

The Word became flesh and lived
among us.
John 1:14.

Our faith family, the Church

What is the Church? Or rather: *who* is the Church? Essentially, the Church is a people, a family of believers who centre their lives on the one living God, creator and redeemer of the world.

Historically, as a Christian people the Church emerged from the Jewish people whose scriptures and core beliefs (e.g., love of God and neighbour) remain the bedrock of our own religious tradition.

Christian faith, however, involves another step: the belief that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God has been revealed in human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who was both truly God and truly human.

Jesus was a faithful Jew whose life and teachings revealed God's ways of love, compassion, justice, forgiveness. Amidst the religious and political tensions of a Roman-occupied land, his teachings and actions attracted enemies as well as followers. Ultimately his religious convictions cost him his life. He was executed in the Roman way: death by crucifixion.

Jesus' death was followed by extraordinary events. According to Christian testimony, he was raised from the dead and proclaimed as Lord, the Son of God and Saviour of all.

This movement, from suffering and death to resurrection and new life, is at the heart of Christian faith. The selfgiving love of Jesus is the "Good News" path which Christians seek to make their own as they come to God, united as one people in the Holy Spirit.

They do this in solidarity with all people of goodwill, reaching out to a world in desperate need of hope and healing.

2. Why baptism?

When parents are asked why they have chosen to have their child baptised in the Catholic Church, there is usually a wide range of responses.

Some will emphasise the family aspect: traditions and customs passed on through the generations. Some will speak of their love for their spouse which leads them to willingly accommodate their spouse's Catholic tradition. Others speak in terms of values, beliefs, spirituality, faith. Still others speak directly of God, of Jesus, of the Church and its sacraments.

All these responses have their rightful place in the 'big picture' of baptism.

Indeed, we are speaking of a great mystery of divine love. No statement about baptism will ever express its significance perfectly, or exhaust its meaning. But we can each contribute a precious insight into this mystery of love.

Reflection

How about you? How would you answer the question: why have you brought your child to be baptised? Why do you see baptism as being important for your child?

Share some thoughts now with the group. We encourage you to continue this conversation at home.

More...

For reflection at home:

God in our life

- God is love. Who has taught me most about what it means to love?
- How would I describe my childhood experience of God? Of Church?
- What part do God and Church have in my life now?
- How would I describe my relationship with Jesus? With the Holy Spirit?

God in our child's life

- As our child grows up, how would I like him/her to think of God?

Hopes and dreams

- What hopes and dreams for our child do I hold on the occasion of his/her baptism and into the future?



Baptism is about belonging

There is a simple yet profound word which is helpful in encapsulating the many dimensions of baptism: belonging.

Through baptism:

- We belong to Jesus Christ who shows us the way to God.
- We belong to a great family of faith, the Church.

Of course, this belonging is not like signing a membership with the local library or RSL club!

Baptism is like a wedding: the ceremony is just the beginning. It is the gateway to a new life of unity, sharing joys and struggles as we seek to live as disciples of Jesus, as one people, one body in Christ.

Because baptism is a relationship with God and God's people, it is a membership that never 'expires.' It is a relationship that endures throughout your child's life, and even beyond...eternally.

Like all memberships, baptism entails an agreement between parties. On your part, you agree to raise your child in the way of Christ and to do all you can to help your child continue their sacramental journey as a member of the Church.

As you do so, the Church community (especially as embodied by your local parish) is committed to living the life of Christ so as to be a loving, nourishing Christian community of faith in which your child will grow up.

Together we acknowledge that we belong to God and we trust in God's fidelity to us. In our faith tradition this mutual commitment of belonging and trust is often described in terms of "covenant."

Reflection

If you have a thought or reflection to share as we continue to unpack the meaning of baptism, by all means share it with the group.



What is a sacrament?

Baptism is a sacrament.

In the Catholic Church a sacrament is understood to be a special sign or symbol of God's love.

This sign is not like a road sign. A road sign might signal for you to stop or go, however the sign itself is an external indicator.

A sacrament, on the other hand, involves a profound relationship between the sign, the action of God, and our participation in faith. In baptism the symbol of water signifies your child's birth into the life of Christ. As the water flows and the words of baptism are prayed, we believe that a deeper reality is actually taking place: your child is being drawn into a relationship with Christ and with the community that lives the life of baptism.

While sacraments refer to divine mystery, they are not 'magic.' They cannot exist apart from the community of those who are baptised. They call for active human involvement and commitment, even if God is the initiator of what is happening in the sacrament.

Baptism is a sacrament of initiation (entry, welcome, membership) within the Catholic community, an initiation into the life of Christ. It is the first of three sacraments of initiation which form a unity: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

As you prepare for your child's baptism, his/her sacramental journey has begun!