



# *Baptism*

*at*

*St Michael & All Angels*

**Welcome!**

**We are delighted that you are exploring baptism, a foundational sacrament of Christ's Church.**

**What is Baptism?**

Practiced from the earliest days of the Christian movement, Baptism (sometimes called Christening) is a sign of new life in Jesus Christ. In this new life all people are joined as one, since we are not baptised into the Anglican church, but into the wholeness of Christ's Church – the one, holy, catholic (from the Greek *catholikos*, meaning universal) and apostolic Church, transcending every brand name.

The Anglican Church practices 'open baptism', which means that we welcome with open arms your wish to be baptised or to have your child baptised, and try to place as few hurdles in your way as possible. At the same time we want to help you make this celebration meaningful and memorable, the start of a journey in faith, hope and love within the community and household of faith. Baptism is a powerful sign, focusing on many of the great themes of the life of faith. We celebrate God's creative and redemptive work – in creation, bringing cosmos out of chaos; in liberating the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt by parting the waters of the Red Sea; in empowering Jesus with the divine Spirit at his own baptism in the river Jordan; in Jesus' overcoming of death and sin in his crucifixion and resurrection.

Baptism connects the small story of an individual life with this cosmic story, the big picture showing what it means to be a human being in relationship with God. All the baptised participate in this eternal cycle of dying and rising to newness of life by the public vows made when they are brought to the life-giving water.

God's gift of love for the whole creation is revealed in this special way, liberating us from all that denies or denigrates or destroys the dignity of human nature.

Baptism is entry into life lived in company with Christ, meeting him week by week around his table where we are inspired to live Christlike lives, nourished with bread for the journey. Baptism means we belong to a great family, the community of the catholic (from the Greek *katholikos*, meaning universal) Church of the ages, stretching back in time and around the world. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mother Theresa of Calcutta become relatives, together with heroes of the past like Francis of Assisi, Oscar Romero, and Martin Luther King Jr, to name just a few. The Christian family is large and strong, renowned for the many faithful who work for justice and peace in today's world.

Although baptism is universal in its embrace, initiating us into the life of the universal Church, we experience the richness of our inheritance by involvement in a local church. As we give ourselves here to one another in love, committing to particular people in all their diversity, the blessedness of who we are and whose we are begins to dawn. Here we experience the mystery of God's patient and passionate love as we live for one another and with one another, and learn from one another.

### **Sponsors / Godparents**

Because baptised life is about replacing independence with interdependence, adults as well as children need spiritual sponsors. Adults should choose mature Christians who can nurture and guide them in faith.

Parents are the primary sponsors of their own children, since it is initially in the home that a child's beliefs and values are formed and shared. This is the main place where care and growth take place – physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. The home in isolation, however, is never enough. Well-balanced children learn to socialize early, participating in larger communities beyond that of their parents and siblings. It is customary and wise, therefore, to choose extra sponsors to assist with the special task of encouraging a child to grow in Christian faith and life. It is not necessary to choose your best friends for this role. Choose people who will take an active interest in the spiritual

development of your child. There is some flexibility around how many sponsors a person might have, though our Prayer Book commends two godfathers and one godmother for boys, and two godmothers and one godfather for girls. All Godparents must be baptised, and preferably confirmed.

## **What is it to be a Christian?**

In the baptism service, parents and godparents are asked:

### **“Do you turn to Christ?”**

So - it's good to have some clarity about what responding to that question in the affirmative means.

The baptism service itself gives a rich picture, drawn from the saving events recorded in the Bible, of what it is to be a Christian. In short, to be a Christian is to turn to Jesus Christ.

As said in the Bible:

*‘The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth’ (John 1.14)*

*‘Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.’ (Hebrews 1.1-3A)*

*‘But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life’. (Titus 3.4-7)*

We also ask:

**“Do you repent of your sins, do you reject selfish living and all that is false and unjust, and do you renounce all that is evil?”**

*‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’. (Acts 2.38)*

*“The time has come,” Jesus said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1.15)*

*‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us’. (1 John 1.8-10)*

**So – a Christian community is a place where a fair bit of repenting is going on. What does that mean?**

Well, it means we are a people who are not afraid to face our failures and limitations, who are aware of the reality of sin in humanity, and are only too happy to point to the forgiveness and redemption which are extended to us through Jesus Christ.

That forgiveness extends from God to us, but also, opens the possibility of radical forgiveness and honesty to be a marker of a redeemed people. Whether divine to human, or human to human, repentance offers a comprehensive restoration of relationships.

It’s worth emphasising – repentance is not about making up for the wrong we have done or trying to prove ourselves to God! Repentance is a faithful response to God’s call on our lives, trusting in the love and mercy of God. This trust becomes visible in a changed life; as followers of Christ, we live life differently as we learn from Jesus how to live life.

And we are called to do this together – which is why we gather at least weekly as the community of the faithful to be formed by God’s Spirit into disciples of Christ.

*‘Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ (John 13.35)*

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2.42, 46-47)*

This is one of the blessings of being a Christian. Life is busy, or connections and community can be scarce, but in the company of Jesus’ people you will meet a wonderful diverse mix of people, who will have different views on all sorts of things but are united in their love for the Lord, and the joy of being sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus.

### **What are the options?**

Proceeding with the **baptism** of their child is the usual practice for people who belong to a community of the faithful. If you are not regular members of the congregation, we will offer some means of preparation in the lead up to the baptism in the hope that there is a greater awareness of the significance of what is happening in baptism – that a person is marked as a child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of heaven.

Alternatively, if you don’t feel able to make the baptismal promises at this stage, we can offer you a **Thanksgiving for a Child**. This can take place either within or outside of Sunday worship, does not require much preparation, but still provides a means to thank God for the gift of your child, pray for their growth, and receive support from those involved in their spiritual welfare. This can be a heartfelt and meaningful service which leaves open the possibility of baptism later on.

## **What Next?**

At St Michael & All Angels we baptize adults as well as infants throughout the year, however, in the six weeks of Lent leading up to Easter there are no baptisms. Some other Sundays are also ruled out for practical reasons. To avoid disappointment, you need to discuss dates with the parish priest well in advance.

In addition to in-person discussions about this sacrament with the parish clergy, the best preparation for baptism is simply coming to the Sunday Eucharist, and we ask that you do this for at least a month prior to the baptism date – and, hopefully, happily ever-after as well!

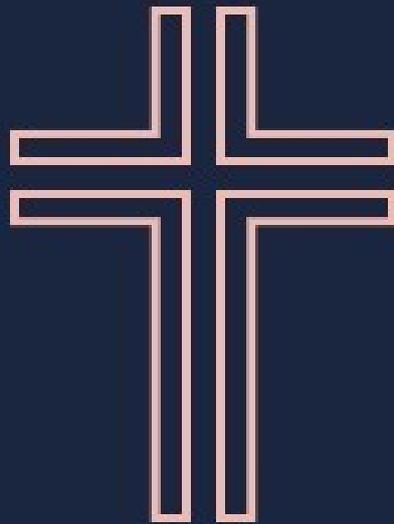
Your presence helps you get to know us and us to know you. It means that you and your family become part of the parish community ahead of the baptism day, so that when the celebration happens your own happiness is shared by everyone present.

## **Cost**

No fee is ever charged for baptism, but most people like to make a donation to the ministry and mission of the church.

## **Where to from here?**

If you wish to proceed with Baptism or a Thanksgiving for a Child, or have any further questions at all, please contact Fr Brett via the email address on the back of this booklet.



**Anglican Parish of Canning**  
Church of St Michael & All Angels



**46 George Way, Cannington 6107**  
**PO Box 67, Cannington 6987**



**(08) 9350 5468**



**parish@canningtonanglicans.org**



**www.canningtonanglicans.org.au**



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