

Catholic Parish of Lindfield-Killara



Some background information as you prepare
for your child's baptism

Baptism is the sacrament which begins our Christian life. As such, it is never simply a private or a family affair – it is a welcome into the Christian *community* and in particular into the community of the Church or denomination in which the baptism is celebrated.

Baptism brings the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit which came upon Jesus at his own baptism empowering him in his mission, the Spirit which likewise comes upon *us* to give us strength to live as disciples of the Gospel.

Baptism draws us into the life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But it is not only about drawing us into a relationship with God – as a sacrament of welcome it also draws us into a relationship with the Church – the community of the fellow baptised, the community of disciples of Jesus.

And baptism of course is not the end of the journey – it is only the beginning. Baptism is the first of the three sacraments which together we name as “Sacraments of Initiation”: **Baptism** leads on to the celebration of **Confirmation**, a deepening of the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us continue our journey as disciples; and Confirmation leads on to **the Eucharist**, when we become full members of the Church and come forward with the rest of the community to share in the body and blood of the Lord, to be united through that sharing, and strengthened again to live as disciples.

As a parish community we join you in your joy in celebrating your child’s baptism, this gracious gift of God’s Spirit, this welcome into the community of the Church, this beginning of the lifelong journey as a disciple.

This leaflet aims to set out a few pieces of background information which it will be important to take into account as you prepare for the day of your child’s baptism.

Where?

Since baptism is a welcome into the community of the Church it should be celebrated in the local community where one lives and worships and where the child will grow in their journey of faith. Baptism at Immaculate Heart of Mary and Holy Family Churches therefore will normally only be celebrated for children of parents who are *currently* members of the parish community. If strong pastoral reasons exist we may be able to consider celebrating baptism for families who live elsewhere, but once it has been established that such pastoral reasons exist the family would be asked to provide a letter from the Parish Priest where they reside granting permission for the baptism to be celebrated outside their own parish.

Godparents

The role of the godparents is to represent both the Church community in presenting the children for baptism, and to act as a supporter of you, the parents, in your role of nurturing your child’s growth in faith. In the celebration of baptism the godparents are asked the following question:

“Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their call to be Christian mother and father?”

This question captures the essence of the role of the godparents. Baptism is the *beginning* of a lifetime journey in faith as a disciple. The godparents are people whom you believe can support your child in that journey of faith.

The Church requires that at least one person who acts in this role be themselves a Catholic who has been baptised, and has received Confirmation and the Eucharist. Their role is to join you in presenting your child for baptism and, as has been said above, to help your child live their faith in the Catholic community. Naturally then one person needs to be a full member of the Catholic community. However it is also possible to have other people associated with the godparent role who are members of other Christian Churches. In formal terms they are referred to as “Christian Witnesses”. However their role is essentially the same as that of the Catholic godparent – to support your child in their growth in faith.

Because of this role of the godparent it is never possible for someone who is not themselves baptised to take on this role.

Hopefully the above comments can help you in your choice of your child's godparents. As was said above at least one must be a baptised Catholic, the remainder may be baptised members of other Christian Churches. Normally there would be a total of two people in this role. Ideally they would be committed members of their Church, who, from their own experience and living of faith, can support you in your role and share that faith with your children.

The White Garment

As part of the liturgy of baptism there is a prayer which follows the baptism itself which points to the white garments of the newly baptised as a sign of the new life that they share. For that reason we ask either that your child be dressed entirely in white for the whole liturgy or otherwise that you have a white garment (for example a white shawl) which the godparents would wrap around your child at this time while the prayer is being prayed.

The Baptismal Candle

Throughout the whole of the liturgy of baptism the Paschal (Easter) Candle is burning near the font. The Paschal Candle is always the sign of the resurrection and burns in the church throughout the Easter season. After your child's baptism we light their baptismal candle from the Easter Candle with a prayer that expresses our faith that the light of the candle is a further sign of the life that they share and as a sign of our hope that you, the parents and godparents, will nurture that faith as carefully as you would care for a wavering flame.

You will need to provide a candle for this occasion. The candle should be white or gold. If you wish it may be decorated and may even have your child's name written on it. The candle should be a reasonably large one – it's intended to last a lifetime! The candle may be lit each year on the anniversary of baptism when your family might like to share a prayer over the family meal. It can be lit again on important occasions in your child's life – for example Confirmation and First Holy Communion.

Choice of the Celebration

Baptism may be celebrated as a liturgy on its own, quite separate to Mass, or it may be celebrated within a Sunday Mass. We provide these two options on different days and when you make arrangements for the baptism we will be able to let you know on which days the two options are available. At the very beginning of this leaflet it was pointed out that baptism by its very nature is not only a family celebration but a celebration of the whole Christian community – it is a sacrament which welcomes the newly baptised into that community. For that reason the celebration of baptism within Sunday Mass is a wonderful thing – the whole community is present when the person being baptised is being welcomed into that community. The choice of the style of celebration is up to you within the range of dates that we can make available – however we hope that you would consider the possibility of having the baptism within Mass so that it may truly be a celebration for the parish as well as for your family.

As a sacrament of the Church no charge is made for the celebration of baptism. However it is customary to give a donation which helps to support the life and the work of the parish. The donation can simply be placed in an envelope and given to the celebrant on the day of the baptism.

We look forward to the day of your child's baptism. It's a great day not only for you and your family but for the whole Church as your child begins their life as a disciple of the Lord.

Fr Colin Blayney