

Beliefs: What is the difference between infant and believers' baptism and why does the Anglican Church encourage infant baptism?

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The Anglican Church looks back primarily to the account in Acts (in the New Testament) of the early Church to determine many church practices. Yes, there were times when adults came to faith and asked how they should respond. For example, after Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, many of the crowd were cut to the heart and asked how they should respond. 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you' is Peter's response (Acts 2: 37 – 38). This is indeed believers' baptism. However, as the Christian faith spread, there developed an understanding of faith within a family or household (as there was within the Jewish tradition). When the jailer at Philippi comes to Christian faith he is baptised with his entire family (Acts 16:33) – and from the wording we have to assume that this included children and babies. So, the Anglican understanding is that infants and children within families where parents have faith, are brought up within that faith.

The Introduction to the Baptism service declares 'Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love'. It is also a time when a new child is welcomed into the church family. Baptism primarily celebrates what God has done for us, and our response to that love. The water represents forgiveness that is always available to us, and a lighted candle symbolises God's guidance and direction in our life's journey. The child is brought by parents and God-parents who make promises on behalf of the child that they will pray for the child, help them to find the love of Christ in their lives and to follow Christ's teaching, and become part of a church with their family. Later, often when they are a teenager (or at any time in their life), they will have the chance to 'confirm' that faith for themselves in the service of confirmation, a service which gives them the opportunity now to declare publicly their Christian belief for themselves.

Many people who have come to that Christian belief as teenagers or adults have not been baptised as infants, and so they are baptised and confirmed at the same service. In common parlance the word Christening is used for the baptism of infants. This can cause confusion, so it is important to know that all who have been christened have been baptised. The Anglican understanding is that you are only baptised once.