

St Michael's Church Tilehurst

Thanking God for your baby

We are so glad you have decided to ask for God's blessing on your child. We are very pleased to help, and this booklet explains what we can offer you.



A child is a wonderful gift from God and it's right that we want to celebrate such a fantastic present.

The Church of England offers two approaches – **thanksgiving** and **baptism**

Both are ways of celebrating the life of your child which involve making promises to God with the support of close friends.

Both offer the opportunity for a family celebration. The main difference is in the extent and depth of Christian commitment that each form of service expresses.



(1) What is a *Thanksgiving*?

"Thanksgiving for the gift of a child" is a celebration to mark the birth and naming of your child. We give thanks for your child's new life, and commit both you and the child to God, asking for his help and blessing in the years to come.

It is the sort of service that almost anyone who believes in God can stand up and take part in, even if they are not sure what else they believe. It's a way in which parents can express their gratitude for the birth of the child, and receive God's

blessing on them and the child. The church members present welcome your family and pray for you.

(2) What is a *Baptism*?

For parents who bring children to be **baptised**, the service involves making promises before God and the congregation to be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus Christ – and to show evidence of that commitment by being part of the church community. This is a tough commitment to make in the 21st century, and is something to be thought through seriously.

A baptism is also a celebration, often with lots of friends and relatives, but rather more is involved. You, and "Godparents" make very solemn promises before God which are effectively a public declaration of basic Christian belief involving:

- (i) deciding to turn away from the natural way of doing things, and letting God rule every area of our lives (what the Bible calls "**repentance**") and
- (ii) deciding to follow Jesus Christ and accept God's forgiveness made possible by his death on the cross (this is what the Bible calls choosing to "**believe**").

The promises and statements you and Godparents make are enclosed with this leaflet - they cannot be made lightly!

Similarly, we pray and trust that a baptized child will grow up to understand and appropriate for themselves the promises made in baptism. For this reason, it is important to understand that baptism is the beginning of a spiritual journey within the family of the church - not a one-off event which means that a child is "done".

(3) How do I know whether *baptism* or *thanksgiving* is right for me?

If you want to thank God for the gift of your child, *but do not want to make the solemn promises before God and other people that baptism involves*, then the

thanksgiving or dedication service is for you. **Thanksgiving** is also for those who

feel they want to acknowledge God and seek his help in the child's upbringing. Of course, your child can always be baptized later on as well, should you, or the child (when older and able understand the promises made) want this. That is *why a lot of committed Christians, too, opt for this service.*

Baptism is for the children of parents *who are, or want to be practising Christians.* The Christian faith is a personal relationship with God through Christ. This relationship is open to us, not on the basis of how good we are, but as a gift. (Much though this surprises many, the Christian faith is not about "being good enough to go to heaven".)

(4) Is the **Thanksgiving** a "second class" baptism?

Definitely not! The two services are different ways of responding to God's gift of a child and both are treated by the Church as great occasions. **Thanksgivings** are a first class alternative and joyfully used by both committed Christians and those who are not. Either way the child's spiritual status is the same.

(5) Do I have to come to church?

If you decide to have a **thanksgiving** service, this does not imply any on-going commitment to come to church. We would love to see you – you might be surprised by what you find! – but the thanksgiving does not involve any promises to that effect. The Church of England **baptism** service, by contrast, does include the clear statement by parents and godparents that they will help their children "take their place within the life and worship of the church". By church law godparents must have been baptised themselves.

We hope this information is helpful, but please don't worry if you still have questions! The church is not for perfect people but for ordinary men and women like us who are honest enough to recognise our need of God. We look forward to talking about some of these things – or any other questions you have – in the near future.