

## **Baptism at St George's**

Perhaps you are thinking about baptism – either for yourself or for one or more of your children. This leaflet is intended to provide an overview of baptism and why you might consider it.

### **What is Baptism?**

Baptism is our response to the invitation of Jesus Christ to follow God's way of living. It both symbolizes joining the church and committing ourselves to following Jesus. We do not think that God only loves or accepts us if we have been baptized. God loves us right from our birth, whether or not we ever get baptized. Instead, baptism is our human response of "yes" to God's invitation to us to follow Christ.

Some people feel called to baptism because of an important life event, such as the wonder of God's creation at the birth of a new baby. Others come to baptism after a long period of struggle and spiritual growth. Yet others may have had the experience of suddenly receiving a call to follow Jesus. Whatever your circumstances, we at St George's will be pleased to welcome you as you take this significant step in your spiritual life.

At baptism, we receive a name. This reflects Scripture in which God says of his people Israel, "I have called you by name, you are mine. You are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you." [Isaiah Chapter 43] This name is, of course, our Christian name, and where better to be known by our Christian names than among our fellow parishioners at church!

Because we make a commitment to follow Jesus at our baptism, the ceremony has a definite sense of starting new chapter in life. Water has been used as a symbol of baptism from the earliest days of Christianity, nearly two thousand years ago. Water is essential to life and also a symbol of cleanliness or purity – one of the images used at baptism is that water cleanses our souls from impurities such as sin, just as we use water to clean our bodies when we take a shower. Water is also symbolic of Jesus' own baptism in the River Jordan at the beginning of his earthly ministry.

Baptism is called a "sacrament" – often described as an outward and visible sign of an inward but invisible grace. Water is the outward and visible sign of baptism. The invisible grace is God's acceptance of our commitment to follow Jesus, to the best of our ability. None of us can truly understand that "invisible grace" by which God accepts us, which is why infants and young children are just as welcome to be baptized as older folks. We can only hope to grow gradually into a greater understanding of God's love for us.

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

Baptism is carried out as part of the regular Sunday service at St George's, because the person being baptized is joining a Christian community as well as beginning a life-long personal spiritual journey. It is both individual and communal. Private baptisms are performed only for special reasons, such as the unavailability of participants except on a particular occasion, or if the

person to be baptized is grievously ill.

At the baptismal service, the candidate(s) – or, in the case of young children, their parents and sponsors – are asked questions about what they believe, and they make promises to follow Jesus Christ in their lives to the best of their ability. Of course, instruction is given beforehand by the clergy! Sponsors, also called god-parents make these promises on behalf of children too young to make the promises themselves.

The congregation then promises to support the new member(s) of Christ's family on their journey. Following this, everyone present makes an Affirmation of Faith – a statement of belief in the three natures of God – God the Father and Creator; Jesus, God's Son and our brother and guide; and the Holy Spirit, who animates our desire to continue on our spiritual journey.

In the actual baptism, water is poured over the forehead of the candidate – three times, once each in the name of the three natures of God. Unlike the early Christians, we at St George's do not practise complete immersion in water. A lighted candle is given to each person as soon as they have been baptized. This is another symbol of baptism – that we pass from darkness of unknowing into the light of knowledge of Jesus. Some people choose to relight this candle either on their birthday or on the anniversary of their baptism each year.

After the baptism, the Sunday service continues in the usual way with the Eucharist – the sharing of the symbolic meal of bread and wine as commanded by Jesus at the Last Supper (see separate leaflet). Almost all Christian churches, including St. George's, accept baptism in any church as equally valid; therefore, if you were baptized elsewhere, your baptism is automatically accepted at St George's.

### **How do I go about arranging baptism for myself or my child?**

Contact the clergy at St George's to arrange both a date that will be convenient to you and the family and friends who we hope will be with you to celebrate on this special occasion. Our web site has an application form that you may download, fill out, and return in person or electronically. This provides details of the full names of the candidate, parents, and sponsors (even older candidates may like to have one or more sponsors to act as "spiritual buddies"). The clergy will also arrange a time for explaining more of the significance of baptism to you, and will assist you to fill out the accompanying form, if you wish. In the case of baptizing children, we ask that at least one of the parents is himself or herself baptized, since you will be promising to bring your child up in a Christian-oriented household. If you are not already baptized yourself, you may want to take this step alongside your child. Equally, if you are not a regular member of St George's, you may wish to attend our services to get a better sense of our beliefs.

There is no fee charged for baptism. This sacrament is part of who we are and what we do as a Christian community.