

Our Vicar writes

NEW BIRTH

Well I have enjoyed my first Christmas at St. Mary's and it was a wonderful experience, to see the church so full for our Carol Service, the Christingle and Nativity Service as well as Midnight Mass. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did and found space for the Christ Child in all the busyness.

February will see me taking my first baptism at St. Mary's. It will be a great pleasure to start to welcome new members into the church family. Baptism has always been the ceremony of entry into Christ's family in the church. It is the thing that binds all Christian churches into one family in the use of water and the invocation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although Baptism is now usual in infants, it started as a sign of adult commitment to follow Christ. This is still reflected in our service of Baptism and Confirmation. At Baptism the parents and Godparents speak for the child, promising to bring the child up in the Christian faith until the child is old enough to make their own declaration of faith. Today we call that Confirmation, a confirming by the baptised of the promises made on their behalf at their baptism. (By the way Baptism and Christening refer to the same ceremony.) However a Godparent's responsibility doesn't really end at this point in the person's life, as a parent is always a parent whatever the child may do or wherever they may go. So, if your Godchild doesn't get to the point of confirming their baptism decisions, you are still their Godparent for life and must continue to love, encourage and support them.

This reflects our heavenly parent's relationship with us. He doesn't abandon us even if we abandon him. He is always there for us, waiting for us, wanting us to come to him or come back to him. You are never too old to be baptized. The oldest person I have baptised was 72. You are never too old to be confirmed. There can be a hundred and one reasons why you have not been confirmed before; maybe now is the time to think about it. Just come and have a quiet word with me sometime, or invite me round for a chat. There is no commitment in talking and exploring what it might mean for you.

While talking about baptisms or Christening, these are not the only choices people can make about celebrating the birth of their child or children. There are two other main options people may want to make.

The first is to simply have their child blessed. This can take place at home or in church or even in hospital at a time and place that suits the family. It is a lovely way to ask God's blessing on the new life and to let the child know that you want everything that is good and best for them in their life. In this you share God's desire for the child's life and he would love to share that in a Blessing. This is similar to coming and receiving a blessing at the altar rail when people are receiving communion.

The second option would be to have service of Blessing and Thanksgiving. In a secular context this would be similar to say a naming ceremony. In the service we ask for God's blessing on the child and special people, chosen by the family, act as sponsors, and they make a promise to love and care for the child and its parents, but do not make the promises about confirmation, and neither is the child baptised with water. The focus of the service is on the child's biological family rather than the church family. If you would like a large party to celebrate your child's life, then this is ideal as it can be at a time and date to suit you, although Saturdays and Sunday are the usual days because of people's working habits.

So Blessings, Thanksgivings, Baptisms or Christenings, I look forward to celebrating new life in all its fullness with you and your family. Make sure you spread the word.

God bless you one and all

Simon