

If you want to thank God for the gift of your child, but do not want to make the solemn promises before God and other people that baptism involves, then the thanksgiving service is for you. Thanksgiving is also for those whose main aim is to either have a naming ceremony or a family party. Of course, your child can always be baptized later on as well, should you decide you would like that.

Baptism is for the children of parents who want to be practicing Christians. A Christian is a person who decides to follow Jesus Christ, accepts Christian teaching about his life and death and resurrection, and as a result of that, wants to be a committed member of a local church. The Christian faith is a personal relationship with God through Christ. This relationship is open to us not on the basis of how good we are, but as a gift (much though this surprises many: the Christian faith is not about “being good enough to go to heaven”...).

Of course, being a Christian does not guarantee us a problem-free life (far from it, in fact – it is harder to be a Christian than not to be one in many ways) – but it does bring a completely new and exciting perspective on everything. Following Jesus is about forgiveness for the past, purpose for the present and hope for the future.

### **(7) How does coming to church fit into the bigger picture?**

As has been said before, a thanksgiving service does not imply any ongoing commitment to come to church. We would love to see you – and you might be surprised by what you find! – but the thanksgiving does not involve any promises to that effect.

If you decide that this is the best option for you then we can make a booking immediately for an intimate and private service on a Sunday afternoon tailored to your specific needs with friends and family around or on a Sunday morning in the context of the Main church service.

The baptism service, by contrast, does include the clear statement by parents that they will help their children “take their place within the life and worship of the church”. There is therefore the expectation that you are members of the church and will become regular attenders (at least for our monthly all-age or Messy Church services). You may wish to come to more and

that would be great. Our doors are always open! We will try our best to help you do that.

However we must realise that coming to church, or indeed baptism itself, do not make people Christian. But coming to church is something a Christian would naturally aim to do.

A Christian outside the church family is as strange as a bee cutting itself off from a hive, or a football player opting out of the rest of the team and running round by himself in the corner of the pitch. Commitment to Christ carries with it commitment to His people, the church.

In baptism this is what you are promising to do. You need to therefore think through whether a) you are willing to do this, and b) you are able to do this.

For some there is a real issue about being forced to work on Sundays, which we understand. But for others, it is a question of priorities. It is not always easy to plan the way we spend each Sunday – but church-going often means putting God first.

For example, you will have less time to go shopping, repair the car, do the cooking, play football or be involved in clubs or other activities. This is a tough choice in 21st Century Britain; but the Christian faith is serious business which involves making clear choices and developing new habits.

If you want a good place to start, then many people find that coming to the All-age Service each month is a good way into the local church family. Sometimes people ask, “How often should I come to church?” but that’s a bit like asking, “How often should I kiss my spouse?” If it isn’t happening reasonably regularly, or you have to keep a count of it, then something isn’t quite right!

### **(8) What if I’m not sure or have loads of questions?**

You may well have all sorts of questions, and that’s fine: it’s the people who don’t ask questions who bother me more, because that probably means they’re just saying ‘yes’ to everything out of politeness! I’m more than happy to meet with you at any time if you would like to chat about things further. From time to time we also run ALPHA, this short course helps to explain the Christian faith in more detail, and provides a great opportunity to ask questions. Another way to tackle questions is simply to start attending church regularly at our all-age services. Of course, you can also think things through yourself, perhaps by buying the book “Christianity Explored” by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper (available via [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)) or visiting websites such as [www.messageofjesus.co.uk](http://www.messageofjesus.co.uk) and [www.bethinking.org](http://www.bethinking.org)

# Thanksgiving and Baptism Services at Biggar Parish Church



Thank you for your enquiry about thanksgiving or baptism.

Having a baby is both a great joy and a great responsibility and you obviously want to do what is best for your child. The purpose of this leaflet is simply to explain a little more about the options that are now open to you.

Both **thanksgiving** and **baptism** (which is also sometimes called christening) are ways of celebrating the life of your child which involve making promises to God, sometimes with the support of Godparents or sponsors, but the main difference is in the extent and depth of Christian commitment that each form of service expresses.

I see my job as to explain to you with integrity what both these services mean, and what standing up and saying the promises in each case means in practice for parents such as yourself.

I then trust you to choose with me with similar integrity the option which best represents where you are at on your spiritual journey – be that thanksgiving or baptism (or indeed both, or neither, as is some times the case). Of course, if you have any queries at all in any way, shape or form, do feel free to ask me at any time!

Mike

Here are questions that people sometimes ask...

**(1) What is a Thanksgiving?**

A **thanksgiving** is a celebration to mark the birth and naming of your child. It can often be the occasion for a family party. We give thanks for your child's new life, and commit both you and them to God, asking for his help and blessing in the years to come.

A **thanksgiving** is the sort of service that almost anyone who believes in God can stand up and take part in, even if they are not sure what else they believe. It's a way in which parents can express their gratitude for the birth of a child, and receive God's blessing on them and the child. This service places no further obligations on you in terms of ongoing commitment to the life of the Church.

But...

**(i) Can my child still be married in church?**

Yes, that is usually the case. In the Church of Scotland, it is up to the discretion of the individual minister to marry a couple in the church or not. This, however, is never dependant on whether someone has been 'baptised' or not.

**(ii) Can my child have a Christian funeral service if they are not "Christened"?**

Yes, this is not affected by whether a person has been "Christened" or not.

**(iii) Is it a real Christening?**

Yes. If you look up the word "Christen" in a dictionary, you'll find it says "baptise" that's an indication of the age of the dictionary rather than a statement of theology! The word "Christen" means "bring to Christ". Both baptism and thanksgiving do that.

**(iv) Does it make my child a Christian?**

Neither baptism nor thanksgiving does that. You become a Christian by faith in Jesus, trusting in Him as Lord and Saviour. We pray that your child will want to put his/ her faith in Jesus, but we can't do it for them.

**(v) Does it mean my child will go to heaven if they die?**

The Bible doesn't tell us about other people's destiny, only our own. Christians do not believe that a church service affects a child's eternal destiny. Being certain of eternal life comes only through believing and trusting in Jesus, not whether you have been "Christened".

**(2) What is a Baptism?**

A **baptism** is also a celebration, often with lots of friends and relatives, but rather more is involved. There is the expectation that your family are or will become actively involved in church life. In the Bible, **baptism** is linked to...

**(i)...deciding to turn away from our own way of doing things**, and letting God rule every area of our lives (what the Bible calls "repentance")

**(ii)... deciding to follow Jesus Christ** and accept God's forgiveness made possible by his death on the cross. (This is what the Bible calls choosing to "believe").

**Baptism** is therefore an event which embodies more explicit Christian commitment, and it involves making a series of promises which amount to a public declaration of basic Christian belief and a desire to live these out in practice in a committed and whole hearted way. The promises and statement that you as parents make are enclosed with this leaflet. They cannot be made lightly!

**(3) Why is water used in Baptism?**

Water is used because it reminds us of...

**(i)... cleaning.** Just as water cleans our clothes and washing up, so the pouring of water in baptism reminds us that when we turn to Jesus Christ as outlined above, God makes us spiritually "clean" in his sight.

**(ii)... death.** Water can be very destructive, causing floods or storms. The water of baptism speaks of death —dying to life without God.

**(iii)...life.** Water is vital for life, as we know from our gardens! The water of baptism reminds us that God offers us spiritual life, life which not even physical death can destroy.

Thanksgiving is a simpler ceremony which does not include water. However, this does not make it a second

class alternative. Far from it! In fact it is a first class alternative and joyfully used by Christians and those who are not. Either way the child's spiritual status is the same.

**4) Why are children baptised?**

So far it may seem that baptism is only really for adults. And some churches, like Baptists, limit it to grown-ups or older children only. But in the Church of Scotland we believe that when children are born to Christian parents, they may be given the sign of the Christian community (baptism) when they are welcomed into the Church family. This is done in the belief and expectation that the children themselves will want to be followers of Jesus themselves when they are old enough to make their own minds up.

It is a bit like opening a bank account for a baby – the account is opened in their name and in one sense the money is theirs, but they have to grow up and understand what it is all about in order for it to become real to them personally. Similarly, we pray and trust that a baptized child will grow up to understand and appropriate for themselves the promises made in baptism. For this reason, it is important to understand that baptism is the beginning of a spiritual journey within the family of the church—not a one-off event which means that a child is "done"...

**(5) What does this mean for me as a parent?**

For parents who bring children to be baptized, the service involves making promises before God and the congregation to be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus Christ – and to show evidence of that commitment by being a regular part of the church community. This is a robust commitment to make in today's post-Christian, secular society, and is something to be thought through seriously. Because baptism is so tied in with being part of the church family, we always have a baptism in a morning service so that everyone can join in welcoming your child. During the service the members of the church also make a solemn promise to nurture your child in the Christian faith and to support you as a family in your faith journey.

**(6) How do I know whether baptism or thanksgiving is right for me and my child?**