

Ask Fr. James

Why I should baptize my baby as an infant

The church encourages parents to try and baptize their babies as infants. In Mark 10:13-16 we see Jesus blessing the children. Infant baptism has spiritual, theological and ecclesiastical significance. First, at baptism, the infant receives the forgiveness of original sin which we were all born with as we are descendants of Adam and Eve; secondly, the infant receives divine grace through the prayers and holy anointing and for the first time in the infant's life, he/she is configured to Christ by being marked out for Christ and consequently incorporated into the Church.

At the infant's baptism during Mass, the priest calls on all in attendance to offer prayers in thanksgiving for the safe delivery of the child and for continued health of both child and the parents. These prayers are assurances of God's grace and divine love for the newborn. In John 3:5 Jesus says: No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Baptism is the gateway sacrament for becoming a Christian and we are baptized in the water of baptism and in the spirit through the Trinitarian formulary for baptism - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Planning for the baptism itself commonly involves didactic class presentations to the parents on the theological meaning and significance of the baptismal rite. They are reminded of their duty and responsibility to protect and care for the child, to teach the child Christian beliefs and practices and to assure its continued access to the Church community.

The intent of the church is that God creates through baptism a secure "holding environment" within which child and family may continue to grow to health and wholeness. At baptism the newborn is declared to be a citizen of a larger community that transcends family, the parents, siblings, and grandparents as it is the incorporation of the newborn into the Church community. This is the reason that the infant's parents are required to select sponsors or "godparents" for the newborn from amongst practicing Catholics who will be a role model of faith for the child now and in the future.

All that the church requires of parents who present their child for holy baptism is that they should continually bring the kid to Mass and teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. As they grow in years, they should place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith and also assure that they continue living in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the Church.

In our parish, special pastoral attention is given to the newly baptized family to provide whatever support may be needed after the baptism to sustain their own relationship as husband and wife and the child's new relationship with the church, especially when they find attendance at worship and other church functions complicated by the constant demands of the newborn. Continued expressions of concern and care by the pastor, staff and parishioners convey God's continuing care and sustain their sense of a closer relationship to their religious community.