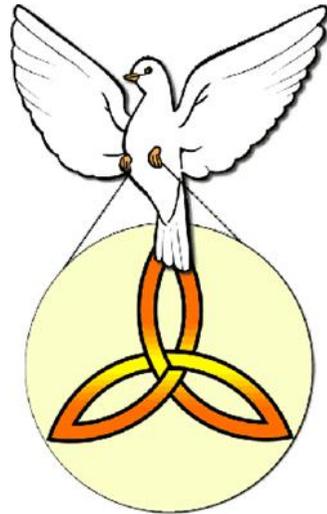
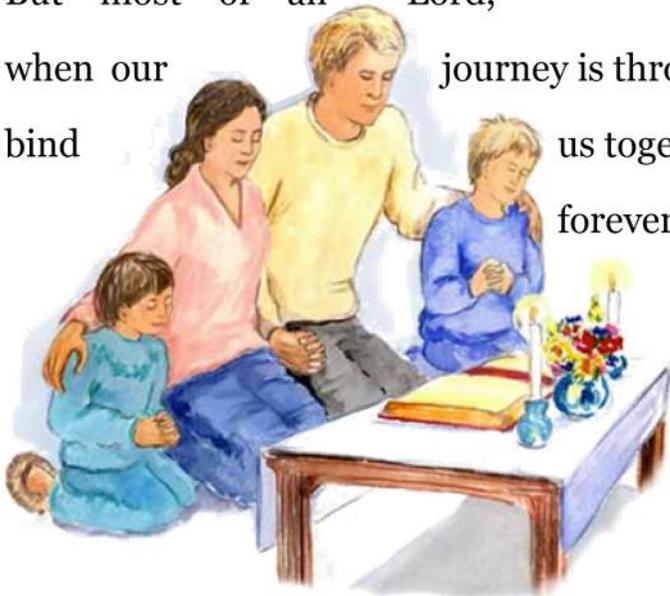


A Family Prayer

Dear Father in heaven,
I ask for your touch,
bless all my family
We need you so much.
Teach us to love,
to forgive and to share,
with the help of your Spirit,
to thrive and to dare.



But most of all Lord,
when our journey is through,
bind us together
forever with you.



THOUGHTS FOR PARENTS CONSIDERING



BAPTISM

Dear Parents

Everyone in our parish sends you best wishes and congratulations on the birth of your new child. May your baby grow up to be strong and healthy, treasured in an atmosphere of security that is graced by the presence of Almighty God.

Perhaps you are thinking about having your child Baptised. Why not get in touch with the parish priest? He will arrange a convenient time to have a chat about Baptism and also to give you advice and guidance.

There is often a lot of confusion surrounding Baptism. A mixture of half truths, folk religion and social tradition. Sometimes people think it is just a case of phoning up the priest, making a date and getting the baby 'done'. The substance of Baptism is more substantial than this. Baptism is one of the greatest gifts that God and His Church have to offer a family. It is a celebration packed with grace and beauty. However these wonderful blessings are not simply for the child. These gifts are intended for the parents, godparents indeed the whole family connected with the child. The parish wants all of you to leave the church feeling affirmed, respected and thoroughly blessed as a result of a marvellous encounter with Almighty God.

It would be very beneficial to give the period of preparation some serious thought. This booklet is intended to help. Its contents will provide food for reflection. The intention is to enrich your whole family enabling you to realise that your role in the celebration of Baptism is valued and honoured.

Jewish Blessing on Children

MAY THE LORD BLESS AND KEEP
YOU

MAY THE LORD LET HIS PRESENCE
SHINE UPON YOU

AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU

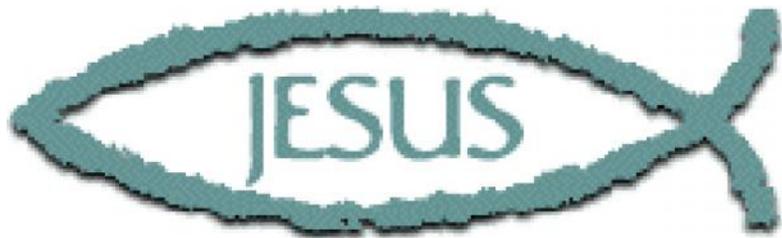
MAY HE SHED HIS RADIANCE
AROUND YOU

AND GRANT YOU PEACE.

AMEN.

Please give all these points some thought. In particular ask yourself how you will be able to provide an ongoing sense of commitment and good example. Then if you feel that you want to proceed with the Baptism the priest will provide you with another little booklet called ‘**Application for Baptism**’. This will contain an application form, the details of which will be placed in the Baptism Registers of our parish. There are also guidelines about names, godparents as well as a few words about your marriage.

In the meantime the parish sends you warmest good wishes and promises of prayers especially during our masses. We also enclose two beautiful prayers for you and your family.



Here is some great news for you

On page after page of the Holy Bible we begin to notice that God is continually inviting people to enter into **close personal relationships** with Him. He is inviting us to share in His life, to get to know Him, to keep our sights fixed on Him. By sharing the gift of life with us, God wishes us to blossom and mature to the fullest of our potential as human beings. An early saint of the church called St Irenaeus put it this way “*When men and women are fully alive and fully human there is the glory of God.*”

Life is the greatest gift God gives us. Your child is a **L**perfect example of God’s gift. However the Lord is offering your child even greater life, life that will never end. It is not simply natural life. That will come to an end. He is offering your child a share in His life. This is called **Supernatural Life.**



The teachings of Jesus completely support this message. This is hardly surprising since He is the Lord of Life, the Son of God, the Father's perfect spokesman. The message Jesus proclaimed was for the **whole world**. It was not simply for the Jewish people. His message was this: "*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*" Life with all its possibilities and the promise of something unimaginable in the life to come. The message is not a fairy story. It has been taught with certainty and conviction by the Catholic Church for 2000 years. It still preaches it today.

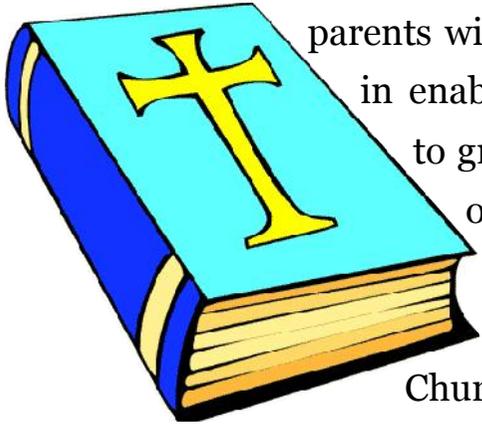
Through the gift of Baptism your child is being offered an opportunity to enter into the **Life of God and His Church**. As parents you are being offered an invitation to respond. The invitation comes from God Himself. He awaits your response. However before making your final decision, it may be wise to read on a little more.



Fourthly, the parish has nothing but the **highest praise** for parents who try their best to cultivate the Baptismal life of their children. They will be continually respected, prayed for and acknowledged for their efforts. The parish is enriched so much as a result of this.

A parish priest once said this "*Whenever parents try their best to bring up their children in the practice of the Faith they honour their child, their family name, their God and they will save their souls*". There is no doubt that trying to bring up children in a religious atmosphere can be difficult in the context of today's secular world with its phenomenal pressures. The efforts of parents can be of enormous benefit. 'Religion is caught not taught.' If children believe their parents have time for God and their religion it will make an impact on them. It may never ever leave them. That is an **enormous blessing** from parents to their children. Mother Church is there to give you every encouragement and congratulation.

It is worth remembering that Baptism only provides an opportunity for **first steps** in our Catholic journey. Subsequent progress will take time. However the good example, encouragement and interest of both parents will be of massive assistance in enabling the seeds of Baptism to grow and develop in the life of the child. Very often large numbers of baptised children are rarely seen in Church until First Communion time arrives. The opportunities for spiritual growth during those young years are lost. The relationship with the parish and its life becomes weaker. Both the children and their parents can become complete strangers to their Catholic way of life. The years pass by together with their opportunities. Very often they disappear forever.



I think I want this for my child!

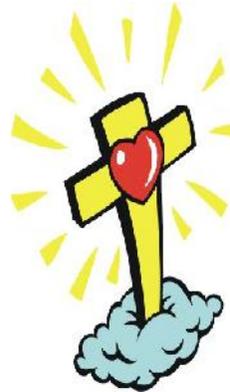
If this is your reaction then well done! A positive response to God's invitation is to be applauded. However, there is much to think about. The Church calls herself '**Mother Church**'. She cares for her children. She wants the best for them. Like all good mothers, she encourages her children to act authentically and sincerely. It is Holy Mother Church who reminds parents that the Baptism is as much about them as it is about their new child. It is Mother Church who sets before her children the responsibilities and commitments that Baptism presents to them. Here are a couple of points worth thinking about.

Firstly, Baptism is a **gift** from God. It is not a right to be demanded or expected from a priest. Like all good gifts it must be treated with respect and responded to with thanks and sincerity. Through this gift God wishes to do something for us. We are not doing something for Him.



Secondly, parents are invited to undertake certain **responsibilities** in response to God's invitation. They are asked to raise their child in the active practice of the Catholic Faith by bringing their child to Mass on Sundays (as all Catholics are supposed to do) and faithfully observing the codes of values taught by Jesus the Light of the World. Supposing parents do not practise their Faith? Supposing they rarely go to Mass, say prayers or support their parish. Supposing membership of the Catholic church matters little to them. Will these parents be able to undertake Baptismal promises sincerely and authentically? As one writer put it "*If you want something to work you follow the manufacturer's instructions*". The church follows a set of guidelines called the **Code of Canon Law**. The Code instructs us that if there is not a well founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion then the Baptism is to be deferred and the parents advised and instructed. Catholic teaching also states that '*Grace works on Nature*'. In other words, God's grace does not work like magic. It needs just a little bit of effort from human nature to help it.

Thirdly, until our children are baptised they have no religious identity. Thanks to the gift of Baptism, your child will be granted **membership** of the Catholic Church, and membership of the parish. Your child will become a citizen of the Catholic Church the oldest institution in Western Europe. So welcome is the newly baptised child that the parish bestows gifts upon it, notably its rich history and its sacred traditions. Your child will belong to the family of this parish and will be treasured along with all of our children.



It is hoped that the child will treasure and savour these **blessings** in the years that follow. However supposing this does not happen? Supposing a newly baptised child is never brought to Mass or is ever involved in the life of the parish? Can we honestly say that the seeds of membership are being encouraged to blossom and develop? We would never take the trouble of joining a famous club and then never bother to attend. It would seem a little pointless.