

# Baptism

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*What we do, and why we do it*



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# Introduction

The purpose of this booklet written by Vicky Coneys is to explain what Baptism (sometimes called 'Christening') is, and why and how we celebrate it in the way we do at St Alphege, Seasalter.

You might be preparing for your own or your child's Baptism, you might be new to the Anglican church and find the way we approach Baptism seems different from experiences you have had in other Christian churches, or you might have questions you have always wanted to ask about the way we do things here.

Although there are some Church of England rules about Baptism that all Anglican churches must honour, such as the words we use, you'll find what Baptism 'looks like' will vary from one Church of England church to another depending on the style and tradition of the church, so this is very much a local guide. For example being on the coast gives us the chance at Seasalter to baptise in the sea – something we do whenever we can!

Our hope and prayer is that this guide will help you understand more about this amazing gift to the Church, and help your own connection and journey with God to grow and deepen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Steve Coneys  
Vicar, St Alphege, Seasalter

# What is Baptism?

Baptism is all about a person belonging to God, and making him part of their life journey. It is a simple, symbolic celebration, shared with family, friends and the wider church community.

In Baptism, we proclaim together that God loves and calls the one who is being baptised. Baptism brings together *actions* which we can see (for example, pouring water), *words* which we say, and *trust* that God is at work through his Holy Spirit. This work of God, which might be unseen at the time, is at the heart of Baptism.

## ***Baptism involves words which we say...***

We all wander far from God and lose our way: Christ comes to find us and welcomes us home. In baptism we respond to his call.

Do you turn away from sin?

**I do.**

Do you reject evil?

**I do.**

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

**I do.**

Do you trust in him as Lord?

**I do.**

# What does the Bible say?

Baptism was the foundation for Jesus' ministry. The Gospels describe Jesus' own baptism, where he went down into the water and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

Matthew 3

*16 As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'*



'This is my own dear Son whom I love' by Megan

In the same way, the disciples were commanded to 'go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28.19). It is clear that from the very beginning of the Christian church, believers were baptised in water and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is described repeatedly in the Book of Acts.

St Paul describes baptism as the way we truly belong to Jesus, as we share in his death and resurrection and are born again to new life:

*We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life' (Romans 6.4)*

## **What happens at a Baptism?**

At Seasalter, Baptism could mean a traditional service in the Old Church, informal all-age worship in the Christian Centre or even Baptism in the sea. But whatever the setting and style, the important things remain the same. There are always prayers and thanksgiving; a decision to turn from sin and to follow Christ; the sign of the cross, and Baptism with water; a welcome into God's family the Church, and the challenge to keep growing as a follower of Christ. It's always a happy and joyful occasion.

## **Who can be baptised?**

We offer Baptism to people of all ages: babies, children, young people and adults. This is because Baptism is about what God is doing in a person's life, whether it's right at the beginning, or after many years. If, however, you prefer to leave Baptism until your child is old enough to make a decision for themselves, that's fine too. A service of Thanksgiving in church is another way of marking the birth of a child, and committing them to God's care as they grow up.

We believe that God welcomes everyone and wants to be part of their journey: you don't have to wait until you're perfect before thinking about Baptism for yourself or your child. And you can never be too old to be baptised!

If you have any questions about when and whether to seek Baptism, or a service of Thanksgiving, please don't hesitate to contact Steve the Vicar.

## What happens when babies or children are baptised?

You will already have discussed what works best for your family with the Vicar or another member of the Baptism team. They will talk through the Baptism service and answer any questions you may have.

Sunday morning Baptisms at the Christian Centre take place during the 10.10am Lighthouse service or the 11am service. The Old Church is also used for Baptisms. Wherever you choose, there's plenty of room for family and friends to sit together. The Baptism itself will be led by one of the clergy team and will be relaxed and informal. Younger children are encouraged to come up to the front so that they can see what is happening.

Because babies and children cannot express their own decision to be baptised, they need to have Godparents who join with the parents to do so on their behalf. Godparents and parents answer some questions on behalf of the child (don't worry; it's all printed out for you!). The Vicar makes the sign of the cross on the child's forehead, and pours water over them three times, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The water is warm, and is poured into a container called a font. The Seasalter font is a modern wood and metal bowl. The water is a symbol of God's cleansing and new life.



We then welcome your child into the church family and give a lighted candle, a symbol that they are beginning their journey with God, and a prayer that they will shine with his light in their lives.

If the Baptism was in the Old Church, your family will be invited to come to the Christian Centre on the following Sunday, so that the church community can welcome you. It's our hope and prayer that your child's Baptism will be the start of an ongoing relationship with the local church, through activities, worship services, or just getting to know you better.

## **Who can be a Godparent?**

Godparents have a really important role in supporting your child as they grow up, and grow in faith. Because of this special role, Godparents must be baptised themselves (although they don't have to be members of the Church of England).

Godparents can be friends or family members; people who will pray for your child and encourage them. There should be at least three Godparents: two of the same sex as the child and at least one of the opposite sex. Here is a helpful link [www.churchofenglandchristenings.org/godparents](http://www.churchofenglandchristenings.org/godparents)

## **What's the difference between Baptism and 'Christening'?**

There's no difference. 'Christening' is another word for Baptism. There is sometimes, though, a bit of confusion about whether a Christening is a naming ceremony. Hopefully, what you have read already has made it clear that when a child is baptised it's about much more than giving them their name. It's about starting off a whole new life with God. For that to happen, they need the support of both their parents and the church family.



## What happens when older children, young people and adults are baptised?

Baptising an older person is a great joy. Taking the step of Baptism usually means that God has been working in your life, to bring you to this point. It's appropriate, therefore, to begin by chatting things through with the Vicar or one of the other clergy team. We can work with you to plan a service which really expresses what you want to say and share, whether in a traditional service, at the Christian Centre, or in the sea at Seasalter Beach.

Whatever you choose, there is an opportunity, should you wish, to share what your Baptism means to you. When this kind of sharing (testimony) happens, it is a great encouragement to others, an event to invite your friends to, and an important stage in your journey of faith.



One word of caution: sea Baptisms at Seasalter need plenty of advance planning, because high tide has to be just right to coincide with Sunday service times.

## What if I was already baptised as a baby?

It is the understanding of the Church of England that people are baptised once and for all. So if you were already baptised, in any Christian denomination, you cannot be baptised again.

That doesn't mean that you can't find ways to make your own, public, commitment of faith as a young person or adult. For example, it is possible to reaffirm your Baptismal promises, and you can do this in front of family and friends. Why not speak to one of the clergy team if you'd like to consider this?

Another possibility is to consider Confirmation.

## **What is Confirmation?**

Confirmation is a church service where the Bishop comes and prays for the Holy Spirit to 'confirm' (make real and alive) the good things that were begun at your Baptism. Young people and adults who are to be confirmed usually share some kind of preparation in small groups beforehand. The Bishop confirms all the candidates from the local churches at one big service, usually in Whitstable or Herne Bay.

Speak to Steve the Vicar if Confirmation interests you; there will also be notices given out at church as the time approaches.

## **And finally...**

Remember that God is inviting people of all ages to belong to him and share their journey. Wherever you find yourself on the journey, and however you choose to mark that stage, we pray that God will bless you, and we hope that we can share the journey with you.