

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Baptism at Good Shepherd

What is baptism in the Episcopal Church?

According to the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church, “Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church” (BCP p. 298) In baptism, “God adopts us as his children and makes us members of the Body of Christ” (BCP p. 838). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls us to “make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). It is our privilege to fulfill this call as the Body of Christ assembled at Good Shepherd!

How do I schedule a baptism at Good Shepherd?

We celebrate nearly 100 baptisms a year at Good Shepherd and offer an opportunity for baptism nearly every month (except during Advent and Lent) and in every service, but we do limit the number of baptisms per service and schedule them on a first-come-first-served basis. The process of requesting a baptism begins by contacting the Rev. Brin Bon, Senior Associate for Liturgy & Formation, who will send you an initial request form and start the process of preparing you, or your family and child for baptism. We are almost always able to accommodate the first date you request, but it is possible that the date you asked for is no longer available by the time we process your form. Your baptism date is not considered final until we send an email confirming that you are on the official baptism schedule for the date and service you requested.

Can we schedule a private baptism?

Because baptism is understood as full initiation into the Body of Christ, and the Book of Common Prayer instructs that it is “appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast (BCP p. 298), we do not typically schedule or perform private baptisms. However, there are occasionally times when, out of extreme necessity, a baptism needs to be scheduled outside of a Sunday service. If you believe this is the case for you or your child, please contact the Rev. Brin Bon, Senior Associate for Liturgy & Formation, to discuss the matter.

What happens in the baptism prep class and why is it required?

In this one-hour class, we review the theology of baptism, discuss the importance of your and your child’s participation in the worship and sacraments of the Church, and review the logistics of the actual baptism. For new parents and godparent, this is especially important, and is an opportunity to learn about the many ways Good Shepherd is here to help you live a life shaped by Christ and the Christian tradition so that you can fulfill the promises you will make as you present your child for baptism. Sponsoring a child for baptism requires an affirmation of your own faith so that you can

honestly and adequately help your child / godchild grow up learning what it means and how to follow Christ, and we want you to do this thoughtfully, intentionally, and with the help of the Church. For adults wishing to be baptized, a member of our clergy will typically work with you one-on-one to prepare you for baptism.

Who can sponsor a child for baptism?

According to the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church, a sponsor (often called a “godparent” when the baptismal candidate is a child) must be a baptized person. Sponsors can be baptized in any Christian denomination. It is very fitting that parents be included among the sponsors of their own child(ren). Regardless of who the sponsors are, these people vow to support the person they present “by prayer and example in their Christian life.” Thus, it is the hope of the Church that parents and godparents will be people who have an active faith of their own, and that they will share this faith with the child they sponsor. There is no requirement about the number or gender of the sponsors, as long as there is at least one.

Can I request that a particular priest baptize me / my child?

This is generally difficult to do as the schedule for which of our six different services the clergy preach and Celebrate Holy Eucharist in is set months in advance. We know that there is sometimes a strong desire to have a priest who you have grown close to be the one who celebrates this important milestone with you, but we want to assure you that your or your child’s baptism into the Body of Christ is valid and important no matter which member of the clergy baptizes you / them. That said, we will try to accommodate such a request whenever possible. Please contact the Rev. Brin Bon to discuss this further.

When should we arrive on the day of the baptism?

The parents and sponsors should arrive 30 minutes early to review any logistics that are unique to your service and to meet the clergy who will be celebrating your baptism.

Will you reserve seats for my family?

We reserve seats at the front of the worship space for the baptism candidate, their immediate family (siblings and parents, partners, or children), their sponsors and any immediate family of the sponsors. We do not reserve seats for extended family and friends, and encourage them to arrive early to find a seat close to the front of the church. Prior to the service, we will ask you to tell us how many people to reserve seats for.

What about photos?

We love for you to take photos on this special day! Because there is so much happening as we get ready for the service to start, we ask that you wait until after the service is ended to take photos. At that time, you may gather at the front of the worship space or around the baptismal font / near the Paschal Candle, or in front of the church building—whatever you like!

What happens when I make a donation for altar flowers?

The donations we receive from our families and candidates at baptism help provide beautiful altar flowers on these special occasions as well as the rest of the year. We also print a dedication for the altar flowers on behalf of the baptism families in the bulletin for that Sunday. We do not print the individual names of those who give them. You can make the donation using the following link:

<https://secure.accessacs.com/access/oglogin.aspx?sn=96363>. Please select the “Altar Flowers” fund from the dropdown menu, and then write “baptism” in the optional memo field. We are so grateful for your generosity and we benefit from it all year long!

What do we receive from the church signifying or confirming the baptism?

On the day of the baptism we will give you a baptism certificate, as well as certificates for each of the sponsors. For young children, we also give you a keepsake illustrated book that will help you tell your child the story of their baptism as they grow up. Our St. Elizabeth’s Guild members work all year long to hand-sew and embroider a linen baptism towel that we will give you following the service—after we use it to pat your / the child’s forehead dry after we pour water on it during the baptism. Finally, we will give you a candle during the service, with the words: “Receive the Light of Christ.” We encourage you to keep this candle and to light it on the anniversary of your or your child’s baptism, or on other milestones or important times of prayer as a reminder of your belonging in the Body of Christ.

Does Good Shepherd keep a record of my / my child’s baptism?

Yes, we record all baptisms in our Baptism Register in case you or your child ever need confirmation of it. This may happen if they are later Confirmed, want to apply for Holy Orders, or need to otherwise confirm that they were baptized. Your signed Baptism Certificate will also satisfy most of these requirements, and was once considered a legal civil document.

What should I do after my / my child’s baptism?

Attend worship, receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, and participate as fully as you can in the ongoing life of the Body of Christ—the Church!