



Your Baby's Baptism

PARENT GUIDE

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Baptism of Infants

It is important for Catholics to know why we need salvation and how Christ, in his paschal mystery, brings it about. It is the core of our faith that every person seeking baptism should understand and accept. But how do infants grasp such profound spiritual realities? The simple answer is, they don't. Infants cannot understand and accept these realities, so their parents and godparents act for them in requesting baptism.

The baptism of infants, with parents and godparents acting on their behalf, is a well-established and ancient tradition in the Church. Infants receive the same graces from the sacrament as adults who receive it: forgiveness of original sin and entry into the Church, the body of Christ. In fact, the baptism of infants points up an important reality about baptism itself and the grace it imparts. We do nothing to earn our salvation—it is a free, unmerited gift from God through Jesus Christ. The practice of baptizing infants helps us remember that none of us deserves salvation, and yet in baptism we are saved through the gratuitous grace of God.



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Another reason infant baptism works theologically is the nature of baptism itself as an entry point into Christian life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow after Baptism (CCC 1254).”

It goes on to explain that this is why, each year, all members of the Church renew their baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil. This practice shows that we Catholics know our baptisms were just the beginning of our pilgrimage home to God, and we rely on sacramental nourishment along that journey of faith. Another way Catholics seal their commitment to the faith is through the sacrament of confirmation—for many, around age fourteen. Like baptism, confirmation is a sacrament of initiation, but unlike infant baptism, the person receiving the sacrament does so in his or her own behalf. You can look forward to your child making this adult commitment to the faith, with your support, when he or she reaches confirmation age.

Baptism begins a journey for the baptized person, but it begins a journey for the parents and godparents as well. It is no trifling matter

to request baptism on behalf of an infant. The *Catechism* explains that the parents’ guidance of the child is important, and so is the assistance of godparents, “who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized—child or adult—on the road of Christian life” (CCC 1255). For these reasons, the Church expects parents to be practicing Catholics with an understanding of the faith and to be members of a parish community. If they are not, how will they teach their child these essential aspects of the faith? Godparents (or at least one of them, if two are chosen) are expected to be confirmed, practicing Catholics who have reached the age of maturity, usually sixteen (*Code of Canon Law* 872). It would be difficult for someone younger than sixteen or not yet fully initiated into the Church to serve as a primary teacher and example of the faith to a godchild. Despite popular practice, in the eyes of the Church, the role of godparent is practical rather than honorary; godparents are spiritual and religious mentors to a young Catholic. Indeed, the *Catechism* says the role of godparents “is a truly ecclesial function (*officium*)” (CCC 1255).



Baptism: A Short History

The sacrament of baptism has a long history in the Church. John was baptizing in the Jordan before Jesus had even begun his earthly ministry! Of course, John's version of baptism was not the same as ours today. But his and the later Christian practice of baptism are both based in part on the tradition of ritual washing for purification found in ancient Judaism. While John's form of baptism was a sign of repentance and the expectation of the kingdom of God, the later Christian baptism was a washing-away of sin and a profound entry point into a new life: the life of Christ.

The earliest Church was by necessity a Church of converts. Although the Christian Scriptures testify to the baptism of whole households together (Acts 16:15), which must have included young children, infant baptism in the earliest Church was not the norm. Much more often, adults who came to the Church as new believers were baptized after a period called the catechumenate. This period of instruction and probation showed the seriousness of the catechumen (the person preparing for baptism) and readied him or her for this important faith commitment, which took place, with few exceptions, at Easter. After their baptism, the neophytes (newly baptized) were often anointed with oil, sometimes twice (once by the bishop, a sort of early confirmation), and then garbed in white:

a sign of their new life in Christ. Then for the first time, these neophytes took part in the eucharistic meal with the rest of the Christian community. In the days following their joyous initiation into the Church, the new members attended instructional sessions with the bishop, which helped them understand and reflect on the rites by which they had been incorporated into the body of Christ.

Due to the rapid growth of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries and, at the same time, the articulation and clarification by the Church of theological concepts such as original sin, the practice of baptizing infants became more common. By the eighth century in the Western world, almost everyone was born into the Catholic Church, and thus the need for adult baptisms (and the catechumenate which preceded them) was nearly extinguished.

Times have changed since the early days of Christendom. We now live in a secular age and in a global Church, and the need for adult baptism is back. The liturgical renewal of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries restored the ancient Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as well as the catechumenate. Today our process of initiation is much like that of the early Church described above. At the annual Easter Vigil, those wishing to join the Church who have completed the period of instruction are baptized, confirmed, and make their first Communion in a joyous celebration of the paschal mystery.



Tools for Faithful Families

To help families stay active in the faith, Liguori offers affordable products that cover topics such as prayer, parenting, and early faith development. Visit Liguori.org/baptism for: A keepsake blessing from the Rite of Baptism; "Our Parish Home," a contact form that can be customized; "Celebrating the Faith": ways for families to rejoice throughout the year.



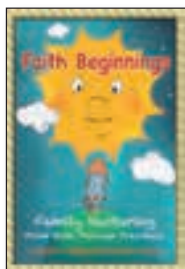
Sharing the Faith With Your Child
From Birth to Age Four
815232

With practical wisdom, the authors of this handbook show parents how their daily lives, experiences, and relationships reinforce their role as parents. The book includes chapters on Parenting, Being a Family, Being a Catholic Family, and Rearing Children in a Christian Family.



Introducing Children to Silence and Prayer
For Catechists and Parents
#823145

In *Introducing Children to Silence and Prayer*, Luis M. Benavides helps families get to know and communicate with God. Benavides also helps us to reexamine our own attitudes about prayer as he offers a different perspective to help children begin the journey and deepen their relationship with God.



Faith Beginnings
Family Nurturing From Birth Through Preschool
#822315

Faith Beginnings helps parents to form and nurture their preschool children's faith development, even in the earliest stages of life. The authors provide concrete faith-related activities and suggestions to help parents nurture the faith life of their infant, toddler, and preschool children.

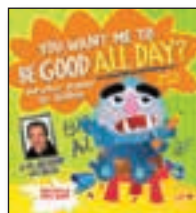
Reading to your child begins early, and these two books by Fr. Joe Kempf and his furry friend, Big Al, will help children—and their parents—to pray the way Jesus taught us to pray... simply and from the heart.



My Sister Is Annoying! And Other Prayers for Children

#818271
Audio CD included.

Children say the most wonderful things! This book of prayers, by Fr. Joe Kempf and his furry friend, Big Al, is written the way children talk—and the way they think! *My Sister Is Annoying* is a beautifully illustrated, fun way for children to talk to God about things that are important to them, such as the joy of playing outside, celebrating a birthday, and trying to figure out the right thing to do.



You Want Me to Be Good ALL DAY? And Other Prayers for Children

#818431
Audio CD included.

In a delightful combination of events that impact children's lives, Big Al learns lessons about compassion, responsibility, and individuality through prayer. Prayers about Baptism, Communion, and even a wedding make this book perfect for young children.



Just for the holidays, Liguori's beautifully illustrated children's books appeal to children's love of animals and touches their hearts.



Little Lamb Finds Christmas
#824890

One winter night, a little lamb gets lost just outside Bethlehem. While tending the flock, his shepherd receives heavenly messengers and amazing news. This story leads children to Jesus' nativity and helps them relate to events that can change everyone's life.



Easter Bunny's Amazing Day
#823534

Meet the Risen Jesus with an amazing bunny—and his amazing tale—in this beautifully illustrated hardcover children's book. Children will learn about Jesus' friendship and comfort through the eyes of a timid bunny who experiences firsthand the love and joy Jesus brings.

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