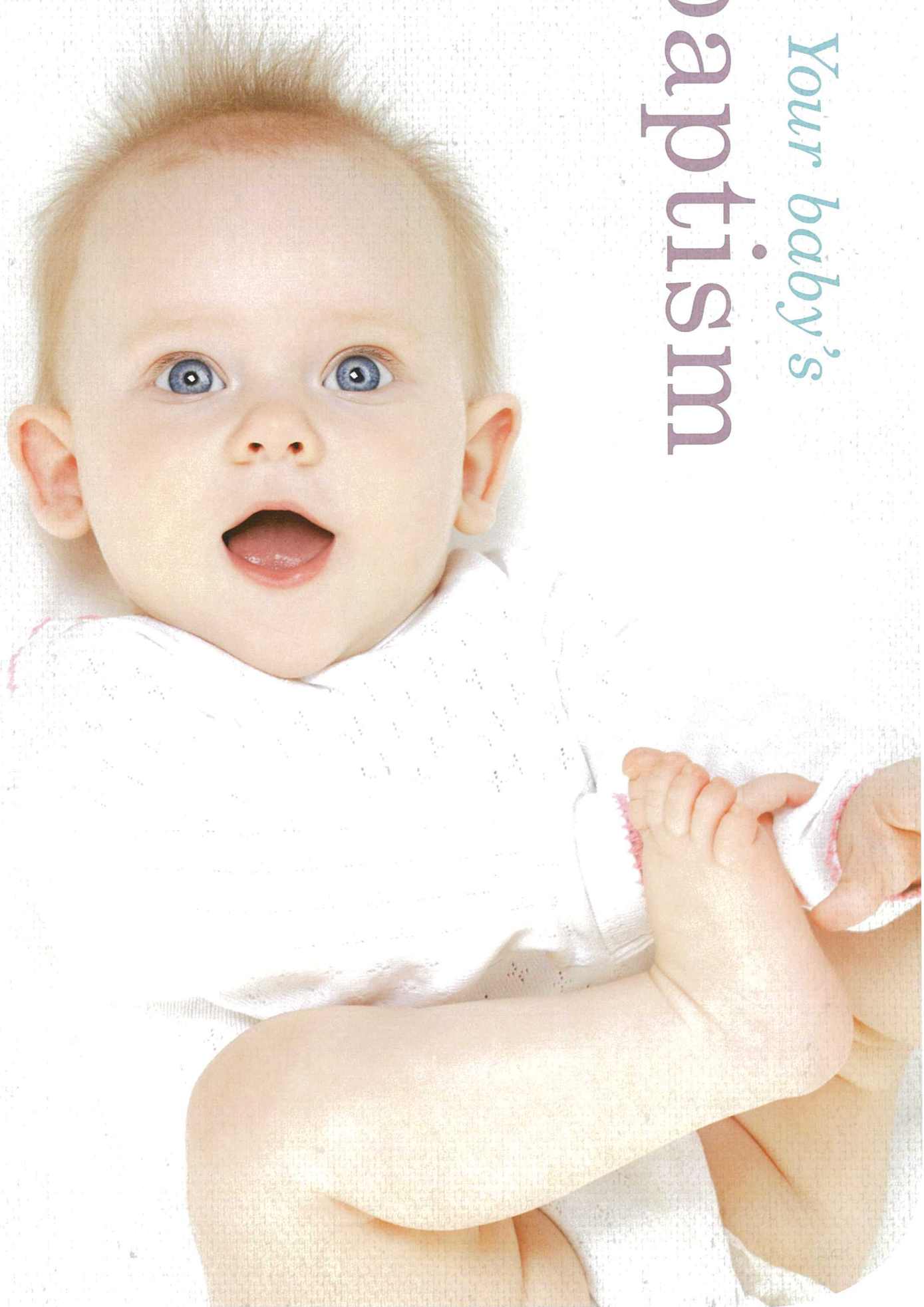


Your baby's
baptism



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A photograph of a woman with long, curly brown hair and a man with dark hair and a beard, both looking down at a newborn baby. The baby is lying on a white lace cloth, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The woman is on the left, and the man is on the right. The text "there seems to be so much to do" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

“there
seems
to be
*so much
to do*”

It's likely that at the moment you are concerned about the birth of your baby. Either it's an event you are waiting for, or you are still recovering from it. Before the baby arrives there is so much to think about: where will the baby sleep, baby's clothes, will the baby be completely healthy and perhaps even the prospect of twins? Then, all of a sudden, there is chaos. The baby finally arrives and there is no time to think. There is so much to get done.

Some people think of baptism simply as something else to "get done". They speak of baptism as having the baby "done". That's very sad, because baptism is a birth into the Christian community and is in every way as solemn and important as birth itself. It's an event that needs to be prepared for.

Your baby's baptism is a time for celebration and joy. And, naturally, you want the best for your baby.

We want to help you plan and prepare for the baptism in the best possible way.

Your faith is important

Your most important preparation is to look at your own faith. Your baby will be born with your features and will pick up your mannerisms. As he or she gets older your child will grow up, too, with your faith. That is why, when you approach the Church about having your child baptised, you will be encouraged to think through your own faith and the part it plays in your life.

The very fact that you have asked to have your baby baptised shows that you recognise the importance of God in your life. For centuries, children too young to answer for themselves have been baptised. The Church recognises the desire of Christian parents to share the life of Christ with their children. Jesus Christ, like you, wants the best for your child.

Growing in God's love

Your efforts will not only help your baby to grow up in the love of God, they will also help you to grow. As you teach your child to pray, you yourself will deepen your prayer; as you teach your child to appreciate the Mass, your own faith will be enriched. Your baby's baptism is only the beginning of a new life in which you will grow closer to one another in the family and closer to God. The Church welcomes your child into its midst with love and prayers for the future peace and happiness of your family.

Ben came home from nursery school, jumped into his dad's lap and asked: "Where did I come from?" Dad cleared his throat and attempted a simple, but complete, answer to his son's question. Ben was fidgeting by the time his dad finished. "Well," he said, "I just wondered because Sophie said she came from Wollongong."



God's love for your child

The misunderstanding between dad and Ben was rather like the misunderstanding at a secret meeting between Jesus and a leading Jew called Nicodemus. Jesus said that unless we are born from above we cannot see the kingdom of God. Naturally, Nicodemus was puzzled. He asked if a grown man or woman could really go back into the mother's womb and be born again.

The answer to that question is obvious. The mother goes through great pain to give birth to a baby who is alive and kicking. Nothing can put the baby back into the womb. But Jesus went on to tell us that your baby isn't just your child. Your baby is also God's child. And he, too, went through enormous pain – even to dying on the cross for us – to show us how much he loves every child.

Jesus knew that such love has to be seen to be believed. And baptism is a sign, or sacrament, that he gave us to show his love. Sometimes, people imagine that we have to be baptised to show our belief in God. In a sense, that's true. But baptism is far more than that. It shows God's belief in us.

The smile of God

When you smile at your baby it brings him or her to life: your baby starts to chuckle and to wriggle. God's smile comes in baptism. It is the sign that all sin is forgiven and that we are precious and valued. And that really is a re-birth. It gives us new life. It makes it possible for us to start again.

This is why some people compare the water of baptism to the womb; others compare it to the tomb in which Jesus himself was laid. When your child emerges from the water it is like being born again. This time, however, it isn't with the life you have given it; but it is with the life – the Spirit – of Jesus, who now looks forward to receiving your child into eternal life.

Jesus went on to tell us that your baby isn't just your child. Your baby is God's child too.

The first thing you do after your baby is born is to start loving your baby. You kiss your baby, you hug your baby, you feed your baby. Usually, you hardly think about what you are doing. You simply love your child. And, you help your baby to grow into a mature, loving adult – as one of the family. There will come a day when you can talk to him or her as an equal.

Our heavenly Father shows his love for us in the same way as you show your love for your child – by signs and gestures. The ceremony of baptism is full of them. The most important of these signs is the pouring of the water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

You and God express love in the same way – by signs and gestures. Your love and God's love have the same effect – it draws your child into the family. The day will come when God, like yourself, can talk to your child almost as an equal.

If these little signs of love are lacking, the consequences can be disastrous.

If a parent starves a baby of love the child may grow up thinking of him or herself as being quite unloveable.

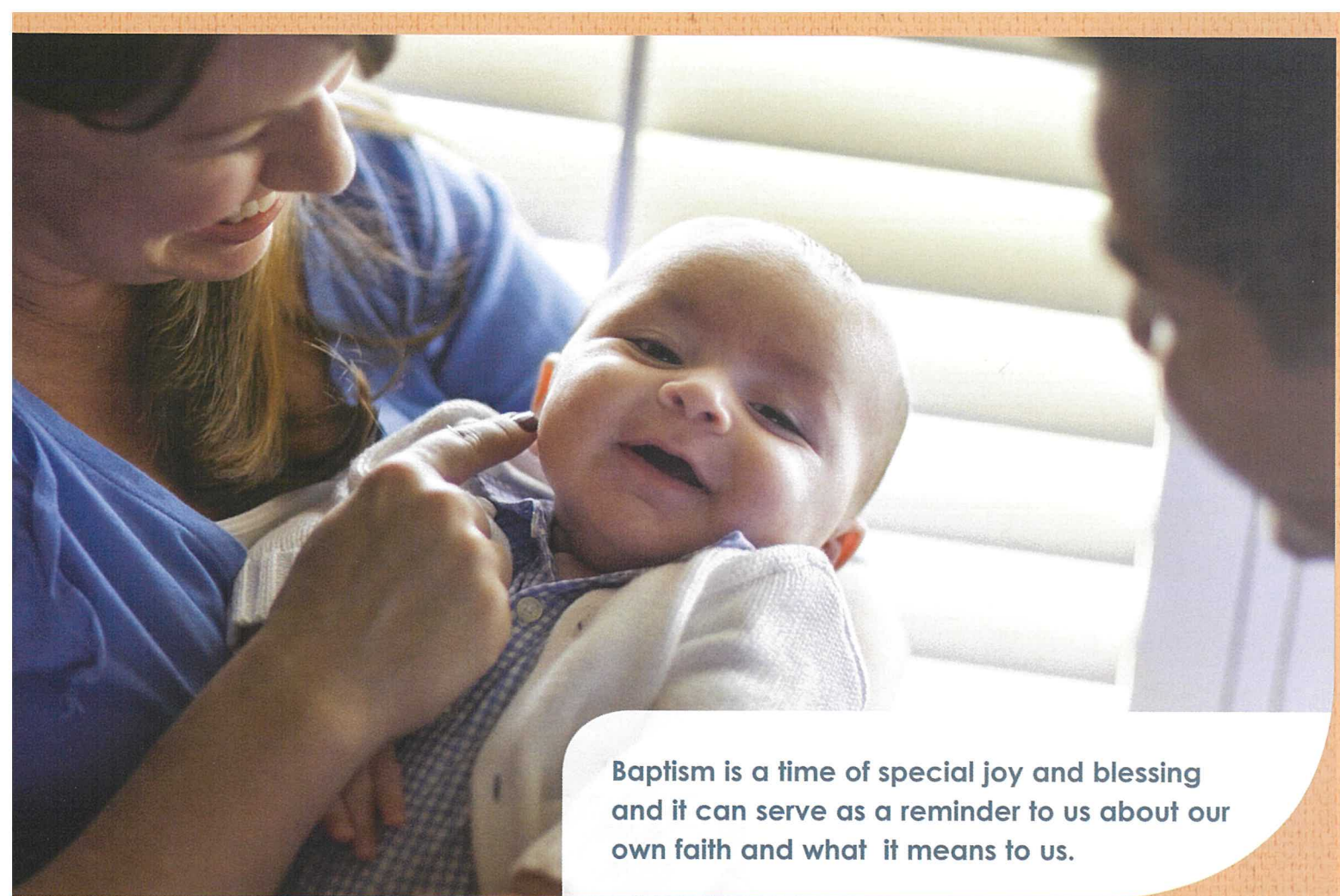
Your faith – your child's faith

It's important that you and your partner basically agree on the way your baby is to be brought up, otherwise the child will suffer. In the same way; it's important that parents understand what God expects of them in this regard. That is why, at the beginning of the ceremony, you are asked if you clearly understand that you are:

“accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbour.”

It's important that the question is answered honestly. This doesn't mean that if you have failed in the practice of the faith your priest will refuse to baptise your baby. It simply means that he may want you to pause and think about why you really want your baby baptised, and how you can share a faith which you no longer practise yourself.





Baptism is a time of special joy and blessing and it can serve as a reminder to us about our own faith and what it means to us.

Not a Catholic?

If you are a practising Christian of another denomination you will recognise how important baptism is. While some denominations defer baptism until adulthood, others – including the Catholic Church – baptise infants.

If you are married to a Catholic you will already have some understanding of the great importance Catholics attach to their faith and the passing on of that faith to their children. When you got married, you will remember, your partner agreed to do all that he or she could to bring up the children in the practice of his or her faith.

Your baby's baptism is the first and most important step you will take as parents in the life and faith of your child. It's important that you share this very special celebration together and the Catholic Church wants you to feel welcome to participate as much as you wish.

Non-believer?

If you are not familiar with Christianity you may be puzzled by some of the ceremonies of baptism. However, you will share your Christian partner's desire to do the best for your baby. Your partner will greatly appreciate your support and encouragement.

There are several moments during the baptism service when the parents play an active part. The Church hopes that you will feel welcome and at home, so that you can join in without feeling uncomfortable or under pressure. If, for personal reasons, you don't wish to participate, the Church respects your wishes.

In the next section we go through the ceremony. You may like to discuss together your part in the baptism of your child.

the signs and symbolism of baptism

Sign of the Cross

A sign on something shows its origins or ownership. The sign of the cross is the mark of Christians because Jesus Christ died on the cross. Parents and godparents trace it on the child's forehead to show that the baby belongs to Christ, who now offers his help and grace to face and overcome the sufferings of life.

Water

This is for cleansing and is a sign that our sins are washed away. Baptism cleanses us of original sin with which we are all born and, in the baptism of adults, of every sin committed prior to baptism. Water is also necessary for life and so is a sign, that the life of the risen Christ is ours.

Oils

Oil of Baptism is olive oil rubbed on the breast of the baby, just as athletes used to rub themselves with oil to strengthen and prepare for the fight ahead. Oil of Chrism is a mixture of olive oil and balsam (sweet-smelling ointment) and is rubbed on the crown of the head. It is a sign that the one baptised has become a priest, a prophet and a king. The profession of faith which you make on behalf of your child at baptism will later be reaffirmed personally by your child in the sacrament of confirmation when the Oil of Chrism will be used again. The oils are blessed each year at a special Mass in holy week, the week before Easter.



White Garment

This garment (which can take various forms, such as a white shawl or a white stole, according to local customs) is an echo of the new clothes worn by Christians after baptism in the early centuries. It is a sign of innocence and the new life of resurrection.

Candles

These symbolise Christ – the Light of the World. The baptismal candle is lit from the paschal candle, which stands near the altar at Easter as a sign of the risen Christ. The baptismal candle reminds us that the light of Christ has entered the child's life, and its flame symbolises the flame of faith which will burn throughout the life of your child. You can help to keep that flame of faith burning brightly.

Baptismal Register

Your baby's baptism will be recorded in the parish baptismal register. In the years ahead, proof of baptism may be obtained in the form of a certificate issued on the basis of this registration. Your child's confirmation, marriage or ordination will also be noted alongside this entry in the register.

the day of baptism

Normally your baby will be baptised solemnly in church. Sometimes, it may be suggested that the baptism take place during Sunday Mass or just after the service. Otherwise it will be at a time customary in your parish. Do not worry about where to stand or where to move during the service. Let the priest or deacon who baptises be your guide.

Following careful thought and preparation, you bring your baby to church to ask for baptism. It is a public sign of your own faith and trust in God's love. The ceremonies of baptism speak powerfully of this love and, as you follow the service by joining in the prayers and responses, you are drawn deeper into God's love.

Welcoming

**"When two or three meet in my name,
I shall be there with them."**

Jesus Christ

The ceremony begins with a warm welcome to you and your family from the priest or deacon, on behalf of the Christian community – the Church. He asks what name you have given your baby and whether you accept the responsibility of bringing up your child in the practice of the faith. Then with you, the parents and godparents, he greets your baby with the sign of the cross. You trace the cross on the forehead of your baby as a sign that this is a child of Christ. Having welcomed one another, everyone turns to the most important guest, Jesus Christ, who comes among those who gather in his name. In the gospel Jesus speaks of the new life which baptism brings; and the priest or deacon may expand on this with a short talk.

Prayers are then offered for your baby, for you and for your family. You may make a selection or write them for yourselves. Finally, we ask the intercession of the saints in heaven so that the baptism becomes a gathering of the whole family of the Church.

Washing

**"Baptise in the name of the Father and
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."**

Jesus Christ

Water is the symbol of life, for without water there will be no life. Water also makes us clean. Baptism signifies the new life and the cleansing from sin won for us when Jesus died on the cross and rose to new life.

To prepare for the baptism itself the priest or deacon prays that your baby may be delivered from every evil and this prayer is reinforced by the anointing with Oil of Baptism as a sign of Christ's strengthening power. The water is blessed. Then the priest or deacon asks you to renew the vows which were made by or for you at your own baptism.

Now comes the climax of the whole ceremony. The priest or deacon pours the baptismal water over your child's head three times, saying:

**"N., I baptise you in the name
of the Father, and of the Son, and
of the Holy Spirit."**



Worshipping

"Unless a person is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Jesus Christ

Your baby is now a Christian. Following an ancient custom, your baby is anointed with the Oil of Chrism. "Christ" means "anointed one" – for Jesus was given special work to do. He suffered, died and rose again in order to unite us to his heavenly Father.

Your baby has the special work of living as a member of Christ's body – the Church. In this he or she will be helped by celebrating the other sacraments and, in particular, will take part in the Eucharist. The offering of thanks and praise to the Father, which is central to the Mass, is at the heart of all Christian life fully expressed.

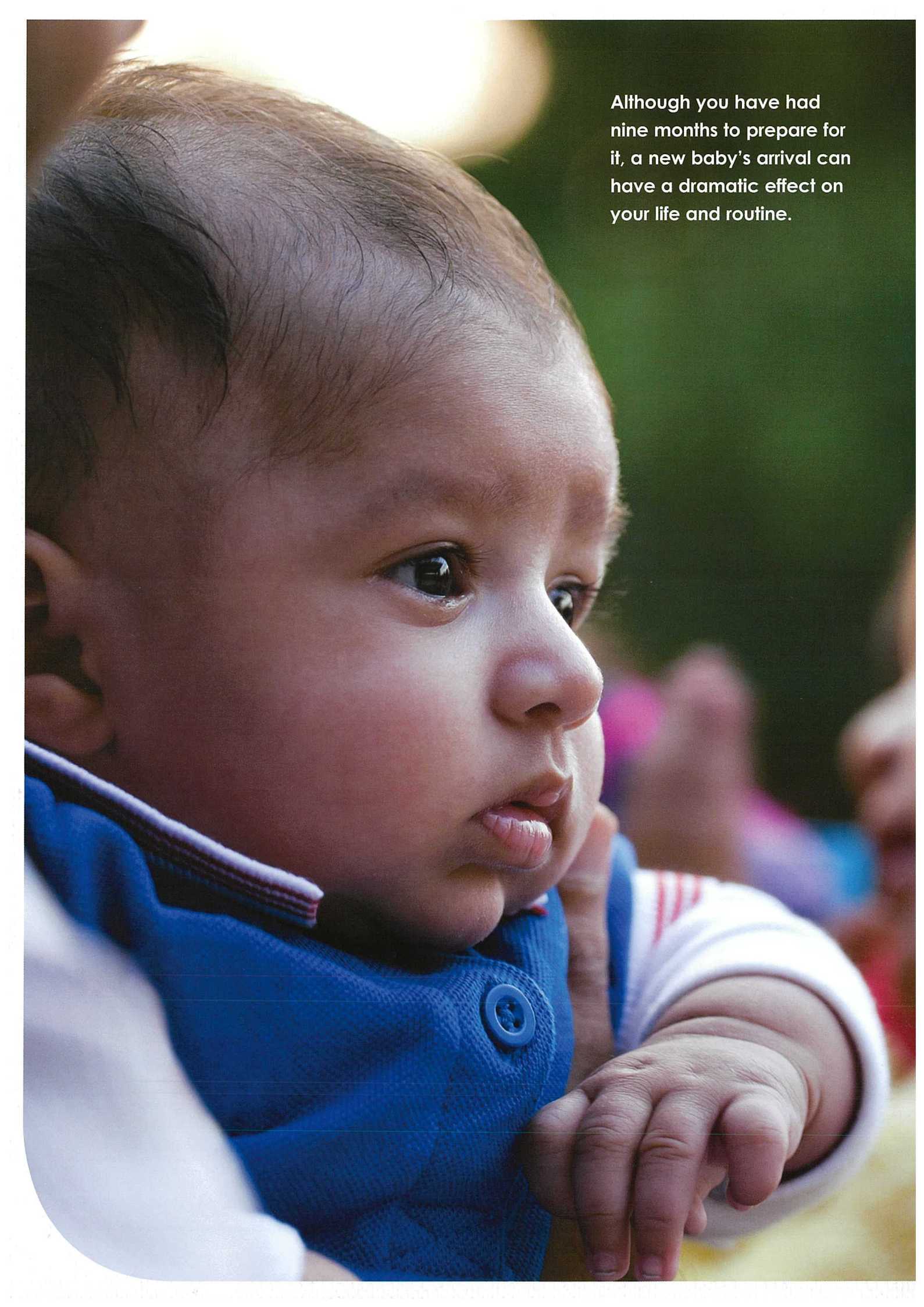
Witnessing

"You are the light of the world... Your light must shine so that everyone will give the praise to your Father in heaven."

Jesus Christ

Your baby has been given the Spirit of Christ and so can reveal this life in the world. As a sign of this power to witness to Christ, a **white garment** is wrapped around your baby to show that he or she is a new creation clothed in Christ. Finally, a member of the family, usually the father or godparent, is given a **candle** lit from the paschal candle. This symbolises the light of Christ which will shine on, and through, your child for life.

The ceremony concludes with the Church sending you on your future life together as a family. Everyone prays together the prayer Christ taught us: the Our Father. This is followed by special prayers for each parent and all who have joined in this joyful welcoming of a new Christian into the world.



Although you have had nine months to prepare for it, a new baby's arrival can have a dramatic effect on your life and routine.

You have probably studied books and attended talks at the prenatal clinic which have provided plenty of information about birth, the immediate post-delivery period, and how to wash and feed your noisy little newcomer. What may not have been covered very well is discussion about how your daily lives will be altered by becoming a family. For example, you will have less time to go out, or away for a day or two, without some extra thought and planning. Any new mother finds that everything seems to take twice as long when one feeding session ends it is almost time to begin again.

You will find, too, that in the early weeks you may become very tired as a result of broken nights and early morning feeds. New mothers who have worked until just before the birth often find in the weeks that follow, they miss the daily company and conversation of other adults. Partners, returning from work, find they come home to a more chaotic household.

Most new parents face these problems and each couple has to reassess their lifestyle and adapt accordingly.

A seed is sown

Your change in lifestyle offers an opportunity to think again about your Christian faith. Often people don't bother so much about the practice of their faith when they leave home and get married. It may be that they didn't like the set-up in their local parish. They may have had some disagreement or, they may have just let their faith slip. For such Christians the birth of a baby and the question of baptism provide a focus for a new beginning.

When your baby comes home for the first time after birth he or she will begin to take on your own characteristics and personality. Your baby will become like you. That's why your attitudes and ideas are so important. And it is also why the priest or deacon, during the baptismal service, asks about your intentions as parents and whether you intend to help your child to grow in the Christian life.

If you were asked to give your outstanding memories of childhood, the chances are that you would recall the things you and your family did, rather than any special gifts or possessions. It is the family traditions that stand out in our memories: the visit to granny, the Sunday lunch, the weekly jobs in the house given to us by our parents. These are the memories that endure.

Whether your memories and experiences of childhood are good or bad, you will recognise by now their great influence on the way you think, your expectations and your own ideas of what is an ideal family life.



The arrival of your own child has brought you to a crossroads. Until now, other people – your parents, in-laws and friends – have shared their family customs with you. Now you have to begin to lay the foundations of your own family traditions. You find yourself moving over from the passenger's seat to the driver's seat.

Creating your family

This takes time. Firstly, it means taking time with your partner. You may have painful and unhappy memories of childhood. Time spent with one another can heal these tensions and lead to a tangible re-birth: a re-birth to the experience of loving and being loved. And the climax of your lovemaking is sexual intercourse. This is the moment when you share in God's lovemaking and may even be collaborators with God in bringing about new human life. If so, it is no exaggeration to say that you will have become partners in God's creative Spirit in the world. Bringing up a child also takes time. A lot of time! Take a small child for a walk, for example, and you will

find it will take you twice as long as usual because he or she spots the tiny ant, the hidden soft moss, and the rich variety of textures and colours of walls and stones. Your child will embarrass you by saying "Hello" to a stranger or an unfriendly looking business person, and you will be amazed how often the person approached responds with a smile.

Wasting time with God

It is this appreciation of life and the world around him or her that is so important when we come to teach our child to pray. Prayer has been described as "wasting time with God". But it is time well spent; for in coming closer to God we draw closer, to one another.

It is as dangerous to make family prayer a lengthy, heavy affair as it is to neglect it altogether. A suitable method is to encourage children at an evening gathering to say a little prayer of their own about anything or anybody they choose. It may be for the goldfish to get better, for their friend's mother who is ill, or some other matter which concerns them.

Any adult present may want to say a prayer in the same way. We suggest that their prayer emphasise thanksgiving or a wider petition, showing by example the way we talk to God about our life and the world about us. These individual prayers can then be concluded with a couple of the best-known prayers – especially the Lord's Prayer.

Your baby's baptism is an opportunity to enhance or even rekindle your family's faith in the eternal life promised by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There will never be another family quite the same as yours, with all its strengths and weaknesses. Take time for yourselves and your faith; for each is irreplaceable.

Questions people ask

"Why does the Church insist on the baptism of babies?"

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until the child can make up its own mind?"

These are questions that are sometimes asked. And they make sense in a certain way, except that they ignore your desire to share with your child all that you have which is good and enriching in life. Your faith is such a gift.

The Church has always baptised children soon after they are born as a sign of God's love. Some of the oldest baptisteries contained a second, much smaller, font beside the main one. This was used by children who were too small to stand comfortably in the main font, which in those earliest days of the Church was a deep pool built into the floor.

Baptising a baby, before the baby can make the slightest effort to do anything for his or her own salvation, says very dramatically that all salvation is from God. Clearly, in an adult there must already be an element of faith – some sign of accepting God's love. But an infant is carried to the font by the faith of the family.

"My husband's family are not Catholics but he would very much like his sister to be godmother to our baby son. Is this allowed?"

Godparents go back to the days when most adult converts to the Christian faith had no Christian parents. Godparents spoke up for the baptised person and, if necessary, helped him or her to grow in the faith. Today, in the vast majority of infant baptisms, these tasks belong primarily to the parents.

The Church insists that at least one godparent is a Catholic whose primary role remains that of supporting the parents in bringing up the child in the Christian faith. Most parents choose two. When this happens, provided one godparent is a Catholic, it is certainly allowable for someone who is not a Catholic to act as a witness to the baptism. It remains important, however, that your sister-in-law is baptised, confirmed, aged 16 or over and of sufficient maturity to appreciate her role.

"Why does the Church insist on the baptism of babies?"

"How much does a baptism cost in the Catholic Church?"

Nothing. There is no charge for a baptism or any other church service. It is customary, however, for an offering to be made to help meet parish expenses. This is at the discretion of the family although a parish might suggest what the usual offering is in the local area. But if you cannot afford any offering don't be anxious. Just explain the situation to the priest.

"How soon should I have my baby baptised?"

The Church encourages Catholic families to have their children baptised as soon as possible after birth. This is because of Christ's teaching on the fundamental importance of baptism. If there is any danger of death the baby must be baptised immediately. In such emergencies anyone can baptise. You pour water over the head of the baby, at the same time saying the words: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The baptism will usually take place once the mother has recovered from the birth and after (both) parents have been suitably prepared. If you have experienced some difficulties with the practice of your faith it may be helpful to allow a little longer in order to clarify your own beliefs and to rebuild a life of faith within your family.

"My mother says I have to give my baby girl the name of a saint but I don't agree. Who is right?"

In the first few centuries of the Church the custom was to change one's name at baptism to express some Christian idea, such as Irene (peace). In succeeding centuries the Church advised parents to call their children after a saint. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "In Baptism, the Christian receives his name in the Church. Parents, godparents and the pastor are to see that he or she be given a Christian name. The patron saint provides a model of charity and the assurance of his or her prayer" (paragraph 2165). Additionally, a baby may be named after a Christian Mystery – for example, "Trinity" – or a Christian virtue – for example, "Faith".

"My friend's baby was stillborn. What will happen to the baby?"

Your friend's baby is entrusted to the mysterious but infinitely kind and powerful love of God. If anyone has any doubts about such love then look at the crucifix. The cross proves that God's love is greater than any human mind can understand or follow.

Jesus told us that "unless a person is born through water and the Spirit, he or she cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). At times in the past this has led some people to suggest that unbaptised infants pass into a state of limbo – where the baby is excluded from both heaven and hell. This is not, and never has been, the official teaching of the Catholic Church. It is clear that many who are not baptised – for example, the saints of the Old Testament – receive God's Spirit and so are welcomed into the kingdom of God. God's life is shared with us in various ways – of which baptism is the most important sign.

"My partner isn't a Christian and feels very self-conscious and anxious about the ceremony and what we have to do as parents during the baptism. Will there be a practice beforehand?"

Your partner's anxiety is perfectly understandable. Even people who attend church services regularly can feel nervous and shy about taking a central part in an important ceremony such as their child's baptism. However, there is no need to be worried. The priest or deacon taking the service will guide you through it step by step and indicate exactly what part you play as parents. During the preparation for the baptism don't be shy about mentioning any

point or action which does worry either of you. It is important that the day of your baby's baptism doesn't become an ordeal but a family occasion to be enjoyed and celebrated by everyone present.

"My baby was baptised at birth because of illness. Can he be re-baptised in church?"

Baptism is a once-in-a-lifetime event. It means that we become a member of God's family; we become a Christian. We cannot become what we already are.

The baptism can't be repeated but it is desirable that you have a celebration in church and share in the prayers and blessings which are part of the baptismal ceremony. You may also wish to appoint godparents at the same time. Such a service is a lovely thanksgiving for the safety and well-being of your baby.

"I have not been to church for a number of years and my seven-year-old daughter has never been baptised. Could I have her baptised at the same time as our baby?"

Yes, but you will need to allow time for her preparation. She will need to be given some instruction about baptism so that she understands what is happening. You may well feel that you would also find some form of preparation helpful in order to clarify any points about the faith which have given you difficulties.

People sometimes wonder about how to approach a priest. After Sunday Mass is not always the best time as there are usually too many people around. Try to book a time convenient for both of you in order to meet in an atmosphere of quiet and peace.

"I'm a single parent. I want my baby baptised but I am anxious about the kind of reception I'll get."

You will be given a friendly welcome by the priest or parish representative who will be happy to arrange for the baptism of your baby. So don't worry at all. The Church will simply want to be assured, as with any other parent, of your own commitment to your child's Catholic upbringing.

"My wife goes to a different Christian church and would like her minister to take part in the baptism. Is this possible?"

Yes. Your wife's minister may share in the prayers and readings at your baby's baptism. Discuss it with your priest; he will be happy to explain what is customary.

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until the child can make up its own mind?"

A Prayer for Your Baby

Lord, thank you for all the blessings you have bestowed on our family. Most of all, thank you for this wonderful child who teaches us about the wonder of life and creation.

I have seen you in my child's eyes, in every little move and gesture.
I now understand better your love for each of us.

So today, Lord, I lift up my own child to you for your blessings and guidance. Stay with us all through the journey of life, protect us from all harm, and welcome each of us into the warmth of your embrace. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Act of Sorrow

O my God, I thank you for loving me. I am sorry for all my sins, for not loving others and not loving you. Help me to live like Jesus and not sin again.
Amen.

Morning Prayer

O my God, you love me, you're with me night and day. I want to love you always in all I do and say. I'll try to please you, Father.
Bless me through the day. Amen.

Night Prayer

God, our Father, I come to say thank you for your love today.
Thank you for my family and all the friends you give to me.
Guard me in the dark of night and in the morning send your light. Amen.

A Prayer for your family at baptism

Mary MacKillop, also known as St Mary of the Cross, helped families in many places around Australia and New Zealand by setting up schools where children were taught by the order that she founded, the Sisters of St Joseph.



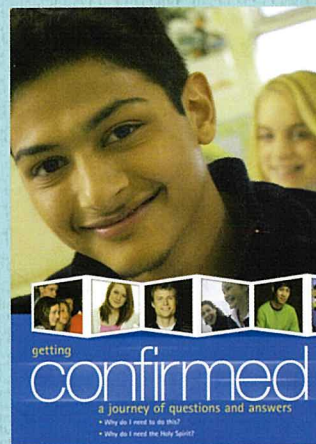
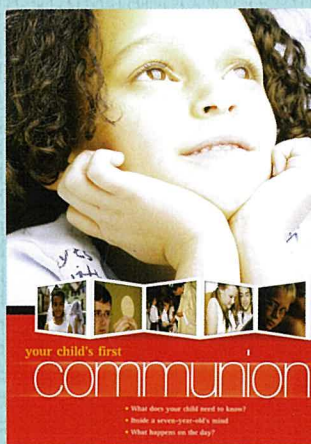
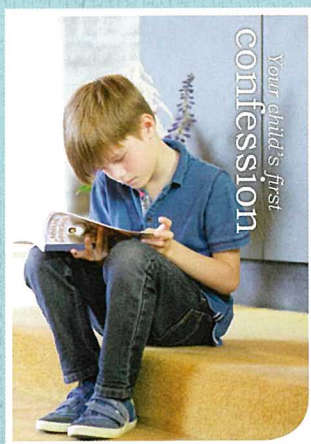
Generous, Loving God,
You raised up an Australian, Mary MacKillop
to inspire us in our times.
Both Flora and Alexander MacKillop, Scottish migrants,
contributed to the formation of their children in faith.
The family was not always a happy one.
At 16 years old, Mary was the sole provider
for the family of eight children.

Generous, Loving God
we learn from Mary MacKillop the value of solitude.
She regularly wrote letters to all the sisters,
throughout Australia and New Zealand.
Sitting in a garden she marvelled at the quiet
enabling her to "hear the singing of the birds
and the ticking of the clock."

Generous, Loving God,
may we share times of quiet
with our family, in parks and gardens,
near water; watching sunsets .
As the water is poured over the head of this child
may we acknowledge the beginning of a journey in faith.
Together we discover the beauty of the world and one another,
Leading us to our Creator, God.

Your Baby's Baptism offers a complete guide for families preparing for their baby's baptism. It answers the common questions asked by all wishing to have their child baptised in a Catholic church and gives an overview of the sacrament of baptism, helping the family to understand and fully participate on the special day.

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