

# Introduction

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Welcome to *Together at Baptism* and to this special time of preparation for your child's Baptism in the Catholic Church. Parents from many walks of life use this booklet, and we hope that each of you will find much of value in it. You may be awaiting the birth of your first child, have a newborn, or have a child who is several months old. One parent may not be Catholic, or you may be a single parent. Perhaps you have been away from the Church for a while. No matter what your life circumstances are, if you have come to the Church sincerely desiring to raise your child in the Catholic faith, this book is written for you. We hope it will enrich your experience of Christian parenthood and help you to understand the rich meaning of the celebration of your child's Baptism and the lifelong journey of faith that this sacrament initiates.

Along with the joys of parenthood, there are of course many responsibilities. While a newborn baby's needs may seem simple—to be fed, changed, and most of all, loved—these needs have to be met on the baby's schedule, not on yours. This is a fact of parenting that can often seem relentless. One of a child's most basic needs is for the sense of security that only comes through consistent care and nurturing. During the early months and years of his or her life, your care, guidance, and protection will help your child feel secure, thrive, and lay a strong foundation for future well-being. As your child grows you will face all the ongoing challenges of raising a son or daughter who is healthy in body, mind, and spirit. As the parent of a Christian child, you also accept the challenge of raising a child who knows and loves Jesus Christ and is willing to engage the world on behalf of the Gospel.

Your adult faith will help you meet these challenges. As you foster your child's relationship with God and provide the experience of being a part of the Church, you are helping your child to grow secure in God's love and to develop a sense of Christian identity. There is no better way than the celebration of Baptism to begin this process. During the celebration, family, friends, neighbors, and perhaps a significant portion of your parish community, will gather around you. In a more formal and explicit role, the godparent or godparents you have chosen for your child will also stand with you during the celebration. They will assume a particular responsibility in supporting you as parents and hopefully will become a powerful witness to the Catholic faith for your child. We will say more about the important role of godparents later, but here is a list of requirements that you should keep in mind when choosing a godparent or godparents.

*A Godparent Should:*

- be a firm and enthusiastic believer, ready, willing, and able to help his or her godchild live a Christian life.
- be at least sixteen years old.
- be a member of the Catholic Church in good standing.
- lead a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.
- have received all three of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation.
- not be the child's parent.

Usually there are two godparents, a godfather and a godmother. However, there can be just one. A baptized non-Catholic may serve as a Christian witness, but there must also be a Catholic godparent. If you have questions about who may

serve as a godparent, consult with your pastor or his delegate in the parish.

### *Using This Booklet*

The liturgy of Baptism invites you to think about the hopes and dreams you have for your child and the values you want to communicate to him or her in everyday life. These hopes, dreams, and values are expressed in the choices you make as a parent, the traditions you foster in your family, and the habits and interests you cultivate in your child. To help you reflect on these vital dimensions of your role as a parent, *Together at Baptism* provides a brief commentary and reflection question on each part of the *Rite of Baptism for Children*. This rite, or set of ritual actions, celebrates the beginning of your child's life as a child of God and member of the Church. It also affirms your own commitment to the faith and your promise to be your child's first catechist, being the first to hand on the faith to him or her by your Christian example.

This booklet will help you more fully appreciate the full meaning of the words, gestures, and signs of Baptism, and to understand the commitment you are making when you have your child baptized. You might use the commentaries and reflection questions for personal reflection, or you might use them during a small-group conversation that is part of a Baptism preparation program in your parish.

*Together at Baptism* is based on the *Rite of Baptism for Several Children*. It contains all of the liturgical texts and scripture readings for this normative form of the rite. However, some of you may be the only family having a child baptized, and the *Rite of Baptism for One Child* will instead be used. If the latter is true for you, your parish may invite you to help choose the prayers and readings for your child's Baptism. In this case, a tear-out liturgy-planning sheet is provided for you at the back of this

booklet to indicate your choices to the priest or deacon who will baptize your child.

In some parishes it is common practice for several children to be baptized in the same celebration during a Sunday Mass. Celebration of Baptism in this way allows the whole parish community to express its welcome of the child and to offer its prayers and support to the parents. On these occasions, the scripture readings are those appointed for that Sunday rather than those assigned to the celebration of Baptism, which appear in appendix A of this booklet. If your child is being baptized outside of Mass, *Together at Baptism* provides simple instructions on how the order of the liturgy will be different.

Finally, *Together at Baptism* can also be used to prepare for the celebration of the *Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church*. When Baptism has been administered in an emergency, such as when a child is in danger of dying, this rite provides a way for the parish to welcome a child and offer support to the child's parents and family. There are changes to the celebration acknowledging that Baptism has already taken place and that give thanks for the child's recovery. If this is your situation, the priest or deacon who will preside at the liturgy can explain to you exactly what will happen. Like those parents preparing for the Baptism of their child, the commentaries in this booklet will help you gain a deeper understanding of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Appendix A contains all the scripture readings assigned to the *Rite of Baptism for Children*, and appendix B contains alternate texts for some of the prayers and blessings. Appendix C provides a sample structure for a family renewal of Baptism that you can use to celebrate the anniversary of your child's Baptism in years to come. This is a good way to help your child appreciate the meaning of Baptism as he or she grows.



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# Rite of Baptism for Children

## **An Overview of the Celebration**

The celebration of your child's Baptism will look and feel much like the celebration of Mass with a few notable additions. The liturgy will begin with the welcome and reception of your child and any other children to be baptized at the same celebration. This usually takes place at or near the entrance of the church. The presider will greet everyone present and then engage you in a brief dialogue about what name you have given your child and what you ask of the Church. He will welcome your child into the community by claiming him or her for Christ with the Sign of the Cross. This simple ritual will be repeated for each family presenting a child for Baptism.

Parents, the children to be baptized, their godparent(s), and the presider and other ministers then go together to the place where the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated. This will look similar to the entrance procession at Sunday Mass unless the reception of the children did not take place at the church entrance. In case of the latter, everyone will simply go to his or her places within the assembly, and the presider will go to his chair. If Baptism takes place during Mass, the Gloria will be said or sung, then the priest will pray the Collect.

The Liturgy of the Word will proceed as usual, with scripture readings, a homily, and the General Intercessions. The Intercessions will conclude with a litany that calls the saints to pray for the gathered community. The priest or deacon will then say a prayer of exorcism and anoint your child. There may then be a procession to the Baptismal font where the celebration of Baptism will take place. If Baptism is celebrated apart from Mass, the Lord's Prayer, a final blessing, and dismissal will follow immediately, bringing the celebration to a close. If the Baptism takes place within Mass, families and ministers will return to their appropriate places for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which will be celebrated in the usual manner.

# Reception of the Children

## A Communal Celebration

If possible, Baptism should take place on Sunday, the day on which the Church celebrates the paschal mystery. It should be conferred in a communal celebration for all the recently born children, and in the presence of the faithful, or at least of relatives, friends, and neighbors, who are all to take an active part in the rite.

—*Rite of Baptism for Children*, #32

The celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism is a special occasion in the life of your family and in the life of the Church. At birth, your child was born into your human family. In one wonderful moment he or she became related to a whole set of people—not only parents, brothers, and sisters, but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and many more. At Baptism, your child was born into the Church, the People of God. Just as it is good to gather your family and friends for the celebration of your child's Baptism, it is fitting to have that celebration in the midst of your parish community.

As members of the Church, we are all part of the family of faith. Although some of the people you see at Mass may seem like complete strangers, as baptized Christians we all are united in Christ, we are members of his body, and sons and daughters of the Father. We all share in what is most important: our faith in Christ and our membership in the Church. One reason the Church prefers that Baptism is celebrated on Sunday is simply because the Church community has already gathered. This is

especially true, of course, if the Baptism of children takes place during Sunday Mass.

A second reason that Sunday is the preferred day on which to celebrate Baptism is the Christian meaning of the day itself. Sunday is the day Christ rose from the dead. That's why the Church has, from the beginning, gathered on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. In Baptism we share in Christ's resurrection: we die to sin and rise with him to a new life as daughters and sons of God. It is our holiest of days, the beginning and the culmination of each week.

A third reason why it is preferable to celebrate Baptism on Sunday, especially during Sunday Mass, is that Baptism begins a process of initiation into the Church. This process reaches its fulfillment when we share fully in the Eucharist by being welcomed to the Lord's Table in Holy Communion. Baptism is the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. In Baptism we become members of the Church, and that membership reaches its fullness in the Eucharist, most perfectly in the Sunday Eucharist.

### ***For Reflection***

What reasons do you have for wanting your child baptized in the Catholic Church?

In your own words, what do you believe Baptism means?