

Christenings at Island Bay Presbyterian Church

This introductory brochure gives some information as to what is available at the Island Bay Presbyterian Church and what christenings and other naming ceremonies mean.

What is a christening?

Historically, a christening used to be the naming ceremony that accompanied a baby's baptism (this was when the child's "Christian name" was given). These days when people talk about christening they usually mean the act of baptism. In recent years however the church has evolved other rituals and ceremonies to mark the special time of the birth of a baby. These require varying levels of belief in Christianity and are a naming ceremony, a blessing ceremony, and a dedication.

What is a naming ceremony?

Often new parents can have very different views on spirituality and religion; sometimes one or both parents can be quite uncomfortable with the Church or spiritual things but still want to mark the birth of their child in a public way. Parents in this situation may wish to opt for a naming ceremony.

Naming ceremonies have no set form and can be conducted in your home or another non-religious venue. The parents are free to decide how much of God or spirituality they want in this ceremony (naturally, if they are not comfortable with Christian spirituality it would not be normal for them to approach a church to facilitate this ceremony for them).

What is a blessing ceremony?

A blessing ceremony is a much more spiritual event. In this ceremony the parents are presenting their child to God and overtly asking the Divine to bless and look over him/her (and themselves as they seek to be good parents). This can be done in a Sunday morning or some other special church service, or it can be done in your home or some other significant place.

A blessing can also incorporate the act of symbolically giving a name to the newborn.

What is a dedication?

A dedication requires one or both parents to have a commitment to and belief in Christianity. It is also reasonably free in structure; it can involve the blessing and naming aspects of the first two ceremonies, and is done in a church service.

As the name suggests, a dedication involves dedicating your child to God, the focus of this ceremony being on the *parent's* decision to do this. This includes promising to raise your child to the best of your abilities, seeing that their spiritual needs are met and ensuring that they are raised with a good knowledge of the Christian faith (e.g. taking them to Sunday school), as well as asking God for the strength and wisdom to do those things well.

Many Christian couples choose to dedicate their children rather than baptising them, to give them the freedom to accept or reject Christian truth later in life. In this case they would often use the standard baptism service, omitting the water and the words "I baptise you..." (Much of the section on baptism is relevant here).

As vows or promises are made by the parents before God in this service, the minister is required to spend some time with you going over them –

two to three meetings would be normal. This is to make sure that you understand what it is you are promising, and that you are sincere in your intention to follow up on those promises to the best of your ability. This ceremony is taken very seriously by Christians and we desire that it be treated with respect.

What is a baptism?

Baptism is one of the two sacraments in the Presbyterian Church, and as such it is a holy thing. It is a once in a lifetime event, we cannot re-baptise people (though we offer confirmation or a full-immersion service re-confirming the vows made by a person's parents when they were an infant). People can receive baptism at any age and Presbyterians recognise the baptisms performed by any Christian church.



In baptism the primary focus is on *God's* love, grace and initiative in trying to establish a relationship with us. In a baptism service, we (the parents and the congregation together) are responding to this in faith. Accordingly, it involves a congregation or group of Christians, and can only be done as part of a church service - except in special circumstances such as sickness.

If it is an **adult baptism** the individual confesses his/her faith in Christ, and pledges commitment to the life and mission of the Church.

With an **infant baptism**, the parents are asked to reaffirm their faith in Jesus and to pledge that they will bring up their child in the life of the Church in the hope that in due course he/she will make a personal acceptance of Christian faith.

During the service the congregation is asked, on behalf of the universal Church, to support the parents in fulfilling their vows. Practically this means that the family is regarded as coming under the pastoral care of Island Bay Presbyterian Church, and is expected to support our Sunday School and youth programmes. If a family does not desire to share in the ongoing life of our congregation, they will be encouraged to look at the blessing or naming ceremonies above.

The Church once believed that those who died unbaptised were doomed to hell-fire; we do *not* teach this anymore. Baptism is not a free ticket to heaven, just as God's love and acceptance of us are not conditional on undergoing this sacrament.

The rules of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand state that children of active congregational members have a right to receive baptism, but if baptism is sought for the children of non-members then authorisation by the Parish Council is required. This is to gain assurance from the minister that the vows will be made in sincerity and understanding. Accordingly, as with dedications, it would be normal to meet with the minister for about three sessions to go through the service and the vows so that he/she can give this assurance.

If you wish to know more or discuss this with our minister, please contact Rev. Nathan Parry at telephone 383 8699, email minister@ibpc.org.nz or simply pop in when next at the church.



Are you considering having your child christened?

Some thoughts on how you can do this and what the different forms of naming ceremonies mean.



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