

So you're asking about baptism for your child...

Thanks for sharing the excitement of the new addition to your family with us! We'd like to help you mark that special event. You're probably reading this booklet now because you contacted us asking for your child to be baptised.

This document may clarify some of the things we've discussed in our initial meeting.

We know that you are thankful to have your beautiful child. It may be that you'd like some help to say thank you to God for the gift of your child and to ask God's blessing on your child. If that is what you'd like to achieve, we would be very happy to conduct a "Service of Thanksgiving for and Blessing of a Child". This service may happen in a regular Sunday service; or it may happen in a gathering of family and friends organised by you. We would be just delighted to help you say thank you to God for the gift of your child and to pray God's blessing on your child.



Baptism is quite different.

We know that your child is important to you. You want nothing less than the best for your child. God wants the best for your child too; as does the church, which represents the body of Christ. Because of that, we'd like you to understand what baptism means; and why we don't just say "yes" automatically to a request for baptism. We want to be very open and clear about what you're asking of us and what, in turn, are the expectations placed on you through that request.

Baptism is...



Baptism is...

Baptism is the word that we use for the ritual that you are asking us to perform. We don't call it a "christening" or a "naming". We know it seems like jargon, but the words are important. They help to explain just how significant the thing that you're asking for is and why we regard it as important.

The word 'baptism' comes from the Greek word *baptizo* which means 'to dip' into water or liquid. A related word form, *bapto*, is used for dipping something into dye, and for drawing water. *Baptizo* may also mean 'to cause to perish by drowning'. The imagery is vivid. It is about being immersed, about changing colour, about life and death and rebirth. But it's not about human life and death

though. It's about Christian life! It's about being born into the life of the body of Christ, the church. Going under water and coming up signifies that a newly baptised person is incorporated into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The person may be immersed in water or have water poured over them. The meaning is still the same. From this time forward, the person is a member of the one, holy, catholic (universal) and apostolic church:

- the body of Christ,
- the communion of the Holy Spirit,
- the people of God.

The Uniting Church's baptismal service [which is based in the scriptures, the creeds of the greater Christian church and our very own Uniting Church foundational documents] puts it this way:



Baptism is Christ's gift.
It is the sign by which the Spirit of God
joins people to Jesus Christ
and incorporates them into his body, the Church.
In his own baptism in the Jordan by John,
Jesus identified himself with humanity
in its brokenness and sin;
that baptism was completed in his death and resurrection.

By God's grace,
baptism plunges us into the faith of Jesus Christ,
so that whatever is his may be called ours.
By water and the Spirit we are claimed as God's own
and set free from the power of sin and death.
Thus, claimed by God
we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit
that we may live as witnesses to Jesus Christ,
share his ministry in the world and grow to maturity,
awaiting with hope the day of our Lord Jesus.
(‘The Meaning of Baptism’ from ‘The Sacrament of Baptism and the Reaffirmation of
Baptism called Confirmation’ in *Uniting in Worship 2*, © 2005 The Uniting Church in
Australia, p. 74)



A request for baptism is a big thing for us. It's not like asking the church to conduct a marriage service. Marriage is a unique life-long covenant [contract or agreement] made between 2 people before God. Baptism is a covenant made between God and the person being baptised and the body of Christ - the people of the Church.

Therefore, baptism is not about your relationship with your child, but your child's relationship with God and with the people of God.

We call Baptism a "sacrament". It is one of two sacraments that we believe are God's holy gifts to the church; the other is Eucharist or Holy Communion. Sacraments are about how the church was formed and is grown by God.

In previous generations, it was assumed that most people in Australian society went to church and were Christian. That's no longer the case (if it ever was)! Being Christian is one of many religious, spiritual and faith options in our society.



Because it was assumed that everyone was Christian, it was also assumed that every baby would be baptised. Because of these assumptions, it became the “right thing” to “get your baby done”, or simply the thing to do when a baby was born and people wanted to celebrate that event.

Baptism was often treated simply as a human rite of passage—like becoming an adult or getting married— something that everyone or at least many or most people go through. But that’s not what baptism is about for the church. For the church, it is not about being born, but about being born into the Christian life, the body of Christ, the Church.



Baptism means...

Being baptised is about being called to live an intentional Christian life, as part of a Christian community. Giving your allegiance to the Christian faith is about seeking to order your life according to Christian practice. That life and practice is one of worship, witness and service.

Christians are called to meet regularly together to worship God. They are called to witness to their faith through their worship and in their daily lives. They are also called to serve people in the name and the way of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the beginning of our participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Baptism... confers an identity at odds with the ways we are named and claimed by family, nation and ideology. Baptism is the constitution of a new people whose prior loyalties and allegiances are exposed, named, and radically reconfigured.

(Debra Dean Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004)

Baptism is for people and their families who are seeking to intentionally live the Christian life by participating in a worshipping, witnessing and serving community of faith. We call it a congregation. We understand a congregation as the embodiment in one place of the one holy catholic [universal] and apostolic Church: worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God’s Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world.

(*Basis of Union* Para. 15a)

In this context, The Uniting Church will baptise those [adults] who confess [acknowledge] the Christian faith, and children who are presented for baptism and for whose instruction and nourishment in the faith the Church takes responsibility.

(*Basis of Union* Para. 7)

Baptism is not...

We’d like to be able to say that Baptism would give your child extra protection from harm, but that’s not the case either. Christian people are human too; and the Christian life is not necessarily an easy one.



The Christian life has responsibilities to God and to other people— responsibilities of worship, witness and service as mentioned above. Being baptised would not guarantee your child’s health; and it’s not about ensuring that your child is “saved”.

The Uniting Church does not believe that your child’s salvation depends on your child being baptised. On the other hand, we don’t think that anyone who isn’t baptised is “damned” or “bound for hell”.



Baptism is not just something that happens for every child as a matter of course. Nor is it simply asking the church to perform a consumer service, that is, to do something for you on a one-off basis for a donation or a fee. Baptism is about lifelong commitment.

Remembering God’s love for your child or marking your child’s birth or name in a public way is an important thing to do as a family, but it is not what the church understands Baptism to be about. Nor does your child need to be baptised in order to have access to the resources of the church—in order for your child to be able to choose later on to be part of the church; or perhaps to attend Sunday School or services of worship or a Uniting Church school. None of that is the case. If your child is not baptised, s/he will still be able to attend worship, Sunday School and a Uniting Church school, and to make a decision for themselves later to join the church and be baptised.

Baptism is about being incorporated into the body of Christ, the church, and about God’s call to participate in the ministry of Christ in worship, witness and service.

So we’d love you to come to worship, witness and serve with the community and to learn with us what the Christian life is all about. However, if you would simply like to have a one-off thanksgiving for and blessing of your child, we would be delighted to help.

O God, like a mother who comforts her children,
you sustain, nurture and strengthen us;
like a father who cares for his children,
you look upon us with compassion and goodness.
We give you thanks
for the birth (adoption) of this child,
and for the joy that has come to this family.
Confirm their joy by a lively sense of your presence with
them.
Give them calm strength and patient wisdom
as they seek to bring this child
to love all that is true and noble, just and pure,
lovable and gracious, excellent and admirable,
following the example of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.



(from a Service and Thanksgiving and Blessing of a Child, Uniting in Worship 2)