ON INFANT BAPTISM

(Guidance for Church Members)

As a church member you are seeking to have your child baptised. Please think very carefully before doing so. Don't be having your child baptised for purely sentimental reasons - just because you yourself were baptised and your parents and grandparents were baptised or because you have a vague feeling it is the right thing to do. It is important for you as a parent to consider the baptism of your child for the right reasons.

First of all here are some things which baptism is not.

It is not a guarantee of good fortune in the future - that is superstition and has no place in the Christian faith.

It is not the guarantee that the child will escape the terrors of hell as though God would consign an unbaptised child who died to hell and take a baptised child to heaven. That too is superstition. Young children are in God's safe-keeping regardless of baptism so any panic on that account is quite inappropriate.

It does not confer on the child the stamp of Protestantism as opposed to Roman Catholicism. The significance of baptism extends beyond denominational boundaries and cannot be used for that purpose.

It is not magic as though by the baptismal ceremony or the water alone, God's favour can be brought to bear automatically on the child's life.

The reason the Church of Scotland requires that at least one parent is a church member is that the baptism of children only makes sense in the context of a genuinely Christian upbringing which includes serious involvement in the life and worship of the church. Parents cannot simply go through the ritual of infant baptism and then almost immediately put the Christian faith and the church "on the back burner" and imagine that they are somehow doing right by their children by the church or by God. Indeed such hypocrisy is likely to result in exactly the reverse of any good which might be assumed for the baptism.

Like marriage the relevance of baptism depends on promises (vows) made. In the case of infant baptism the promises are made on behalf of the child by the parent(s).

The vows of baptism are:-

(i) Do you present this child to be baptised earnestly desiring that he/she may be grafted into Christ as a member of his body the Church?

(In plain English this just asks if you are sincere in your desire that your child should embrace the Christian faith and all that implies in terms of being part of the Church)

(ii) Do you believe in one God, Father Son and Holy Spirit and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?

(iii) Do you promise depending on the grace of God to teach this child the truths and duties of the Christian Faith and by prayer and example to bring him/her up in the life and worship of the church?

Neither the Church of Scotland nor the Kirk Session nor the minister nor God himself is expecting parents to be perfect before they have their children baptised but only to be able to take the vows sincerely.

Sincerity means:-

desiring that above all else your child will grow up to follow Jesus Christ; being a follower of Jesus Christ yourself; being ready to teach your child about God and Jesus along with the teaching of the Bible in general; praying constantly for your child; setting an example of church attendance and involvement in the life of the church.

Often only one parent is a church member in which case the non member parent may wonder whether or not they can take the vows. I would be reluctant to lay down the law here. If the parent in question having read this leaflet feels they can take the vows along with their spouse then my inclination would be to leave the matter to their own conscience and judgement. I would add however that if the non member parent is not at least a church attendee it is hard to see how the second and third vows can be considered relevant. The same criteria would apply to godparents taking vows. Please feel free to discuss the matter further with the minister especially if you are in doubt in any respect.

The Baptism – Information and advice

It is usual to have the child's birth certificate signed and endorsed on the back with the words "baptised by me Rev. D. Cameron McPherson at Dalsersf Parish Church on (date)".

This is not compulsory of course but if you wish this to be done it would be best, if possible, to give the birth certificate to the minister some time before the day of the baptism. This has the added advantage of confirming the name thus reducing the likelihood of any mix up. The birth certificate would be returned shortly after the baptism or even on the day.

Arrive at least 10-15 minutes before the service begins.

Sit with godparent(s) on the front pew facing the pulpit on the organ side.

The baptism will usually take place early in the service. The minister would normally receive the child from the father. The father should therefore ensure that he takes the child some time during the first hymn if he has not done so earlier.

After the first hymn remain standing, while the rest of the congregation sits.

After an introduction the minister will address the vows (see inside) to the parents (and godparents if relevant). The answer to each one is "I do". The congregation is then asked to stand to acknowledge their commitment to the Christian upbringing of the child. The minister takes the child and baptises it. The congregation sing "The Lord bless thee and keep thee" The congregation (but not the parents) sit. A prayer is said. The minister hands the child back to the mother. A gift, usually a child's Bible, is handed to one of the parents.

While parents may feel free to remain with the child in the service (mood and temperament permitting) it is appreciated that one parent may require to leave with the child. In this case you are welcome to wait in the crèche until the service finishes. It is expected that the rest of your family and friends will remain for the whole service.

D.C. McPherson