

Holy Baptism and its Administration at Saint Gregory's Episcopal Church Long Beach, California

Our Understanding of Holy Baptism

Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.

The Book of Common Prayer, page 298

In the Episcopal Church we understand Baptism to be the way a person becomes a member of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Nothing else is required. Once baptized, a person is a member of the family, born again, a member of the household of God. Baptized persons, regardless of age, are full members of the Church. They regularly receive Holy Communion and participate in the life of the Christian community in ways that are appropriate to their age and faith development.

Holy Baptism is an adult sacrament. Children are baptized as an allowable exception, based on the faith and commitment of their parents. Parents and sponsors are expected to nurture those baptized at an early age and to see that they are fed at the Holy Table. (See the questions in the service of Holy Baptism, The Book of Common Prayer, page 302.) The decision as to whether or not a child is to be baptized is an important and serious one. Parents and sponsors need to be prepared to live into the covenant of their own baptism. This includes regular worship and service as part of a parish community. Those baptized as infants and young children are expected to receive the laying on of hands by the Bishop "when they are ready and have been duly prepared" as an affirmation of the vows already made for them when they were baptized. (See The Book of Common Prayer, page 412.)

Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast. The Book of Common Prayer, page 298

The Administration of Holy Baptism

In the Episcopal Church, the norm is the administration of Holy Baptism at the main service on a Sunday or other feast day. This is in keeping with the standard of the early Church, and is a recognition of the need for the entire congregation to share with parents and Godparents in the baptismal nurture of

those recently initiated into the community. As the service of Holy Baptism is presently structured, it is placed within a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is deeply linked with the baptismal rite. Holy Baptism is administered only once. The Holy Eucharist is repeated, and may be understood as the repeatable part of the baptismal service. In the Eucharist we remember who we are by virtue of our baptism, we are spiritually fed, and thus strengthened for the journey begun in our baptism.

The Bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach the Word and preside at Baptism and the Eucharist.

The Book of Common Prayer, page 298

Holy Baptism is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil, on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany). It is recommended that, as far as possible, Baptisms be reserved for these occasions, or when a bishop is present.

The Book of Common Prayer, page 312

In the early Church, baptism was administered at the Great Vigil of Easter, with the Bishop as the celebrant. Present practice in the Episcopal Church reflects this in order to restore the power of Baptism, both for the life of the person baptized and for the life of the Church-at-large. We are baptismal people, people of the Baptismal Covenant, called out by God to be joined together as the Body of Christ, living and working in the world as People of God. The administration of Holy Baptism at specific moments in the Church Year enables persons to be adequately prepared and lifts up the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as the life transforming experience we believe it to be.

Guidelines for Holy Baptism

In keeping with what we believe to be sound biblical teaching, good theological principles and appropriate pastoral considerations, the Rector of the parish set the following guidelines for the administration of Holy Baptism in this parish.

1. Holy Baptism will be administered at the principal service on Sundays or feast days.
2. As a general rule, Holy Baptism will be administered at the Easter Vigil, late March or April; on the Day of Pentecost, late May or early June; on All Saints' Day, November 1, or the Sunday after All Saints' Day; the First Sunday after the Epiphany, early January;

a Sunday in late Pentecost, August; on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, late February or early March.

3. Baptism of infants and young children:
 - (A) Parents who are members of the congregation are expected to be regular in attendance at worship. Parents who are not members of the congregation are expected to be regularly worshipping members in a congregation at their place of residence.
 - (B) Parents and sponsors will be instructed in the meaning of Holy Baptism by participating in the Baptism preparation program offered by the Rector.
 - (C) **Godparents and Sponsors must be baptized Christians active in a congregation.**
 - (D) Parents are invited to consider preparing for the baptism of their child before the child is born, and are encouraged to speak to the Rector about this.

4. Baptism of Adults:
 - (A) Persons desiring to be baptized will participate in the Inquirer's Class offered twice a year by the Rector
 - (B) Regular attendance at worship and participation in other areas of parish life and service are expected.
 - (C) Baptism of adults normally takes place at the Great Vigil of Easter.

5. Anyone interested in Baptism for themselves or for an infant or child is invited to speak to the Rector or to contact the parish office.

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