

# PARENTS: Baptism is just the beginning!

When a couple gets married, they have a wedding of some kind. Whether it's a civil wedding or a church wedding or something in between, there's some kind of ceremony where the couple publicly and legally begin their married life. Hopefully, it's a great and memorable day for all, especially the couple. A meaningful wedding celebration will even strengthen the promises and resolve of the couple with what we Christians call God's grace for marriage. But then it happens: the wedding is over, and married life begins.

In a good marriage, everything that the couple promised each other at the wedding ceremony – with the help of God's grace, acknowledged or not - now gets lived out on a day to day basis. They love, honor, help and support each other for the rest of their lives, through good times and bad. *This is married life.* The wedding was just the kick-off. And the joy and meaning of the wedding day will quickly fade and become meaningless if the couple doesn't live out their promises in their married life.

It's helpful to think of your child's Baptism ceremony in the same way we just thought about a wedding ceremony. Baptism day is a beautiful and memorable day for all, especially the parents of the children, who, if they enter into the process and the ceremony seriously, experience God's awesome grace to prepare them for what's ahead. But that's just the point; it's what's ahead that really matters. Just like a wedding ceremony, the Baptism ceremony is a kick-off to *baptized life!* This involves the *living out* of the faith that the parents and Godparents profess on behalf of the child.

Just as there are sometimes bad marriages where the couple doesn't live up to their marriage vows, there are sometimes



ineffective Baptisms where the parents don't follow through on the promises they make at the ceremony and it becomes an empty ritual. But when people follow through on their marriage promises, married life is a joy, and reflection of God's own life in the world. This is just as true of Baptism: when the parents take their parental promises seriously and carry them through, God's grace can break through in amazing ways in the life of the family. Most importantly, children are gradually "immersed" (the meaning of the word "baptism") in the love, the values and the practices of Jesus and his community, the Church.

This is the whole point of baptizing children: to give them the support of Jesus' community in overcoming the "original sin" of the world, so that they learn to live lives of love, forgiveness, compassion and justice in the midst of a world that has failed to make these values a priority over self-centeredness and lack of compassion for others. At the Baptism ceremony, the parents and Godparents promise to take responsibility for living out and teaching these Christian values to their children and Godchildren, and so build a better world!

But they can't do it alone. Just as "it takes a village" to raise a child, it takes a Church "village" to raise a *Christian* child. There's too much out there in the "me-first" world that goes against Jesus' values of compassion, forgiveness, cooperation, and



self-sacrifice for the good of all. That's why we Christians need one another, and Christian parents *especially* need the support of a Christian community in raising a Christian child. Through praying, playing, learning and serving

together with others, they surround their children with good examples of other families who are trying to put the values of Jesus first at home, in school, in the workplace and the community. They know that they are not alone!

Now back to our wedding/marriage comparison. Just as the wedding ceremony uses symbols to speak of what will be ahead in the married life so the Baptism ceremony uses symbols to speak of what's ahead in the baptized life. First, parents and children are "received" by the worshipping community as they will be every Sunday throughout their "baptismal life". Then, the child is "claimed" by the sign of the cross, and hopefully the parents will continue to bless the child this way every night, and before long the child will be signing him/herself with the cross. God's Word is proclaimed and explained, just as, hopefully, the family will continue to read and apply the Scriptures in their lives both at church and home. Holy oils symbolically prepare, strengthen and "seal" the child for living a life in imitation of Jesus. The water of Baptism symbolizes the ongoing "immersion" in the ways of Jesus that will take place in the family. The white garment symbolizes the embrace, protection and comfort of being surrounded by and "clothed with" Christ. And the Baptism candle symbolizes the "flame of faith" that

will carry the child through life if the parents and child make the effort to keep it burning and alive.

It's very possible that as a parent you've never thought about Baptism quite this way before. Think of it as the "kick-off" to providing for the *spiritual* growth of your child to go along with all you do to provide for his or her physical, psychological and emotional growth. *And it's no less important!* Your own faith upbringing may have been very different, but this is the time to consider what you want "Catholic" to look like in your own family. The Church invites you at this time as you are preparing to present your child for Baptism to prepare yourself for this awesome and exciting challenge. Here are some things to consider:

- What can we/I do to make the Baptism day focus on the faith life of our family?
- How will we as parent/s and Godparent/s prepare ourselves to treat the Baptism day as the "kick-off" to the baptized life?
- What are 3 things that we/I can do over the next year to deepen the faith life of our child and family? (e.g., go to Mass regularly, pray at home, read stories from a children's Bible, volunteer for or financially support a charitable organization etc.)

Baptism is just the beginning. Work with God and your parish family to insure it's the beginning of a wonderful experience of personal faith and Christian community!

