

## So you want to dedicate your baby to Christ?

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The arrival of a new baby is a time of rejoicing for any family. The newness of life often brings a special freshness toward all of life. Often, during this time, parents want to do something in the church building to celebrate their joy with others and to present their child to God for blessing.

The joy of Jesus' birth was shared with the people of God in the house of God. Like most Jewish parents in that day, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple to be presented to God. Long before this time godly parents presented their children to God. And to this day, parents bring their children to God, asking for his blessing.

### What about infant baptism?

Some Christian churches baptize infants by sprinkling them with water. In those churches the covenant of baptism is seen as being similar to the Old Testament covenant of circumcision. Other Christians don't baptize infants. Instead they dedicate babies to God. There are several reasons for this. First, there are no clear incidents of infant baptism in Scripture. Baptism seems, instead to be an evidence of Christian faith. Additionally, while some groups suggest that baptism imparts a special grace to children, there is no real scriptural support for this. Finally, in our society, often adults who were baptized as children desire to be baptized again as an expression of their decision to receive Christ as their Savior and Lord. For these reasons and others, Common Ground Church does not baptize infants. Christian parents are encouraged to dedicate their children to God during a public worship service. *(If you would like to know why we don't believe in infant baptism, please download the pdf format document found in [www.commongroundchurch.co.za](http://www.commongroundchurch.co.za) and under free resources and under 'dna stuff'.)*

### So what happens in a baby dedication?

Three things happen.

- 1) ***Parents dedicate themselves to God:*** The parents dedicate themselves to parent this child in a God-pleasing way, which is the also way that makes it most likely for this child to one day be drawn to faith in Christ.
- 2) ***The child is welcomed:*** The parents and the church thank God for this gift, and welcome the child into its care.
- 3) ***We all ask Christ to bless this child:*** The parents and the church ask Jesus to bless this little child much like he blessed infants in his own day,

with the prayer and hope that one day this child will come to know and serve Christ personally.

Let's explore these three aspects of baby dedication more fully ...

### **1) Parents dedicate themselves to God**

Children are a gift from God. Like everything good in life, they come from God and they belong to him. Parents are caretakers of the children God has given them. As parents speak to the pastor about their desire to dedicate their children to God, there are several questions they should ask themselves:

1. Since dedication of children is a Christian act of giving children to God for his glory, the most obvious question to ask is, "Are we Christians?" As a couple standing before God dedicating their child to him in a Christian church, their life should show the characteristics of Christ. Sometimes people bring their babies for dedication because it is "the thing to do." God is honoured by hearts that genuinely desire to please him without regard for what others think. Christian dedication of babies is for Christian families.

2. The next question is "Are we serious about this dedication?" Parents should ask themselves if they really want to see their child serve God. Would they like to see their child become a preacher, a Christian businessman, a missionary, or a common laborer for Christ? When Hannah, the mother of Samuel the prophet dedicated him to the Lord, she promised to give him up to serve God in the temple (1 Samuel 1-2:11). Dedication of children to God means handing them over to him to do with as he pleases. An act of dedication is an act of faith in God, trusting him to call the children wisely and mercifully.

3. Another question that is appropriate to ask at the time of Christian Dedication is "Are we willing to oversee our child's Christian development?" Scripture tells us that we are to train a child in the way he should go (Proverbs 22:6). This includes meeting together regularly as Christians to spur one another on to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:23-24). Dedication of children to God is a promise to model a Christian lifestyle to the children worshipping with a church family regularly. In a sense, a Christian dedication of a child is a dedication of the parents to be godly role models.

As parents presenting your child to the Lord, you signify your own personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You show a desire to see God's will carried out in the life of your child. And you acknowledge your place as stewards of what really belongs to God: your child.

Dedication means that by word and example, you promise to teach your child to live a holy life and to value the good gifts God has given us. You promise to give your child every opportunity and encouragement to discover

Christ and to develop into the well-rounded Christian individual God intends him or her to be.

Dedication before God and the church means that you realize that the church should have a large part in the spiritual growth of your family. They should know you and your child so they can give prayer support, assist in Bible teaching, and provide opportunities, facilities and workers through which you and your child can enter into the fullness of Christian faith.

## **2) The child is welcomed**

Throughout his ministry, Jesus affirmed children. He wanted little children welcomed in his name (Mark 9:37). He taught that we need to receive the good news like a child, with simplicity and trust (Mark 10:15). To be great in the kingdom of heaven we need to learn to become humble like little children (Matthew 18:4). Unlike those who wanted a style of religion that was for adults only, Jesus took delight in children's praise (Matthew 21:15-16).

Throughout his ministry, he emphasized the value of children and the lessons we can learn from them, especially about living faith. In some churches children always seem to be an intrusion. They have to sit still, keep quiet and switch off, with nothing to contribute and no moment in the service which makes much sense to them. The church has all too often slipped into the disciples' prejudice and assumed that God and true religion have no time for children. Jesus rejected out of hand the notion that God is only for grown-ups.

So dedication is also a time when both the parents and the church welcome this child into our midst and into our care.

## **3) We ask Christ to bless this child**

While Jesus was on the earth, parents often asked him to hold their children in his arms (Mark 10:13-16). They were looking for more than an affectionate caress - they were seeking God's blessing.

Amazingly, Jesus did so. He took them in his arms, which gives some indication of the maximum age, or at least size, of the young children in this scene. Then he laid hands upon them and blessed them, just as their parents had requested. It is crucial to recognize that Jesus walked a middle path in expressing God's favour. He flatly refused to exclude the children, as if the kingdom of God were a child-free zone. And then he blessed them.

We believe that Jesus is still alive, and that if he was willing to bless children then, then he is still willing now. So we invite his blessing through prayer. We do so, by giving thanks to God for the gift of new life. We pray for God's blessing upon their lives and for God's protection in a world that

can sometimes become difficult and dangerous. We pray for the parents, that they will grow into the astonishing responsibilities of parenthood. We also pray that the parents, supported by the church, will bring up their children in the knowledge of God and his ways. And we pray, above all, that the child will grow into a personal, saving faith, trusting in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. That's a wonderful and rich combination of prayer for any child. It's a great privilege to honour and bless children in such thoroughly biblical ways.

### **In conclusion...**

If it is your wish to follow the example of godly parents who throughout the ages presented their children to God in dedication; if you will pray for and with your child, to instruct your child in the things of God, to teach your child to read God's Word, and to do everything in your power to bring your child to a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; if you believe it is a great privilege to offer a child back to the Creator, and wish to stand before God and the church to dedicate your child to God, then the leadership at Common Ground Church would love to assist you in doing so.