

Baptism Policy

A. Introduction

We love to baptise people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, and who can make a profession of their new faith for themselves – older children, young people and adults.

In addition, we rejoice in God’s gift of all children, born to any parents, and so we will offer a service of thanksgiving for the gift of a child to any family which requests it. But we also assert that the baptism of babies and younger children belonging to Christian families is appropriate [see appendix]; and so we conduct infant baptisms in Elmdon as well.

B. Day and location of baptism services

Unless there are compelling reasons otherwise, Elmdon baptisms and services of thanksgiving for the gift of a child will always be conducted in the main Sunday service¹. They will always take place in Elmdon Church itself, except that the candidate be prevented from attending by reason of chronic weakness, illness or danger of death.

C. Eligibility

We will baptise older children, young people and adults (who have not been baptised already) upon a credible profession of faith in the gospel of Christ, arranging further instruction for them as necessary and encouraging them to prepare themselves for their baptism with prayer and fasting². Where practical, this baptism will be done by full immersion. The bishop of the diocese will be given at least one week’s notice before the baptism takes place³ and we will invite all such candidates to consider confirmation at the next opportunity⁴.

We will also baptise the infant children of any member of our congregation (defined as somebody who has attended at least once a month for a period of six months) unless we believe that they or the proposed godparents require further preparation⁵. In addition parents and godparents may be required to attend a baptism preparation course which explains the nature of baptism and the responsibilities Christian parents have towards their children in making baptismal promises to God on these children’s behalf⁶.

Those who are not currently members of our congregation will be offered a service of thanksgiving for the gift of child. If they want a baptism instead of (or as well as) a thanksgiving, a meeting will be arranged with the parents to discern what preparation is required before a baptism is considered appropriate⁷. As a minimum parents will

¹ Canon B21

² Canon B 24.1

³ Canon B 24.2

⁴ Canon B 24.3

⁵ Canon B 22.3

⁶ Canon B 26.2

⁷ Canon B 22.4

be expected to attend the church at least once a month for a period of six months before the baptism takes place. This allows the congregation to get to know the parents and children, to welcome them into the life of the church and to make with a clear conscience the promises that baptism requires of them. In addition these parents and godparents should attend a baptism preparation course, as outlined above.

Attendance and preparation will be reviewed, and appropriate support identified, at the first staff meeting of each month; and the church reserves the right to delay a baptism until both attendance and preparation have taken place. We also reserve the right to insist on further preparation at this stage, if we believe that either parents or godparents require it. In these circumstances, families who live outside the parish of Elmdon will be referred to their own parish church for baptism.

In the event that families resident in the parish choose to seek a baptism in Anglican churches elsewhere, we will expect the same attendance and preparation requirements to be met before we give our consent⁸.

D. Parents and Godparents

We will accept as godparents only those who have been baptised and, where possible, confirmed themselves⁹, and will ask for a confirmation certificate as proof that this has happened. We will, however, be happy to accept a letter of recommendation from the prospective godparent's vicar, minister or pastor in lieu of the confirmation certificate, provided that it provides evidence of engagement with the ongoing life of Christ's Church¹⁰.

We recognise that the baptism service will place the same duties on parents as on godparents and will instruct them accordingly¹¹, as outlined above. Where only one parent is able to make a credible profession of faith, we will encourage the other parent not to make the baptismal promises to God on their children's behalf during the baptism service.

E. Review and amendment of policy

This policy and its operation will be reviewed in autumn 2022 and every two years thereafter, the PCC reserving to itself the right to review and amend it at other times also, as need arises.

Policy revised and re-adopted by Elmdon Parochial Church Council, 12th November 2021

⁸ Canon B 22.5

⁹ Canon B 23.3

¹⁰ Canon B 23.4

¹¹ Canon B 22.3

What is baptism and who should we baptise?

An appendix to the Elmdon Church Baptism Policy

What is baptism?

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commands his disciples to ‘go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’.

Physically baptism is the washing of a person with water but for Christians it is also spiritually significant. In fact, the Bible teaches us that Baptism is:

- A sign of profession and mark of difference that distinguishes Christians from non-Christians (Acts 8:12).
- An instrument by which people who believe the gospel are received into the Church (I Corinthians 12:13). □ A sign which shows the washing of sins by which God promises the Christian forgiveness of the same (Mark 1:14)
- A sign of the new birth that all Christians receive from the Holy Spirit, in dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12)
- A sign by which God promises the Christian adoption, having received the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:15)

Who should we baptise?

The Bible is clear that people who come to believe the gospel and trust Jesus as Lord and Saviour should repent and be baptised. Therefore it is right to baptise people who become Christian, and it would also be wrong to baptise those who aren't yet Christians themselves.

Christians disagree on whether we should baptise the infant children of Christians, although the Church of England (in common with the vast majority of Christians for the last two thousand years) has always promoted the practice.

It comes down to how we understand God's covenant with his people through the Bible. In Old Testament times the sign of God's covenant was circumcision, which included the children of believers. This is most clearly seen in God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 17:7, 10, 12-14) but is a continued theme throughout the Old Testament.

Since God's covenant in the Old Testament is understood to include children, the natural way to read God's covenant in the New Testament is to include children as well unless the Bible tells us otherwise.

In Acts 2:38-39 Peter explains that having heard the gospel people should repent and be baptised, and that they will then receive the Holy Spirit. He then goes on to explain that this promise is for them, their children and all those who are far off – the Gentiles. In fact it is for all whom God calls. The context of the Old Testament and verses like this in the New Testament support what is called the ‘Paedobaptist’ view.

The natural way to read the accounts of household baptisms in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 16:13-15, 16:32-34, 1 Corinthians 1:16) is that they also included the children within them.

The link between circumcision and baptism is made most explicit in Colossians 2:11-12, where Paul explains that in our baptism we have received the circumcision not performed by human hands [i.e. from God].

If God's covenant with his people in the New Testament does still include children, then we can also make sense of the occasions in the Bible where children in the churches are addressed and instructed (e.g. Ephesians 6:1).

This is in line with how most Christians raise their children within church: we treat them as if they are Christians until they prove otherwise (for example, we encourage them to pray as if they are Christians rather than non-Christians).

Both Baptism and Holy Communion are visible proclamations of the gospel. In baptising the children of Christians the Church affirms with Acts 2:39 and other parts of the Bible that God's covenant promise of the gospel is for the children of Christians.

However, this doesn't mean that all children or indeed all adults who are baptised will 'receive Baptism rightly' (see, for example, the account of Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:9-25). The Bible is clear that all people only receive the promises of the gospel, shown in Baptism, in the same way – by faith. Therefore we should baptise Christians and their children.

Finally, I Corinthians 11:27-32 speaks of the danger of people not receiving Holy Communion rightly. This should make us wary of baptising those outside the parameters the Bible gives, because there is a close link in the Bible between Baptism and Holy Communion. It is not difficult to see that those who do not receive baptism rightly risk greater judgment than those who have not received baptism at all. This is because Baptism is a proclaiming of the gospel, and those who are baptised have had greater opportunity to respond to the gospel than those who have not been – so those who reject the gospel from greater knowledge will face greater judgment. As a result we should not baptise non-Christians or the children of non-Christians.

Dan Hughes and Toby Crowe
26th October 2015

Further resources

Bible passages: Genesis 17, Acts 2:38 - 39, Acts 16, Ephesians 6, Colossians 2:11 - 12

Articles 25 and 27 of the Church of England's 39 Articles <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion>

<http://christthetruth.net/category/baptism/>

21 bullet points explaining why a Christian should baptise their child

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-infant-baptism-question>

More evidence to support infant baptism)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/a-brief-defense-of-infant-baptism/>

Three A4 pages defending infant baptism

http://churchsociety.org/blog/entry/baptism_video

A 30 minute video explaining infant baptism

“The Anglican Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism” by John Stott and Alec Motyer - A short book outlining how Anglican Evangelicals have usually explained infant baptism. A copy can be borrowed on request or purchased at <https://www.latimertrust.org/product-page/the-anglican-evangelical-doctrine-of-infant-baptism>