

Catholic Baptism Q & A

The following answer some of the most commonly asked questions about the Sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic church. Questions were compiled with the help of parish catechists across Arkansas. Answers were provided by Father Greg Luyet, pastor of St. Michael Church in West Memphis.

Baptism

Q. Why do we baptize infants?

A. The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "The Church baptizes infants because they are born with original sin; they need to be freed from the power of the Evil One and brought into that realm of freedom which belongs to the children of God." (no. 258)

When parents have their children baptized, they deepen their commitment to protect and nurture the infant. Through baptism, we are cleansed from original sin and become part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Salvation is a gift from God. We can never "earn" the gift which is freely given. However, we are called to respond to the gift through the lives we live. The baptism of an adult emphasizes our response; while the baptism of an infant reveals the "sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation." (Catechism, no. 1250)

Q. How soon after birth do I need to have my baby baptized?

A. In Spanish, an expression for "giving birth" is "dar la luz." Literally, "dar la luz" means "to give light." As a parent you have cooperated with God to bring new life into the world. When you bring a child to be baptized you bring him or her to Christ who is the Light of the World.

In fact, in the baptismal ceremony, the minister tells the parents and godparents: "Receive the Light of Christ." Why would anyone want to wait to share this gift with their newborn child?

You need to get your baby baptized as soon as possible after the baby is born. Ideally, you should contact your pastor prior to the baby being born to participate in pre-baptismal formation sessions. (Code of Canon Law, no. 867§1)

Understandably, no parent wants to think of a child dying; however, should your baby be in danger of death anyone may baptize the child should a priest, deacon or bishop not be available.

Q. Who can be a godparent for baptism?

A. In order to serve as a godparent, a person must be a Catholic in good standing who is at least 16 years old. The godparent must have been confirmed and received the Eucharist and live a "life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on." Parents may not serve as godparents. A baptized non-Catholic may serve as a Christian witness along with a Catholic sponsor. (Canon 874)

Q. Do I have to attend Mass regularly to have my baby baptized in the Church?

A. An important question for you to ask yourself is, why are not attending Mass? Is it because of work schedules? Illness of yourself or someone you love? Is it indifference or negligence? If you are not attending Mass and not living your faith, the question surfaces: Why do you want to have your child baptized?

You have a right to have your child baptized, whether or not you attend Mass regularly. (Canon 843) However, the minister of baptism (bishop, priest or deacon) has the responsibility to ensure that parents and sponsors are properly prepared and that there exists a well-founded hope that the child will be baptized and raised Catholic.

Though a priest cannot deny your child baptism, he can delay the baptism until he is certain that there is a well-founded hope that the child will be raised Catholic.

With that said, you are at an important place in your life. Frequently, it is the birth of a child that brings parents back to the Church that they may have drifted away from for whatever reason.

I encourage you to speak with your pastor. He can help you come back to church. Even though you may not attend Mass regularly that does not mean you cannot come home.