

Infant Baptism at Zion Lutheran Church

Why should I have my baby baptized?

When we baptize, we fulfill Jesus' command, "Go therefore... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." In response to this command, we baptize.

As Christians, we believe that there are two beginnings in life. The first beginning is the miracle of birth. Life is a gift from God and though we claim to understand its process, it is nevertheless, a great miracle. The second beginning is Holy Baptism. Listen to this opening address in the service of Holy Baptism:

"In baptism our gracious heavenly Father frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are born children of a fallen humanity; by water and the Holy Spirit we are reborn children of God, and made members of the church, the body of Christ. Living with Christ in the communion of the saints, we grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God." (ELW, page 227)

In birth, we join a fallen and needy human family. In baptism we are brought by God into His family, there to be loved, cared for and nourished by God. Through Water and the Word of God (coupled together in Baptism), God makes our new life a reality.

What are my responsibilities as a parent?

Baptism is the beginning of a lifelong experience of God's loving care for his people. Baptism has a follow through to it called "nurture". Living with God and his people, "we grow in faith, love and obedience to the will of God."

As parents, you are cautioned that your responsibility does not stop when your child is baptized. On the contrary, God has great plans for parents! You are thereafter partners with God in an educational and guardianship enterprise. Your child belongs to Christ and you are to watch over your son or daughter on God's behalf.

Your responsibilities are clarified in the service:

"As you bring *your children* to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

- ▶to live with them among God's faithful people,
- ▶bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper,
- ▶teach *them* the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
- ▶place in *their* hands the holy scriptures, and
- ▶nurture *them* in faith and prayer, so that your *children* may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace. (ELW, page 228)

It is a staggering responsibility. But God does not ask us to do anything beyond our ability or without his help. You are not alone on this journey of faith, as a congregation we are prepared to be there to support you as parents and your children as they grow in faith.

When do I begin preparing for my child's baptism?

You can begin preparing as early as the pregnancy by scheduling a time to meet with one of the pastors for a "baptismal orientation" meeting. We will talk about the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism, the selection of sponsors, procedures for baptisms at Zion, and cover any questions you may have.

How do I schedule a baptism?

Baptisms can be scheduled to take place at either of our Sunday morning worship services. Call the church office (419-878-0266) or email Karen at kmeyer@zionwaterville.com. Our office staff will ask you to fill out a baptism information form and help you set a date and time for the baptism. They will also try to answer any questions you might have. (Baptism Information Forms may be picked up in the church office or found at Zion's Welcome Desk in the Family Life Center.)

Who should we choose as sponsors/godparents?

There was a time when sponsors/godparents were chosen with the understanding that they would care for the child in the event the parents would die. This is no longer the case. The major responsibility of a sponsor today is to assist the parents in providing a model of faith and a Christian community as an aid to the child's growth and development. Sponsors/godparents should be chosen with care and thoughtfulness. They need not be Lutherans, but they should be active and committed members of a Christian church and have the spiritual welfare of your child at heart.

What is the procedure on the day of baptism?

Your family and friends are encouraged to arrive early and sit in the front of the church. The bulletin will list where your baptism will take place during the worship service. When it is time for the service of Holy Baptism, Pastor Steve or Pastor Dan will invite the parents and sponsors to come forward and stand around the baptismal font facing the congregation.

We will ask you to bring forward copies of the "Evangelical Lutheran Worship" and turn to page 227 to follow during the baptism. Parents and sponsors will be asked to present the child for baptism with the words, "I/We present _____ for baptism."

You will receive a hand-made prayer shawl and a white towel with a baptismal symbol embroidered on it as gifts. You will also receive a baptism certificate and sponsor certificates to remind you of this very important day.

A representative of the congregation or the pastor will present you with a baptismal candle on behalf of the congregation. The candle becomes the symbol of hope for the Christian and is to be used at each anniversary of the baptism.

Follow-Up after the Baptism

Remember, baptism is not the end of the journey, it is the beginning of a life of faith. We spend the rest of our lives exploring who this amazing God who claimed us in baptism is, and how we can better love and serve Him.

There are several specific ways we hope you will nurture the faith of your child on assist them in their walk with Christ.

First, we encourage you to use the candle you were given at the time of their baptism and perform a short service called "The Anniversary of Baptism" to remember the baptismal day each year. In this service, we suggest you bring out pictures from the day of their baptism and tell stories of who was there, what happened, and how God claimed your son or daughter as His precious child. Remind them that they are children of God- that their dad is the King of Kings and that makes them a prince or a princess! Next, light their baptismal candle and repeat the words "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven." Then, help them think about how they can represent God in the word by showing love, mercy and forgiveness to others and helping those in need.

Second, Zion is prepared to offer a comprehensive program of Christian education as your child grows older. This will include Sunday School, two years of confirmation instruction leading to the day of Confirmation, (which is actually called Affirmation of Baptism), and high school youth group. All these programs are designed to help you and your child learn more about God and grow in your relationship with the Lord who claimed you as His dearly loved child on the day of your baptism.

Third, we also want to support you as parents by providing opportunities for you to grow in your parenting skills and your own relationship with God. Adult forums, special classes, discipleship groups and many other resources are available for you to use as you seek to grow in faith, love and obedience to Christ. Faith is more caught than taught, and you are the primary people that will help your children 'catch' faith in Jesus Christ. If your children see you praying, reading the Bible, attending worship, showing God's love for others, serving the needy and sharing your faith with others, they will be far more likely to have a vibrant faith when they grow up. Please let us know any way that we can assist you as you continue your life-long walk with Christ. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we walk the road of faith together and we are here for you and your family.

We look forward to celebrating this important day with your family as your child is welcomed into the family of God, sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. For more information about infant baptism, please read our "Understanding of Infant Baptism" handout. God's blessings to you and your family as you prepare for the baptism and life-long faith of your child.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan and Pastor Steve