

SJEC Baptismal Policy

Baptisms at St. James' Cedartown

Baptism is the central sacrament of the Christian community. It calls us into a new and indissoluble relationship with God through Christ. It is, in the words of the Book of Common Prayer (1979), "full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church."

As such, baptism is a matter of central importance to the life of the Christian community. At St. James' Cedartown, we conform to the norms for baptism expressed in the Book of Common Prayer (1979). Baptisms that take place at St. James' are governed by the policy hereinafter described, which is our effort to live into the norms of the prayer book.

Holy Baptism is a sacrament by which new members are made part of Christ's Body, the Christian Church. The outward and visible sign in baptism is water, in which an individual is baptized in the name of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The inward and spiritual grace in baptism is the person's unity with Christ, being birthed into God's household and receiving the forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit.

At St. James', we delight in welcoming the newly baptized as partners with us in Christ's life and ministry, and we are thrilled that you are considering having your baptism here. Holy Baptism is a sacred occasion. We promise to do all in our power not only to make your baptism a joyous event, but also to support you in your life in Christ.

When we baptize infants, it is the parents and sponsors (godparents) who make promises on behalf of the child. When we baptize adults, the adult renounces evil, affirms faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and joins in promising to uphold the faith of the Church.

In baptism, holy water is poured over the head of the person being baptized. Then Chrism (holy oil, blessed by the bishop) is poured on the person's head as the presence of the Holy Spirit is invoked and claimed for this new Christian. Finally, a candle is given to the newly baptized, symbolizing that this person now shares in the mission of carrying the Light of Christ into the world.

Who can be baptized?

Anyone who seeks God and is drawn to Jesus Christ is welcome to receive the sacrament of Holy Baptism. God's invitation extends to people of all ages and from every kind of background.

Can little children really be baptized?

Yes, of course. The celebration of an infant's baptism is a joyous occasion for that child and for the family, as well as for the family-in-Christ, the church. Baptism celebrates God's love for us, and that God calls each of us to a special and personal relationship.

Must we be active members or regular givers?

No. We welcome everyone. Period. Since part of what baptism conveys is membership in the Body of Christ, the church, we welcome you to participate in our worship and community life--before, during, and after the baptism.

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What happens if we decide to postpone baptism of our child?

Nothing. If you wish to let your children make an informed choice at a later age, that is just fine.

What is the purpose of baptism?

In the Anglican Communion, we tend to emphasize *incorporation into the body of the faithful* at baptism. We also focus on the covenant we make and renew with God. That is why we emphasize church membership and participation so heavily; it would be odd to baptize someone into a community in which they are not actively engaged.

Some also see baptism as washing away the stain of ancestral sin. While this may be a theologically valid and sometimes helpful construct, that this ritual has not been performed does not negate God's love, nor does it prevent God from welcoming those who are not baptized into paradise. Baptism provides a sacramental ritual that proclaims the essential truth that all people are marked as God's beloved forever.

What do I do if I don't know if I was ever baptized?

No problem—we've got that covered. Although we consider baptism an unrepeatable event, we also have the ability to perform what is called a "conditional baptism" in such circumstances.

I was baptized elsewhere; do I need to be baptized again?

No. Baptism is baptism. You could have been baptized in the Roman Catholic, Protestant or non-denominational church, or "down by the riverside"—whatever, so long as it involves water and an invocation of the Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). All such baptisms are recognized by the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion.

When are baptisms offered?

The calendar of the Christian church has four feast days on which baptisms are especially appropriate. They are:

- The Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, in January
- The Great Vigil of Easter in early spring
- The Day of Pentecost, in late spring, and
- All Saints' Sunday, in November.

We encourage baptisms on these joyous occasions.

If circumstances necessitate a different date, we will try to accommodate your need. Baptisms are not held in the season of Lent (the forty days leading up to Easter) and are not encouraged during Advent (the four weeks preceding Christmas).

A baptism service involves several groups of people who plan worship, select music, and such.

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Therefore, we request a minimum of two months' notice for all baptisms. Because baptism is an initiation into the Christian community and is, by its very nature, a public occasion, we do not offer "private baptisms" limited to only to the candidate's immediate family.

Who can be a sponsor or godparent?

Every candidate for baptism is accompanied on his/her faith journey by at least one sponsor (or "godparent" for minor children). The commitment of the sponsor/godparent is to support the candidate in the Christian faith and life. At least one sponsor/godparent must be a baptized Christian. Parents and sponsors/godparents shall be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge of God and in their responsibilities as members of the Church.

How do I prepare for baptism?

The commitments made in baptism are of the utmost gravity, and are not to be made without sufficient preparation. Parents and godparents must be capable of the vows they will make on behalf of a candidate. The commitments made in baptism are understood as being made with the congregation standing in solidarity with the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth and, within that communion, in solidarity with other congregations of Christians around the country and around the world. We encourage families and sponsors of candidates to attend church regularly during the weeks leading up to the Sacrament.

Candidates for baptism—or their parents and godparents if the candidate is an infant—enter into a time of holy preparation immediately before the baptism. The presiding minister will gather the parents, godparents, candidates, and other family in advance of the service. During this time, candidates reflect prayerfully on the five promises of the Baptismal Covenant (Book of Common Prayer, pp. 304-305). These serve as a foundation for a commitment to the Christian faith and life. The Christian journey is a lifelong process, and baptism marks the beginning of a commitment to grow in faith. Preparation can involve more extensive formation, depending on the candidate's age, background, and desire.

What are the expectations of the church after baptism?

Because baptism is a rite of initiation and welcome, the church yearns for the newly baptized to have an authentic relationship with God and the Christian assembly. A mark of this relationship will be regular participation in the life of this parish. We invite candidates for baptism to take seriously this aspect of the Christian life, expressing a sincere commitment to "continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers."

How much does baptism cost?

There is no charge for this or any other sacramental rite. As a sign of God's love freely bestowed upon all people, baptism comes without a "price tag."

What about pictures?

Of course, pictures are welcome. Please avoid the use of flash or supplemental lighting or any other photographic techniques that could distract the congregation and the altar party. We ask that all

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professional photographers or videographers consult with the priest well before the baptism, to help ensure that they understand St. James' policies and expectations in this regard.

How do I schedule a baptism?

Please contact our Parish Administrator to begin the process—or, better yet, come to church, worship with us, and check us out. *You are welcome here!*