

A SHORT GUIDE TO

# Baptism



St Francis of Assisi Parish,  
Priorswood



# Introduction

Welcome to this *Short Guide to Baptism*. If you are reading this then you are most likely preparing to have your child Baptised in our Parish Church, or maybe you are a godparent preparing for your role or maybe you are someone who just wants to know a little more about this Sacrament. Whatever brings you to this *Short Guide to Baptism* you are most welcome.

The aim of this *Short Guide to Baptism* is to help you as you prepare to become a parent or godparent of a child who is Baptised into the Catholic Church. This comes with its own responsibilities. Chief among these responsibilities is your role as the one who guides, supports and encourages your child as they grow in faith. You do this primarily by the example of your own lives. Your child will look to you for good example, they will come to you with their questions and they will model how you live in their own lives. You are their first teachers.

In this booklet we will briefly answer some important questions relating to the Sacrament of Baptism such as:

- What is a Sacrament and why are Sacraments important in our Christian life?
- What is the meaning and purpose of the Sacrament of Baptism?
- What happens at a Baptism?
- What do all the signs and symbols used at a Baptism mean?
- How can parents and godparents support the child's faith as they grow?
- How can we prepare for the celebration of the Sacrament as a family?

I hope you find this guide useful as you prepare, as a family, for this very important event. Thank you for choosing to have your child Baptised. This begins for them a journey of faith that will last a lifetime.

May the Lord guide and support you always.

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# The Sacraments

## What is a Sacrament?

A Sacrament is the way in which we receive God's Grace (Love – Help – Spirit) into our lives. Sacraments are part of our life journey and our faith journey beginning with Baptism at the very start, to anointing of the sick towards the end.

## How many Sacraments are there in the Catholic Church?

The Catholic Church has seven Sacraments:

<b>Sacrament</b>	<b>How often can I receive it?</b>	<b>What do I receive from this Sacrament?</b>
<b>Baptism</b>	Only Once	Holy Spirit & your Christian Name
<b>Reconciliation</b> (Confession)	As often as you like once you have made your first confession	God's forgiveness, mercy and healing when we have sinned.
<b>Eucharist</b> (Holy Communion)	Once a day – once you have made your First Holy Communion	The Body of Christ
<b>Confirmation</b>	Only Once	The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit
<b>Matrimony</b>	Mostly only once	Man and woman joined as one before God
<b>Holy Orders</b>	Only once	Priesthood
<b>Anointing of the Sick</b>	Once a month if required	Healing, courage and comfort in times of sickness.

Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation are known collectively as the *Sacraments of Initiation* and by means of these Sacraments a person is fully initiated into the Catholic Church.

## Why is it important for us to receive the Sacraments?

The seven Sacraments are ways in which God enters into our lives. When we receive a Sacrament, we receive God's presence into our lives and in turn we become more aware of God's presence in the world around us. Sacraments are there to help us be better Christians and better people. They are an important part of our journey of faith. The Sacraments bring us into contact with Jesus and help us build a deeper relationship with God and each other. They are very important milestones on our journey of faith.

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## *The Sacrament of Baptism*

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### What is the Sacrament of Baptism?

Baptism is the first Sacrament we all receive in the Catholic Church. It is the foundation upon which all the other Sacraments are built. The Gospel tells us to put great care into laying the foundations upon which we build our faith. In the Gospel of Matthew (Chapter 7: Verses 24 – 27) we read –

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise person who built their house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”*

The Sacrament of Baptism is the solid rock that the rest of the Sacraments are built upon. When the difficulties and storms of life come it is then that we need the solid rock of our faith in Jesus Christ to keep us steady. Jesus himself received Baptism from John the Baptist in the River Jordan.

### What happens in the Sacrament?

In Baptism the child receives the Holy Spirit for the first time, their Christian name is proclaimed in the church for the first time, they are freed from original sin and anointed with Holy Oil to protect and strengthen them as they grow in life and in faith.

As parents and godparents you make a public commitment to support the child's faith as they grow. Those assembled in the church are witnesses to this commitment you make. The parents, godparents and those assembled make Baptismal Promises on behalf of the child. The child will be invited to make these promises for the first time when they receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

When a person receives the Sacrament of Baptism as an adult, they go through at least two years of preparation beforehand. For a child, the 'preparation' comes after they receive the Sacrament as they begin to learn about their faith and begin to put it into practice in their lives. As their parents and godparents, you are the primary teachers of the faith to them.

The Sacrament of Baptism is received only once in life. Each time we bless ourselves we recall our own Baptism. Churches have holy water fonts for this very reason – as a powerful reminder that each of us have been Baptised into the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And so we are part of a Universal Church and a universal family of faith.

## **What is Original Sin?**

We all are born into an imperfect World of hunger, war, sickness and ultimately death. As Catholics we acknowledge that we have all been born imperfect – we are capable of doing bad as well as good. We are capable of creating hatred, violence and anger as much as we are capable of creating peace, love and joy. This is the 'human condition'. The Catholic faith teaches that this imperfection comes from what is called original sin and this type of sin stretches all the way back Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. Baptism breaks the hold original sin has over us and allows the power of the Holy Spirit operate within us and within our lives. The power of the Holy Spirit gives us the opportunity to make the right choices in life – the type of choices that lead to peace, love and joy rather than the opposite.

## The Signs and Symbols of Baptism

Every church is packed with signs and symbols that point us to God – the altar, stained glass windows, incense, statues and shrines to name just a few. Each Sacrament has its own set of signs and symbols. The following are the signs and symbols associated with the Sacrament of Baptism and their meaning:

<b><i>Sign / Symbol</i></b>	<b><i>Significance</i></b>
<b>White Christening Gown &amp; Shawl</b>	These are outward signs of the child's Christian dignity. They also signify that, through Baptism, the child has become a new creation in Christ and has been clothed with Christ.
<b>Baptismal Candle</b>	The baptismal candle is lit from the Paschal (Easter) Candle. Jesus is the light that guides every baptised person. It also represents the flame of faith, which is to be kept burning brightly.
<b>Paschal (Easter) Candle</b>	This candle represents the risen Jesus, who is the light of the world (Jn 8:12). It is blessed at the Easter Vigil Mass and is lit throughout the year for Baptisms, First Holy Communions, Confirmations and Funerals.
<b>Baptismal Font</b>	This is where the water is poured over the child's head and the Priest baptises them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
<b>Water</b>	Water can be said to be the primary symbol of baptism. Water is a symbol of divine life, grace, new birth, growth, power, deliverance, cleansing and the new covenant.
<b>Holy Oil of Catechumens</b>	The Oil of the Catechumens is used after the prayer of exorcism and applied to the chest. It represents salvation as well as the strength and power that come from Christ our saviour.



<b>Holy Oil of Chrism</b>	After the water has been poured, the Holy Oil of Chrism is used to anoint the crown of the head, and it represents salvation, participation in the priesthood of Christ, membership in the body of Christ and a share in eternal life.
<b>Christian Name</b>	The child's Christian name will be proclaimed in the Church for the first time. The child will carry this Christian name with them throughout their lives as a reminder that they are claimed for Christ.
<b>Parents / Godparents</b>	Parents and godparents are powerful signs of God's love for us and how God cares for all His children.
<b>People gathered in the Church</b>	The people gathered in the church represent the wider Christian Community. The celebration of Baptism is a day of great joy for your family and for the entire Christian family.
<b>Priest</b>	The Priest represents the Universal Church and ministers this Sacrament on behalf of the Church. He welcomes the child into the family of the Church as its newest member.

(Adapted from: *The symbols of baptism* - [TheCatholicSpirit.com](http://TheCatholicSpirit.com))



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# Baptism Day

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This is a day of great joy for your family and friends. If you haven't had a Baptism in your family before or if it has been a while since you have had one, you may ask, 'what's going to happen?'

## Before you come to the church checklist:

1. Baptismal Candle
2. White Shawl
3. Donation to the church if you haven't already given this in
4. Feed your baby / child if they are hungry, it's a big day for them!

## When you arrive:

- Arrive at least 20 minutes before the start time. If your Baptism takes place DURING Mass, we will do the first part of the Baptism before the Mass begins.
- Try to arrive as a group – parents, godparents and grandparents.
- The Priest will check all the names with you to make sure we have everything correct for the Baptismal Register.

## During the Ceremony:

The ceremony has four main parts: ***The Reception of the Child, The Celebration of the Word of God, The Celebration of the Sacrament*** and the ***Conclusion***.

**The Reception of the Child:** This begins our ceremony and you will be asked to name your child and if you agree to the responsibility you have to raise the child in the Catholic faith. The godparents will be asked to publicly commit to support you in this work. The priest, parents, godparents and grandparents make the sign of the cross on the child's forehead as the child is claimed for Jesus Christ.

**The Celebration of the Word of God:** We listen to the readings and prayers. These readings and prayers assure us of God's love for the Church, the child and all of God's People. We pray for you and your child and we call on the saints to pray for the child who is to be Baptised.

**The Celebration of the Sacrament:** This part has a number of elements of its own such as the two anointings, the blessing and pouring of water, wrapping the shawl and lighting the baptismal candle.

**Conclusion:** As we conclude we pray together the Lord's Prayer and we call down God's blessing on the child, parents, godparents and all gathered in the Church.

### **Photographs / Photographers / Video:**

The Archdiocese of Dublin has a clear and robust Child Safeguarding Policy and the taking of photographs / video is covered as part of this. The Policy states that 'there should be no taking of photographs / video during the ceremony. There will be ample time available to take photographs before and after the ceremony.'

Privately hired photographers are not permitted to attend Masses in which there is a Baptism for the purpose of taking photographs or creating video.

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### **While you are in the church**

We ask you to keep a prayerful quiet while in the church before, during and after the ceremony.

Please follow the guidance of our volunteers at all times. During times of COVID restrictions additional requirements may be in place – you will be notified of these in the email you receive confirming your booking.

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## *Preparing as a Family for Baptism*

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Baptism is the first step that your child will take on their journey of faith. As they grow, they will be invited to participate in religion programmes in school, they will be helped prepare to receive the Sacraments of First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Beyond these they might choose to get married in a Catholic Church and have their own children baptised.

As parents and godparents, you play a vital role in helping them cultivate and nurture a sense of the Sacred in their lives. The truth is that they will look to you to help and support them as they grow in faith. If you set a good example for them, then they will follow. Some simple, time-tested and effective ways to support them are:

- *Talk to them about God, Faith, Church, Religion* – let them know that it's perfectly ok to ask questions and seek answers. If you don't have the answers to their questions, contact us in the parish and we will be happy to help.
- *Pray with them as they grow* – the home is the place where the seeds of faith are planted and nourished. Take time out to teach them how to pray the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be. Encourage them to bless themselves as they leave the house (maybe even have a holy water font by the door) and when they pass a church.
- *Bring them to the church* – take your child to Mass and to visit the church. Children are inquisitive by nature and love churches - the colours of the windows, the statues, candles and sounds.
- *Show your interest in their faith development* – ask them about what they are learning in religion in school. When you show an interest, they will love telling you all about it.
- *Pray and worship as a family* – nothing creates bonds like this. Take time as a family to share a prayer, to thank God, to ask for petitions, to light a candle and best of all to attend Mass together.
- *Develop your own faith* – The old saying tells us that we can't give what we don't have. Is it time to renew your own faith and begin to deep your practice once again? If you need help and support, contact us in the parish and we will be happy to help.

## *A Family Prayer*

Lord, bless us always and keep us in your care  
Be with us when we call you - unite the love we share  
Protect us from all harm as we go through our day  
Guide our hearts and minds, and all we do and say.  
Teach us Lord to live together in faith, hope and love  
As we care for one another with your help from above. Amen.



## Notes



[www.priorswoodparish.ie](http://www.priorswoodparish.ie)

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