

Baptism and confirmation

Why do we get baptised?

Jesus gave us the sign of baptism, and he even was baptised himself. It's a sign that links to pictures of washing and of burial/resurrection. It shows that being a child of God is not just about where you are born and into which family – i.e. following the historic religion of your parents and country. It's about something spiritual, received directly through God's Spirit in us, giving a new kind of life to each new follower of Jesus.



Isn't just believing in Jesus enough?

Receiving baptism is not an extra to trusting in Jesus. It is a way to express the faith we have found. You can't baptise yourself! – it's a trusting action where you let yourself be received and counted with the rest of God's people, the worldwide family of Christ's church. Do you trust Jesus enough to show openly that you belong to him? Receiving baptism is also a 'thank you' and a celebration for the gift of new life we've received from God.

Why baptise babies then?

Christian families, who are bringing their children up to trust in Jesus and to know and receive God's free gift of love and forgiveness from an early age, often want to make it clear that their children are already 'in God's family'. The promises made at infant baptism are made by the parents and other adults who take responsibility for the spiritual nurture of those children. At

our church, we invite everyone who sees themselves as 'in God's family' in this way to share in the Holy Communion – the family remembrance meal where we meet specially with Jesus.



Other families (particularly in 'baptist' churches) want to save the sign of baptism for an individual declaration of faith by adults. So they show the inclusion of their children in the church family through a service of 'dedication'. The meaning and beliefs are very similar, even though the use of church ceremonies differs.

What is confirmation about?

God never forces anybody. He never takes away our human independence and responsibility – the very precious gift he gave us when he created men and women 'in his image'. So, in everyone's life, however you've been brought up, there comes a time when you feel independent of the family that cared for you. You realise that God's love, shown in Jesus' death, is for you personally, and you want to accept that gift for yourself – not just copying your parents or your friends. (You'd also have the choice to reject it if you wanted to.)

If you have reached that point, then asking to receive confirmation is your opportunity to make that public witness of your faith, showing you claim the promises made at your baptism as your own, and that you are trusting God to keep you faithful in his family throughout your adult life. It is a way of marking in your life the threshold that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about in John chapter 3, i.e. your realisation that God's Spirit is at work in you and that you have been 'born' and are alive spiritually as well as physically.

Knowing you are 'born' is of course just a start. There will be lots more 'growing up' in Jesus, times of going deeper with God, when we suddenly realise we understand a little more. Not all will be marked publicly.

When should I be confirmed?

If you don't yet feel that sure and confident about your faith, don't worry, and certainly don't feel you are a reject or failure! Growing up is different for everyone, and our spiritual search and growth can often stretch much longer than our physical and emotional maturing. Many adults ask for confirmation in their 20's, 30's or even much later. The important thing is that it is real and right for you. But if it's just a matter of finding the courage to 'go public', don't delay but ask for help – both from Jesus and from friends and leaders.

Why does the bishop 'lay on hands' and pray for the Holy Spirit at confirmation?



Laying hands on while praying for the Holy Spirit and commissioning people for Christian service happened right from the beginning of the church, as described in several places in Acts. It's a sign of being joined to the rest of God's family and of receiving his Spirit through our collective life¹. The Spirit joins us to one another and builds us together into Christ's body. Though the Spirit is already at work in us, and has brought us to faith, we pray for a further and ongoing filling that will enable us to fulfil God's work in new ways and new places.

1 Sometimes people who have been baptised as adults in another church have used confirmation in our church as a way of showing they want to be joined to this church community too.