

What is Baby Dedication?

Adapted from material produced by Arthur G. Patzia, "Baby Dedication in the Believers' Church," *American Baptist Quarterly* 3 (1984): 63; and Morling College.

Christians believe that children are a gift from God. We believe that parents and family are responsible for the care, nurture and teaching of children in the ways of God.

Dedication not Baptism

Baptist Churches conduct baby dedications, rather than infant baptisms. Those who practice infant baptisms, or christenings, typically understand the practice either as a *sacrament* of grace necessary to forgive original sin, or as a *seal* to signify that the infants of Christian parents are in God's covenant of grace. Baptists, however, have always maintained that baptism is for believers only.

Baby dedications are an opportunity to give thanks for the child, recognise the responsibility of the parents to raise their child in the way of the Lord, acknowledge the support of the church community, and bless the child and family.

Scriptural Basis

At times Christians have appealed to Scripture in support of baby dedication. Passages include Hannah bringing Samuel to Shiloh (1 Sam 1:24-28), Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22-24), Jesus blessing the children (Mark 10:13-16, Matt 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17); and instructions in various epistles, such as Eph 6:1-4, which exhort believing parents to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

While these and other Scriptures affirm God's love for children, and the role of parents in a child's life, there is no biblical rite established for baby dedication. Dedications do, however, have an important place in the life of a church as they point to what God has done in creation and redemption, what God is doing in the life of a child, and what God will do through the spiritual influence of the family and church.

Dedication of Child and Parents

A dedication service dedicates both the child and the parents. We dedicate the child to the Lord, asking that they would grow to know and live for God. We dedicate the parents to the Lord, asking for wisdom, understanding, knowledge and ability to raise their child.

Dedication or Thanksgiving

In light of the promises parents are asked to make, dedication is appropriate for Christian parents. If parents are not comfortable making such promises, a simple “thanksgiving” service for the child may be more appropriate.

Occasion

Dedications most commonly take part during a regular Sunday church service, but they may also be separate events in homes, parks, or in the church building at another time.

Pattern

Typically, dedications involve the following:

- An explanation of what dedication is, and what it is not.
- A word from Scripture to parents about their role and responsibility in raising the child.
- Responses or promises from the parents.
- Responses and affirmations of support and prayer from the congregation.
- Prayers of thanksgiving by the pastor, friends or family.
- A blessing by the pastor.