

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

at Emmanuel Church in the City of Baltimore

-Revised September 2016-

The Foundation of Christian Life

The Christian journey begins with a powerful, ancient act: a priest sprinkles water on the new Christian, whether adult or child, announcing: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” This declaration and this act have, for some 2,000 years, been the means by which seekers are drawn into the lifelong journey of growing in Jesus Christ and opening themselves to the mystery and love which our Triune God desires to share with them.

Baptism is the sacrament by which one becomes a member of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. This momentous event embodies a wealth of meanings: joining in the death of Jesus, being washed of sin, entering the resurrected life of Christ, being anointed by the Holy Spirit, and promising to live in Christ’s community of love and service, the Church. Central to the rite are the profound promises the baptized make to our Lord. However, baptism is, at its heart, not our act but God’s: baptism marks us, claims us, and reaffirms our identity amidst the children of God. The rest of our lives are forever transformed into the long, sometimes difficult journey of learning to trust such an immense gift and to shape our lives to reflect it. Baptism is, in short, the beginning of a whole new way of life in which Jesus Christ is our guide, companion and savior.

Central to the meaning of baptism is that it draws us into the Gospel message as revealed in the life of the Church. One of the most important modern writers on Christian ritual, Aidan Kavanaugh, succinctly summarizes this distinctive meaning of Holy Baptism:

The Church baptizes a convert not upon the basis of the convert having been intrigued by some Christian doctrines, attracted by the Christian stance on moral issues, or pleased by the aesthetics of some ceremony. It baptizes in the conviction that the convert either has begun by the Holy Spirit to live in Christ already or shares a marked likelihood of coming to do so in at some future point in the fullest and most explicit ecclesial way. Faith, in this view [...] is a way of life in Christ among his holy ones.¹

One thing this implies is that baptism—whether for adult or child—is never a light or casual matter. It entails the great gift of being claimed among God’s children, and we recognize and accept its

¹ Kavanaugh, Aidan. *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1978. 159.

centrality to our own lives in the vows we make as part of the service.

A Sacrament for Adults and Children

Because a person makes such momentous promises in Baptism (see “The Baptismal Covenant,” pgs. 303-304, in *The Book of Common Prayer*), the Church has felt from its beginnings that it was best for adults to make their own decisions regarding this important step in their spiritual journey. From the earliest days of the Church, infants were baptized when it was likely they would be brought up within a Church community. Thus parents, godparents, and all those gathered make vows on behalf of the child in the modern rite of baptism. That fact underscores the importance of these different levels of community in the child’s faith journey, and it makes evident why at least one parent needs to be an active participant in the life of the Church. It is the sacred responsibility of the Church to prepare parents, godparents and sponsors for the crucial role they undertake.

Baptismal Customs of the Church

Requirements for Baptism

A step as momentous as that of Baptism should never be undertaken lightly. It is expected that adults who wish to be baptized will enter into a period of concentrated preparation and prayer in consultation with a member of the clergy, including the Emmanuel Inquirers’ Class or similar preparation as approved by the clergy of the church. This period of preparation will include regular worship and a deepening involvement in the church community.

For a child to be baptized, at least one parent must be a baptized Christian and should be involved in the life of Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Parents (and, as possible, godparents or sponsors) are expected to attend a preparation course and rehearsal.

The Role of Parents and Godparents

The Book of Common Prayer states the following (298):

Sponsors of adults and older children present the candidates and thereby signify their endorsement of their candidates and their intention to support them by prayer and example in the Christian life. Sponsors of infants, commonly called godparents, present their candidates, make promises in their own names and also take vows on behalf of their candidates.

Given this understanding of the role of a sponsor, it is important that these individuals be carefully and prayerfully chosen. A traditional number of godparents chosen has been two, though some parents are choosing three or more in light of an increasingly mobile society and the parents’ desire to assure the regular presence of godparents in their child’s life. Godparents should be

chosen for their willingness to commit themselves to caring deeply for the child and nurture their spiritual growth. They need not be Episcopalians; however, they must be baptized persons and they should be active participants in this or some other church. After all, they are to be the baptized's model and guide to what it means into live the Christian life!

The Time and Place for Baptism

The service in *The Book of Common Prayer* calls for a service of Holy Baptism to be (a) public, (b) held within the individual's local congregation and (c) held on one of the five principal occasions in the life of the Church Each of these bears some explanation.

Why Public?

To be baptized means to enter the life of the Church. In Baptism, we become members of Christ's Body and heirs of God's eternal kingdom. There is no such thing as being a Christian outside the family of faith. The entrance of a new member into the Church is an important event in the life of a congregation as it welcomes new members into our family—including vowing to support new members in their journey with Jesus. Therefore, it is extremely important for baptisms to be held as part of the regular, public worship of the church. This allows the whole family of Christ to welcome and receive the new Christian, and provides an opportunity for all members to reaffirm their baptismal vows as part of their own continued growth in Christian discipleship.

Why in the Local Parish?

As previously discussed, Baptism is performed with the expectation that the individual will live into the promises they make (or in the case of infant baptism, made on their behalf) during the baptismal service. Therefore, it is most appropriate that these promises be made in the presence of those specific people—namely, family members, fellow parishioners and the clergy serving in the individual's local parish. This community is, in a very real sense, the baptized person's Christian family, and they will pray, worship, and otherwise participate in the life of the church with them, all with the intention of supporting the newly baptized in fulfilling those promises made at baptism.

On rare occasions, someone who lives and worships elsewhere may be baptized at Emmanuel Church if it is deemed appropriate by our clergy. In such cases, it is expected that the minister of the church in which that person normally worships will send a letter to the staff giving assurance that the person and/or sponsors have been prepared for baptism and that the newly baptized person will be properly received at a principal service of the parish where they are an active member. All of this is done under the fundamental assumption that those being baptized will enter into full participation in the life of the Church in the local parish where they live.

Why Only on Certain Occasions?

The Book of Common Prayer recommends that, as far as possible, Holy Baptism be administered only on one of five occasions. Four of these are principal feast days of the Church: the Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints' Day (Nov. 1st or the following Sunday), and the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord. The one other occasion is upon the visit from a bishop. The suggestion that baptism is most appropriate on these occasions illustrates the importance of the sacrament and knits it into the larger tapestry of the annual and historical life of the Church.

Under extraordinary circumstances, baptism may also be scheduled in conjunction with other principal Sunday services in order to accommodate the needs of the congregation and upon the approval of our clergy.

For Additional Information

It may be helpful to review the service of Holy Baptism found in *The Book of Common Prayer* (298-308) and those portions of our Catechism which deal with the sacraments and, especially, baptism (857-859). There are no charges whatsoever involved with the Sacrament of Baptism. It is a free gift of God's love channeled through the Church's ministry. However, on this as on any particular occasion of joy and gratitude, a gift of thanksgiving may be made to Emmanuel Church.

We trust that you will feel free to call upon a member of our staff for answers to any further questions you may have. Godspeed as you explore this important step in your Christian journey.



EMMANUEL
E P I S C O P A L C H U R C H

Request for Holy Baptism

Instructions: Please type or print clearly, sign, date, and then return the completed form to our parish offices promptly. We cannot hold a space on a particular baptismal date until we have all applicable information. The names you provide here will be the ones entered into official parish records and the baptismal certificate, so please do not use abbreviations or nicknames. Thank you.

Person to Be Baptized

Name: _____
First Middle Last

Gender: _____ Birthdate: _____ Birthplace: _____

Address: _____
Street City, State, and ZIP

Preferred Phone Number: _____ Work/Home/Cell

Preferred E-Mail: _____

Parent/Guardian of the Person to Be Baptized

Name: _____
First Middle Last

Gender: _____ Birthdate: _____ Birthplace: _____

Address: _____
Street City, State, and ZIP

Preferred Phone Number: _____ Work/Home/Cell

Preferred E-Mail: _____

Parent/Guardian of the Person to Be Baptized

Name: _____
First Middle Last

Gender: _____ Birthdate: _____ Birthplace: _____

Address: _____
Street City, State, and ZIP

Preferred Phone Number: _____ Work/Home/Cell

Preferred E-Mail: _____



Godparents/Sponsors of the Person to Be Baptized

“Sponsors of adults and older children present the candidates and thereby signify their endorsement of their candidates and their intention to support them by prayer and example in the Christian life. Sponsors of infants, commonly called godparents, present their candidates, make promises in their own names and also take vows on behalf of their candidates.” –The Book of Common Prayer

Given this definition of the role of a sponsor or godparent, it is important that these individuals be carefully and prayerfully considered and chosen. A traditional number of godparents chosen has been two, though some parents are choosing three or more in light of an increasingly mobile society and the parents’ desire to assure the regular presence of godparents in their child’s life.

Godparents should be chosen for their willingness to commit themselves to caring deeply for the child and nurture their spiritual growth. They need not be Episcopalians; however, they must be baptized persons and they should be deeply committed to the life of their own faith community, its traditions and its practices. After all, they are to be the baptized’s model and guide to what it means into live the Christian life!

Godparents are encouraged to attend the preparation class, usually held on the Saturday immediately prior to the baptism. It is expected that godparents whose names will appear on the child’s baptism certificate will be physically present at the baptism service.

Godparent/Sponsor

Name: _____
First Middle Last

Address: _____
Street City, State, and ZIP

Faith Community: _____

Godparent/Sponsor

Name: _____
First Middle Last

Address: _____
Street City, State, and ZIP

Faith Community: _____

(Please add additional godparents’/sponsors’ information to the back of this form as necessary.)