Dear Parent,

Congratulations on the birth of your baby. We are glad that you are considering a service of blessing for your child, and we are sure that there is a service suitable for you. The Church of England has two services to offer after the birth of a child:

Thanksgiving & Blessing Service

This is a service in which parents, friends and family give thanks for the birth (or adoption) of a child and we pray for God's blessing upon the baby, parents and home. Here is one of the prayers from it:

The parents say together:

God our creator,
we thank you for the gift of this child,
entrusted to our care.
May we be patient and understanding,
ready to guide and to forgive,
so that through our love
he/she may come to know your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Thanksgiving service takes place either during our normal Sunday services on the 3rd Sunday of the month, or at 2pm – usually on the 2nd or 3rd Sunday of the month. A certificate to mark the occasion is given.

It may be followed later by baptism, indeed many families choose a Thanksgiving service because it allows the child to make up their own mind about the Christian faith when they are older; but it is not necessarily a first step to baptism. It is simply a different service - a service of saying *Thank you* and asking for *God's Blessing* on your child, rather than one of making promises about active membership of the church.

Whilst Godparents are not officially necessary for a Thanksgiving, it is usual to name "sponsors" who can fulfil the role of supporting the child and family.

Baptism Service

A service of Baptism is to welcome people (whatever their age) into the Christian faith and the church family. They take place on the 3rd Sunday of the month at 10.30am during a main Sunday service. In exceptional circumstances we can undertake Baptisms at 2pm – usually on the 2nd or 3rd Sunday of the month – provided that the parents bring the child to the next Sunday service for the "welcome" part of the baptism service.

Obviously your baby cannot make the decision to become a Christian for him/herself at the moment; so children are baptised on the understanding that at least one of their parents has chosen to follow Jesus and will bring the child up within the family of the church.

This will involve:

- Regular Church going as a family. Christianity is about being in a community, not just about us as individuals.
- Teaching the children from the Bible.
- Praying with them and teaching them to pray.

The baptism service involves parents and Godparents making promises of Christian commitment both for themselves and for the child. It is obviously important that these promises, which are made before God, are understood and made honestly. Your child's spiritual care is too important for you to want to make these promises lightly. Therefore, if you choose this option we will do our best to explain what the promises are about – your responsibility is to decide if you want to make them.

What Happens Next?

The first step is to come to a Sunday service to see what it is like: our 10.30 service has a crèche and groups for all ages of children. Speak to one of the clergy afterwards.
They will arrange to come to your home to explain the different services and fix a date. If you choose the baptism option they will come back for a second time to go through the service and promises in detail.

About St Matthew & St Oswald's

Ask for a "Welcome to Church" leaflet which tells you more about the range of things that happen here or check us out at *www.smso.org.uk*

What about Godparents?

For a service of Thanksgiving you are free to choose anyone you want to be sponsors/godparents. The only commitment they make is to support you and your child.

For a Baptism the godparents must (by law) be themselves baptised. Remember also that in a baptism you are asking godparents to make a public statement about their own Christian faith. Do be careful not to put people in the position of saying things they do not believe. We have a separate leaflet you can show to godparents that explains the promises.

How many godparents? There are no strict rules on the number of godparents, but as a guide three are recommended – two of the same sex as the child. Anything between two and five is quite normal. The key thing is to find the right people who will, in the words of the baptism service, help to lead your child in the ways of Christ, "*by their prayers, by their example and by their teaching.*"

If you have a question, please contact;

Revd Margaret Simmons
e-mail: margaret@smso.org.uk ☎ 07792 895294

Why some people ask for baptism:

To give her her name properly
But children are properly named when their birth is registered. Baptism is not about naming people.

To make sure he goes to heaven if he dies young
God does not judge his children on whether they have been baptised or not.

So she can be married in a church
We do not prevent people from being married here because they are not baptised. Indeed it is more important to us that promises are said with sincerity than a baptism ceremony is "gone through".

To give him a good start as a Christian
Good - but that needs more than baptism to achieve it. This start must continue with a Christian upbringing or it is a start of nothing. If you intend to follow Jesus and bring your child up within the church family, then this is the time for baptism. If you are unsure then it may be better that you opt for a Thanksgiving Service at this time, allowing your child to choose for himself about baptism later - he can be baptised at any age.

ST OSWALD'S
PART OF ST MATTHEW & ST OSWALD'S PARISH

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Welcome to your Baby

(Baptism and Thanksgiving Services Explained)