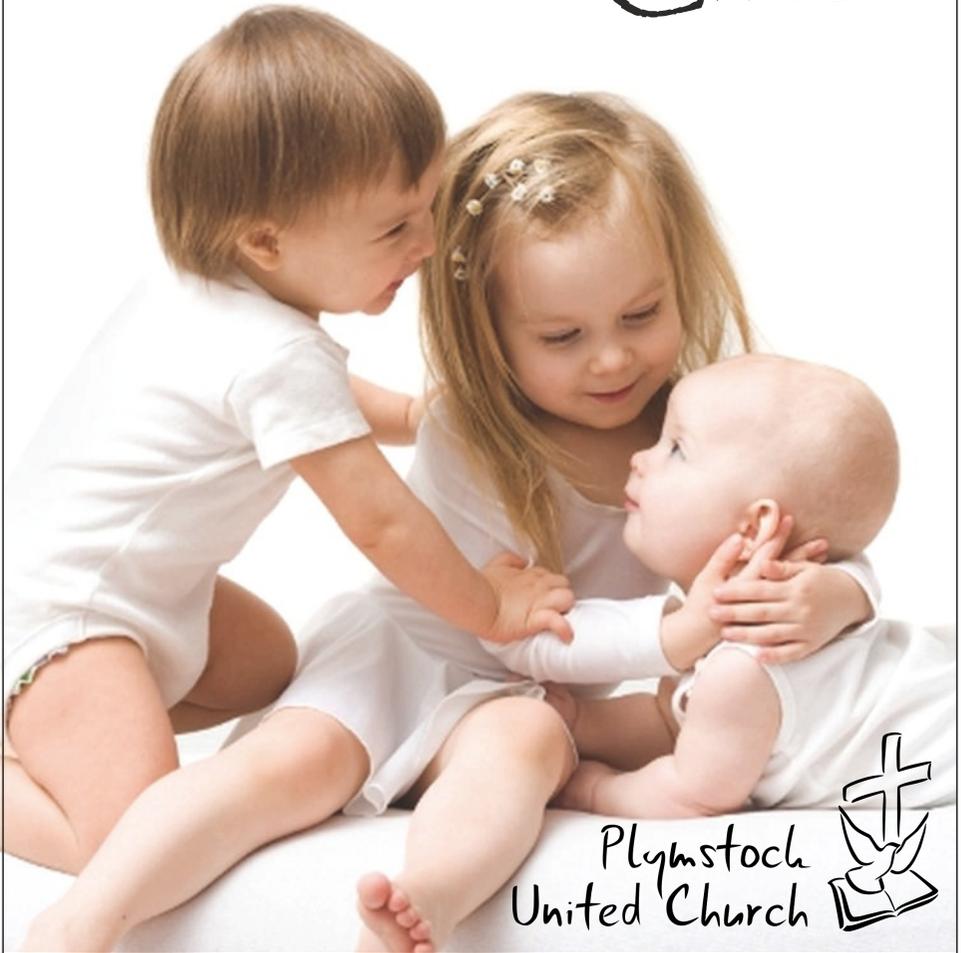


Thank God for your Child



Plymstock
United Church



CONGRATULATIONS!

We do hope that this new member of your family brings you much joy and happiness. As you come to terms with sleepless nights, endless nappies and radical new routines, you may also want to thank God for your child. We would love to share that opportunity with you.

This booklet explains how we handle this at Plymstock United Church. We hope it helps. And if it doesn't answer all your queries, please do ask the Minister.



WHAT IS THE "CEREMONY" ABOUT?

It's all about celebrating a new life in your family, giving thanks to God, and dedicating yourself to the challenging role of being a parent. So we try to make it a significant and joyful event. We want it to be special... after all, your child is special and unique!

We set aside a short period during the service which is devoted entirely to this celebration. It is a time for saying "thank you" to God, for making promises, and for blessing the child. It is your time.

Because we make the sign of a cross and bless the child in the name of Jesus Christ, people sometimes refer to it as a 'christening.' This is different from the act of baptism, which symbolises a person's faith in Jesus and their place within his church. People cannot be forced into the church, whether they are babies, children or adults. Getting baptised is a decision which can only be made by the person concerned. So we respect the child's integrity by allowing them to make up their own mind rather than forcing the symbolism on them.



Why not visit the church's website to see more information about our life, work and worship? www.plymstock.org.uk

Contact the Minister:

Rev Paul Stokes, 6 Tamar Villas, Plymstock PL9 7PE

Tel: 01752 401294 **Email:** minister@plymstock.org.uk

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE SERVICE ?

This time of blessing and giving thanks takes place during one of the church's morning services. We want to celebrate with you, support you with our prayers, and let you experience some of the joys of worshipping our heavenly Father.

LOOK OUT!



Although our services start at 10.00 am, people are usually arriving from around 9.45 onwards, and there will be music/singing beforehand

It helps if you arrive before 9.50 so as to have time to settle before the service starts. Our Church Family Services can be very popular, and you may wish to find seating together for yourself and your guests.

This will normally be during a "Church Family Service", which start at 10:00 am and are usually on the third Sunday of each month. On these occasions the whole of the church - children and adults alike - worship and learn together. These are shorter than our other services, and are more suited to the younger friends and relatives who come to share this happy event with you.

Your big moment comes near the beginning of the service. This means you don't have to sit there anxiously wondering how soon it will be, and whether the nappy will need changing or your baby need feeding in the meantime! It also allows you to relax and enjoy yourself for the rest of the service.

The next two pages show you what will take place. There is an explanation of what is going to happen, a prayer, the promises, the blessing and anointing of your child, and then a final prayer for you and your family.

YOUR CHOICE...

As you read you'll see there are two separate promises for the parents. We expect all parents would probably be happy making the first of those promises. But what about the second? That surely has to be a matter for personal integrity. Perhaps you can gladly and truthfully promise to bring your child up within the church community... or perhaps you're not sure yet?

We'd like you to think about that one. It's your choice whether the second promise is included. If you want it kept in, that's great. But if you feel that you do not yet believe them and cannot, in good conscience, say them, then we would encourage you to maintain your own integrity, and would respect you for it.



Thanksgiving & Blessing for Infants

We are here as part of the Family of God, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we welcome (*parents' names*) and their child (*name*), and all the family and friends who have come to share in this special time with you.

All life is a gift from God, and so they come to give thanks to God for the gift of their child, to seek God's blessing upon *him/her*, and to dedicate themselves to the high task of parenthood.

As church we welcome (*child's name*) just as Jesus Christ welcomed children, and we affirm again that it is our responsibility to declare and to demonstrate the love of God in our lives in such a way that, in due time, this child may come to profess his/her own faith in Jesus Christ.

We shall pray for (*parents' names*) and witness their promises before God, and we shall anoint (*child's name*) with oil, as a symbol of God's blessing. So let us pray.

The *parents* and Minister say together:

**God our Father, Maker of all that is living,
we praise you for the wonder and joy of creation.
We thank you for the love that has brought this child into being,
and for the privileges of parenthood.
With joy we thank you for the gift of new life in this child;
for the potential of *his/her* life,
and the love and hope *he/she* has awakened in us.
Accept our thanks and praise; through
Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.**

Minister: (*Names*), you have brought (*child's name*) into the presence of the Lord, and given thanks for this new life in your family. Do you acknowledge your responsibilities as parents to love and care for *him/her*, and do you promise by your example and words to teach *him/her* a way of life that is good and true?

Parents: **We do.**

Minister: As followers of Jesus Christ, do you promise to bring your *son/daughter* up within the Christian community and to share with *him/her* your own faith in Jesus?

Parents: **We do.**

Minister: Godparents, do you promise, with God's help, to pray for *(child's name)* and *his/her* family, and to love, support and encourage them to the best of your ability?

Godparents: **We do.**

The congregation affirmation, as representatives of Jesus' Church:

We will love you as God has loved us. (*1 John 4:11*)

We will encourage you to love others and do good deeds in the name of Christ. (*Hebrews 10:24*)

We will rejoice with you in times of rejoicing. (*Romans 12:15*)

We will help you through difficult times and carry your burdens. (*Galatians 6:1-2*)

We will pray for you throughout your life. (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*)

You are a blessing from the Lord. (*Psalms 127:3*)

In Mark's Gospel we read: "Some people brought their children to Jesus so that he could bless them by placing his hands on them. But his disciples told the people to stop bothering him. When Jesus saw this he became angry and said, "Let the children come to me! Don't try to stop them. The Kingdom of God belongs to people who are like these children. I promise you that you cannot get into God's Kingdom, unless you accept it the way a child does." Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them."

The Minister takes the child, anoints him/her, and says:

Following our Lord's example I take you *(child's name)* into my arms and I bless you:- The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, bless these parents, that they may cherish their child; make them wise and understanding, to help *him/her* as *he/she* grows; and surround this family with the light of your truth and the warmth of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The child is then returned to the parents, with a memento from the Church.

WHY DO WE USE OIL?

The Christian faith is alive with symbols - visual aids which put into pictures as well as words the things which we believe. Some of them are "acted" images, for instance...

- ❖ Being "buried" under the water in baptism and then raised as a sign of new life
- ❖ Breaking bread and pouring out wine at communion, as reminders of Jesus' body and blood as he died on the cross

And then there are other symbols which are simply straightforward pictures...

- ❖ The cross, pointing to Jesus' sacrifice and God's love for us
- ❖ The dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit - God's presence and power at work today
- ❖ A fish, symbolising someone who follows Jesus
- ❖ A rainbow, picturing God's promises... and so on...

Oil was used in the Bible times as a symbol of God's blessing and anointing, so that makes it a very appropriate symbol to use at a time of blessing.



THE PROMISES ARE IMPORTANT.

As parents you are making very serious statements about your intentions, and are doing so in the presence of God. We are pleased about that, and there are some things which the church can do to help you keep those promises. But ultimately the responsibility is yours.

Teaching your child "a way of life that is good and true" is a challenging task. It means you need to do some thinking for yourselves about life-values. It means being willing to talk about them as your child grows older. And it will mean living consistently with those values as well. Often, having a child in the family prompts people to re-think through what they believe and why they believe it.

Promising to bring your child up "within the Christian community" assumes that they will be coming to church with you. We understand that it is not always easy to bring a small child to church, so we provide crèche facilities and fun children's activities. These can help your child discover for themselves what it's like to be a friend of Jesus, and you will always be most welcome. Of course, it helps if they see this same faith being lived out in practice at home. We all need God's grace to help us to live this way, but it is this kind of example which will enable the child to understand what Christian faith looks like in everyday life.

WHAT IF...?

“What if our baby cries ?” They probably won't be the only one. It's perfectly normal, and we are used to having them around. More importantly, you probably know what they want, so feel free to do whatever is necessary to comfort the child. Walk around at the back of church if it helps, or breastfeed the baby (you are welcome to use the crèche if you would prefer greater privacy).



“What if our toddler plays up ?” Small children do like to see what is going on, so let them look, and answer their questions. If you think you'll have your hands full with a baby, why not get a friend to look after your toddler? There is a carpeted crèche zone, with toys and activities which they could enjoy.

“What if we want some photographs ?” That's fine, but we would prefer it if photographs are not taken during the service. The Minister will happily do an “action replay” afterwards, so that you can get just the shot you want. If you want to video the proceedings, and the camera can operate without special lighting, then please discuss the possibility with the Minister first.



“What if we want Godparents ?” That's fine! You don't have to have them, but many people do. There really are no rules about this. It's traditional to have two of the same sex as the baby and one of the opposite sex, but that's up to you. The Godparents do make promises, so it's a good idea to show them this booklet beforehand and check whether they can honestly make those promises with integrity. After all, you wouldn't want to put them in an awkward position, would you?

CRADLE ROLL AND JUNIOR CHURCH



Your child's name will be put on our Cradle Roll and will be unveiled at the next Mothering Sunday service after this blessing. Our Cradle Roll Secretary will send you a special invitation to this service, and will send cards up to your child's 5th birthday.

And our Junior Church is always ready to welcome any children who want to come along.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT...

Did you know that God has many children ...but no grandchildren? Belonging to his family is a personal choice - it's not something our parents can do for us.

Every child is born into a family, but Jesus said that we can have two births: a physical birth into a biological family, and a spiritual birth into God's family. In his own words: "Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life." That's why the Bible says: "To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God."

Some children are adopted into a new family. However difficult things may have been, they know that they were wanted and chosen by their adoptive parents. The Bible says that "God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure."

As a parent you'll understand these descriptions - the wonder of new life, or the fresh hope through adoption. And you'll appreciate the significance of Jesus' teaching: he invites us to know God, not as some distant, unknown ruler, but as a heavenly father who loves us. One of the most famous parts of the Bible tells us how amazing that love is, when Jesus says: "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

And still talking about children, Jesus also said this: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Infants have an uncomplicated trust in their parents' love and care. Trust (or 'belief') in Jesus is the key to becoming a child of God, entering the kingdom of heaven and enjoying eternal life. It's a choice that each of us has to make for ourselves.

As you continue this exciting, exhausting adventure of parenthood, we hope you'll also take time to think about God's family and ask yourself the question: "What would it mean for me to put my trust in Jesus Christ?"

May God bless you, your family and your home.

