

What happens next?

Both these services mark a significant new beginning - for the newly baptised it means you are now a member of God's Church. This is the start of an adventure that will continue for the rest of their life.

Once you have shared in a Service of Blessing or Baptism, we hope that the promises you have made will encourage you to continue worshipping with us regularly as an individual, or, in the case of a Baptism or Service of Blessing for a child, as a family.

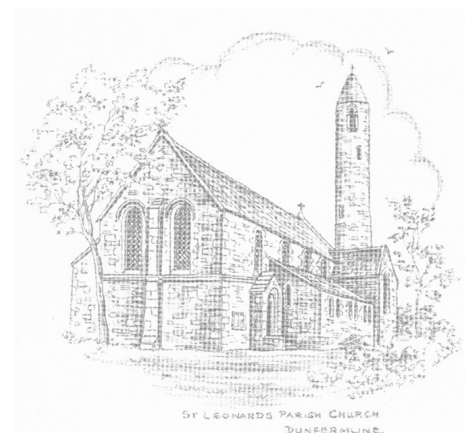
Your children will only feel they belong to the church if they become familiar with the people and the surroundings. Like any family, you have to join in and do things together to get the most out of it. It may be that asking about Baptism or a Service of Blessing has renewed or increased your own interest in God so this may be a good opportunity to see what's on offer for you too.

If you are not yet a Communicant Member of the Church, or would like to know more about the Christian faith, then we would be pleased to talk more about this with you and to invite you to join one of our "*Alpha*" courses which are run in the Spring and Autumn. We also offer "*The Marriage Course*" - for those recently married or preparing for marriage - please contact the church or see our website for more details.

**You are welcome to make your
church home with us!**

BAPTISM & BLESSING

A guide for
adults, parents
and godparents



Baptism: what's it all about?

A baptism service involves . . .

- Declaring your belief in God
- Making decisions and promises
(for yourself or for your child)
- A new beginning
- Sharing in the death and resurrection
of Jesus in a symbolic way
- Joining the Church family
(your local church and the world-wide Church)

Christians describe baptism as a "sacrament" - this means an outward and visible sign of God's love. We believe that God loves all people equally, of whatever race, creed and colour, but at baptism we consciously make a point of acknowledging His love.

How did Christian baptism start?

What about the Service of Blessing?

Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan and it was here that He became aware of God as His Father and felt the special presence and power of the Holy Spirit come upon Him. This was a turning point in His life. You can find the story in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. After His death and resurrection, Jesus commanded His followers to make new disciples and to baptise them too. This has been done ever

I'm not sure I can make these decisions

It is important to consider whether you can make these decisions and answer the questions truthfully. The minister will want to discuss them with you anyway and will help you to think carefully about why you want to be baptised, or why you want your child to be baptised, before making your choice.

If you are not a member of our congregation or you decide that you are unwilling or not ready to make the promises required in a baptism service, you may still want to give thanks for your child and pray for God's support throughout his or her life. If so, you could choose to have a **Service of Blessing** instead. This would enable you to say thank you to God without the extra commitment and promises which baptism requires. You may always have your child baptised at a later date when you are able to make these promises honestly.

Godparents

Parents love their children and take the major responsibility for their care and upbringing - physically, mentally and spiritually. But most people find that being a parent is very hard work and appreciate the interest that special friends and relations take in their children. Being asked to be a godparent is a compliment and a privilege but it is also a responsibility because you are being entrusted with a share in the upbringing of a child. Your job will be to love and encourage the child as your own, to pray for and with them, and to help them to live and grow in God's way, both by your words and example.

encourage parents and children in faith and participation in the life of the local church. It is Christ's sacrament. The Church administers it in His name. That is what gives it such value for us.

Blessing:

The service of blessing is similar in format, except you will not be asked to make the promises associated with Baptism, nor will water be used. A special prayer of blessing will be said over your child.

In both cases the name of your child will be added to our Congregation's Cradle Roll, prayed for and invited to Sunday School.

Making decisions

A baptism is a very important occasion, involving serious promises and decisions. You will be asked questions about the way in which you intend to live your life. In the case of the baptism of your child, the minister will ask you:

- To confess your faith (as when you became a communicant member of the Church)
- To promise to bring your child up in the Christian faith and the ways of the Church, and
- By your life and teaching to give your child a Christian upbringing.

Note that these promises are made by the parents only. While there is no formal role for "Godparents" they will usually be included in the service in some way.

since in Christian churches throughout the world.

Jesus never baptised anyone but the Bible does say that he blessed children who were brought to him by their parents. So too, in the Church, we are happy to ask God's blessing on all children who are brought before him.

What does baptism mean?

Baptism is *first* a sign of God's forgiveness of humankind, in which we share corporately. In any sacrament there is an outward sign that corresponds to its inward meaning. The sprinkling of (or immersion into) water carries with it the meaning of cleansing; and it directs that promise to the person who is baptised, in whom God's Spirit is planted.

It is *second* a sign of our fellowship with Jesus. The New Testament, thinking of baptism by immersion, links the going down into water and the rising from it, with Jesus' death and resurrection, and thinks of the person who is being baptised as sharing that experience. At other places it uses the metaphor from gardening of the grafting of a branch into a root-stock. Always the sense is the same: by baptism we are linked so closely with Christ that His life is at work in us.

And *third*, it is a sign that, because we are united with Christ we are part of the Christian community. At this point the person being baptised is made a member of the Church and shares in its life and mission and worship.

Why children?

Some churches confine baptism to adults, to those who can

understand what they are doing. The early church did not - the promise is "to you and your children" (Acts 2:39). We read of the whole family being baptised as a response to hearing the gospel message. We know that Jesus welcomed children (blessing but not baptising them) and we cannot believe that He does not make a place for children through this Sacrament to share fully in the life of His Church.

That is why we encourage the baptism of children whose parents are active in the life of our congregation, and also why (for all children - baptised or not) we run Sunday School and other youth activities as part of the life of our congregation.

Which children?

But there are limits. The New Testament only speaks of the baptism of adult believers and their children. The Church only administers baptism to children when at least one parent is himself or herself baptised *and* a "communicant member" or "adherent" (active in the life of the local church), or where a child is under Christian guardianship. The Church believes that those it baptises should have the promise of a Christian upbringing so that they can be expected in due course to take for themselves the promises made on their behalf and to profess the faith in which they were baptised.

Baptism marks the beginning of a process, which lays important obligations upon the parents and the Church and in which God also takes His part.

Also, in the case of families who are not members of St. Leonard's, the minister cannot proceed with baptism without the permission of the family's own parish minister.

If you're not already a communicant member and/or attending Sunday worship regularly, then it's a good idea to start doing so as a family as soon as possible. We will be happy to look after your child(ren) in Sunday School if that makes it easier for you. At Sunday School the young people have their own time of age related teaching and activities.

The Baptism / Blessing Service

Baptism:

If, after discussion with the minister, it is decided to proceed with baptism, then it will normally take place during the main Sunday service at the church. During the service the minister will publicly explain what baptism means, will show you what to do and explain when it is time to stand up or sit down. When it is time for the baptism itself, the person being baptised (or the parents in the case of a child) will be asked to stand to make their promises and a statement of faith.

Then the minister will set apart the water for its use in baptism and you or your child will be baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The congregation will be asked to stand with you as a sign of their responsibility towards you or your child. We usually sing a blessing, and at this point children are carried by the minister into the body of the congregation before being returned to their parents.

Baptism is not a guarantee the child will thrive, or a charm to shield the child from danger. It is not essential to salvation, as if the child who is not baptised were condemned. But it is the way God has chosen to strengthen us in Christian living, to