

Holy Baptism at Church of the Transfiguration

BACKGROUND

The Sacrament of Baptism is the ancient rite of initiation into the Christian Church. A Sacrament is something outwardly visible that conveys or communicates something inward and spiritual. In the case of Baptism, the Christian Church believes that the water signifies the work of God inside a person: embracing, cleansing, and empowering. It is the moment when we are welcomed into the Church (the “household of God”), cleansed and forgiven of our sins, and anointed by the Holy Spirit to follow the life-giving ways of Jesus Christ. In that beautiful moment, as the water is poured upon or submerges a person’s head, God is doing something profound at the unseen, spiritual level.

Baptism is one of only two sacraments commended to us by Christ himself (the other being the Lord’s Supper, or Eucharist). In fact, the Gospel of Mark begins not with the story of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, but instead with the scene at the Jordan River, when Jesus submitted to the baptism of John. In Mark’s gospel, the story of Jesus begins at his Baptism, which would seem to imply the same for all of us. In a very powerful way, our lives as the people of God truly and authentically *begin* in the water of Baptism. This is the root of the term “born again” that has become prominent in some Christian circles; through water and the Holy Spirit we are reborn into a new life with God.

The earliest church in the decades after Jesus’ death and resurrection understood Baptism to be of such importance that they required all those seeking Baptism to enter a three-year period of study and preparation, a time called the “catechumenate.” At the conclusion of those three years, the individual would participate in a vigil of fasting and prayer. Finally, at sunrise on the morning of the Feast of the Resurrection (Easter Day) the catechumen would undress, wade out into a body of water, be plunged beneath the surface three times, and then walk out the other side. The extensive requirements and stirring ritual demonstrated to all observers the seriousness of the event.

While we at Transfiguration will not require quite such an extensive period of preparation, nor perform the Baptism quite so dramatically, the full significance and importance of what will happen should not be underestimated. We believe the Holy Spirit is no less present today than when she descended upon Jesus at his baptism. We believe that, despite the distance of time, the Church today is just as connected to the grace and power of God as those early followers. And we believe the forgiveness of sin conveyed in Baptism is no less transformational now than it was then.

Baptism is not only something that connects you to God, but also establishes a sacred relationship between us and the whole Church. It is common to think of Baptism as something that happens “to” a person, but it is better understood as happening in or

among the *whole* Christian family. That is why baptisms performed at Transfiguration occur in the context of our principle weekend worship services, thereby allowing us to make a sacred promise to do all in our power to support the newly baptized in their life in Christ (*The Book of Common Prayer*, 302). Just as much as baptism is your chance to say “yes” to God, it is also our chance, as a church, to say “yes” to you.

Because we believe Baptism is of such significance, it is important that all those seeking this Sacrament for themselves or their children give careful consideration to the implications of what will be initiated in its sacred waters. Only those people who, with God’s help, willingly embrace the commitment to grow into the “full stature of Christ” and intend to take an active role in the Church should receive this Sacrament. Those desiring baptism make enormously important promises to God and to the Church (see pages 302-305 of the *BCP*), and we should only make those promises to God that we intend to keep. If you accept the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the pathway to eternal life, and with God’s help strive to live into the calling of a disciple, then we at Transfiguration will joyfully pledge our support of your or your child’s new life in Christ.

BAPTIZING INFANTS OR CHILDREN

The Episcopal Church joins with the great majority of worldwide churches in the ancient practice of baptizing infants and children. This is not out of a theological position of fear; we do not believe infants and children who are not baptized live or die outside of the purview of God’s grace and love. Indeed, one of the most fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith is that salvation belongs to God alone and due to no fruit of human effort. Rather, Christian parents should bring their children for Baptism because they want them to be part of the community of faith. They want for their child what they themselves experience: grace, love, forgiveness, and newness of life.

In the baptism of infants and children, sponsors (parents and godparents) make promises on behalf of the children they present, and take on the responsibility of raising their children as active members of the Church. Parents need not promise to raise their children at Transfiguration or even in The Episcopal Church. Baptism is not “into” a congregation or a denomination, but rather “into” Christ and Christ’s universal Church. Therefore, we ask that:

- ❖ Parents promise to raise their children in a Christian household with a deep commitment to Christian life, and that they find a worshipping community of which to be a part.
- ❖ At least one parent should be a baptized Christian.
- ❖ Typically one or both parents will be active members of Transfiguration, or were raised at Transfiguration.
- ❖ The child be sponsored by at least two baptized Christians, who may be the child’s parents (see section below titled “Sponsors”). We encourage at least one of the Sponsors to be a member of Transfiguration.

BAPTISM OF ADULTS

It is always a delight to welcome adults into the Church through the Sacrament of Baptism. Although we are far more accustomed to seeing infants and children baptized, the earliest Christians were only baptized as adults, so it is never “too late” to be baptized. Like infants or children, adult candidates are presented by sponsors. These can be family members or “mentors” from the congregation.

At Transfiguration we offer an extended catechumenate for adults seeking Baptism through a course we call “The Way.” The Way helps candidates for Baptism explore the central tenants of our faith, and consider fully the nature of what they would be professing and living. Those interested in Baptism should contact Fr. Michael Merriman at mmerriman@transfiguration.net.

SPONSORS (COMMONLY CALLED GODPARENTS)

Each person who is baptized must be presented by at least two sponsors. For children, the sponsors can include the child’s parents. For adults, sponsors may be family members or other members of the congregation. Sponsors must themselves be baptized Christians, and with a clear conscience and sincere intent take all the promises of the Baptismal Covenant (*BCP*, 302-305). In other words, it is encouraged that a sponsor not be selected due to family expectation or relation, but out of a belief that the chosen person will model the Christian faith and life to the newly baptized. It is further recommended that a sponsor be committed to remain in a dependable relationship with the godchild, and thus we strongly encourage families to choose at least one Sponsor from Transfiguration.

In the baptismal service, sponsors make the same promises as parents: to take personal responsibility and make every effort to see that the newly baptized grows up in the Christian life and as part of the community of the Church. An unstated but additional expectation is that the sponsor will pray regularly for the godchild. The goal of both parents and godparents is to help the child mature in the faith, grow to possess their own personal relationship with Christ, and take up his or her own place in the life of the Church.

OCCASIONS FOR BAPTISM

Baptism is a Sacrament that involves the whole Christian community, therefore it is normally celebrated during a Sunday worship service. Private baptisms are not the norm at Transfiguration except in extreme emergencies. *The Book of Common Prayer* instructs that baptisms are especially appropriate on specific occasions through the year.

At Transfiguration in 2017, these dates are as follows:

The Baptism of Jesus – Sunday, January 8, 11:15 a.m.

Workshop held on December 17, 2016
Great Vigil of Easter – Saturday, April 15, 8:00 p.m.
***Adults only are baptized at this service.*
Second Sunday of Easter – Sunday, April 23, 11:15 a.m.
Workshop held on Saturday, April 8, 2017.
The Day of Pentecost – Sunday, June 4, 9:00 a.m.
Workshop held on Saturday, May 20, 2017.
The Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ – Sunday, August 6, 9:00 a.m.
Workshop held on Saturday, July 29, 2017.
All Saints’ Sunday – Sunday, November 5, 11:15 a.m.
Workshop held on Saturday, October 28, 2017.

EXPECTATIONS

In addition to the background and description of baptism above, a few additional requirements are asked of individuals seeking baptism, parents and sponsors.

- ❖ ***Attendance of a Baptism Workshop:*** The workshop typically runs from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on a Saturday closely preceding the date of baptism. In this time a lengthier conversation about the Sacrament takes place, including an exploration of relevant Scriptural passages, as well as a rehearsal. It is important that sponsors know of this expectation, so that every reasonable effort may be made to attend. The Rector or Associate Rector should be informed of all those unable to attend. *Inability of parents to attend the workshop will likely result in being asked to reschedule the date of the baptism to provide time for adequate preparation.*
- ❖ ***Attendance at Worship and Formation:*** Worship is the heart of our life as a church, and those considering baptism for themselves or their child should make attendance at worship a regular weekly activity. Additionally, the life of a healthy Christian is filled with learning and growth, and we encourage all considering baptism to get into the regular practice of attending classes that feed your mind and soul. We offer a full complement of courses on a wide array of relevant subjects, and you can find out more by speaking with the Associate Rector for Christian Formation, Mother Erin Warde (ewarde@transfiguration.net).
- ❖ ***Financial Commitment:*** Baptism signifies, among other things, entry and commitment to the Church. We demonstrate our commitment to the life and ministry of the Church by active involvement in its ministries, regular attendance at worship, and financial offerings relevant to one’s income. While one-time contributions in honor of the baptism are traditional, an even more appropriate step is to pledge ongoing financial support to Christ’s work at Transfiguration. This is not a fee, but rather an outward sign of a person’s commitment to the body of Christ, the Church. To receive more information about pledging at Transfiguration, please contact Christopher Thomas, Chief Administrative Officer, at cthomas@transfiguration.net.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

- ❖ **Families are expected to arrive one hour early on the day of baptism to rehearse the service.** For example, if the baptism is scheduled for the 11:15 a.m. service, the *entire* family (including sponsors) should arrive by 10:15 a.m. If the baptism is scheduled for the 9:00 a.m. service, everyone should arrive by 8:00 a.m.
- ❖ There is **no required dress** for those receiving the sacrament of baptism. White gowns, while traditional for infants, are certainly not required.
- ❖ **Pews at the front of the church are reserved** for every baptismal family.
- ❖ **No flash photography** is permitted during the service. Pictures taken without the use of a flash, while not encouraged, are permitted. Picture-taking is most appropriate after the service.

RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I/we have received and read the Baptismal Customary of Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, and I/we accept its vision of the sacred nature of Baptism. I/we will inform the sponsors of the expectations described above, particularly pertaining to the fulfillment of the promises they will make at the Baptism.

Signature of Person to be Baptized or Parent Printed Name Date

Signature of Parent (optional) Printed Name Date

NECESSARY INFORMATION

Full Name of Person to be Baptized Proposed Baptism Date

Date of Birth Place of Birth (City, State)

Address (Street, City, State, Zip) Email address Telephone

Parent's Full Name Yes / No Yes / No
Baptized Christian Member of Transfiguration

Parent's Full Name Yes / No Yes / No
Baptized Christian Member of Transfiguration

P1: _____ P2: _____
Religious Affiliation of Parents (ex. Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Jewish, None, etc.)

First Sponsor Church where baptized

Address (Street, City, State, Zip) Email address Telephone

Second Sponsor Church where baptized

Address (Street, City, State, Zip) Email address Telephone

*Return completed form to Ellen Dingwall in the Church Office
at least one month prior to desired date of baptism.*