

# Baptism for Older Children & Adults

By Sue Tait

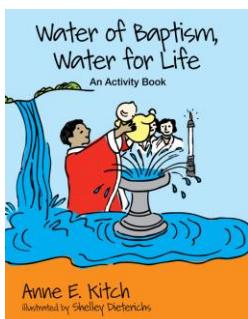
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**Question:** We have some older children preparing for baptism at Easter. What materials do you have for kids beyond the picture book stage, or materials that parents could read to begin a conversation?



**Sue says:** What a great question! And how exciting and challenging that you have candidates old enough to ask questions and make some decisions for themselves. Here are some resources that might interest you, and answer some of their questions.

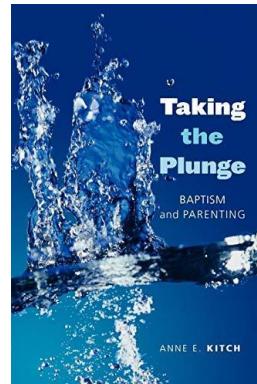


Probably you'll have a baptism class to explain the choreography of the event: where people stand, what people say and what questions are asked of the person seeking baptism, and also of the congregation that supports them, what the priest does. A very helpful book in that regard is by Anne E. Kitch, **Water of Baptism, Water for Life: An Activity Book** (j265.1 Kit). Noting that, "We live in a world where water is becoming a scarce and compromised resource," Kitch helps the reader to understand that water is essential both for our physical and spiritual lives, and water is the visible sign of the Holy

Baptism. Although the activities are useful for younger children, the topics could also be used with older children or adults.

The same author has written a book for parents in which she speaks wonderfully about one way to consider the why of baptism.

**Taking the Plunge: Baptism and Parenting** by Anne E. Kitch (248.8 Kit). For instance, she says in the introduction, "Baptism is a threshold experience. It's about moving through a doorway from one room to another, from one space to another, from one community to another. The baptismal service is the moment you stand on the threshold. But you don't stay there. Before baptism, people belong to the community of their family and are beloved of God. After baptism, they still belong to the community of their family – and God still loves them. But now they also belong to a larger community – a vast extended family known as the Church."

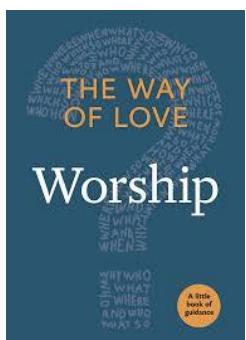


Each chapter contains a section called "Getting your feet wet", questions for individual contemplation or group discussion. Although these questions are probably intended for adults, with some adaptation they could be used with older children or youth. Family and belonging have powerful appeal to all ages.

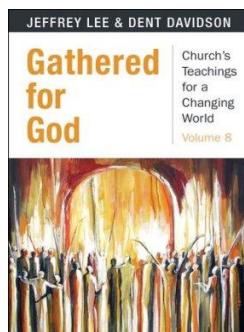
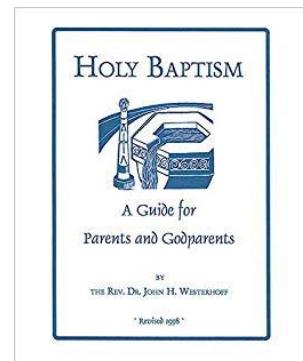


In **Journey into Baptism: A Guidebook** (264.1 Jou), the targeted audiences are adults, or parents/godparents/sponsors of people being presented for baptism. “Baptism happens once; the results will flow through your life.” The author says that we have the rest of our lives to unpack the words said at baptism; each of the baptismal promises are examined and there are questions for discussion, response and dialog.

**Holy Baptism: A Guide for Parents and Godparents** by John H. Westerhoff (265.1 Wes) notes that the Episcopal church requires baptismal preparation for older children and adults; this slim volume is intended to be a resource for such preparation as it looks at the role of parent and godparent. At 39 pages, it is a quick and thoughtful read, aimed at adults, and also suggesting additional books for adults who may go on to seek confirmation. I’ve been told that it is currently out of print, and while much of the material is included in books by Anne Kitch, do keep copies of this if you own them.



Adults might want to read up before discussing baptism with their children, or in preparation for baptism for themselves, both for some basic concepts and to remind themselves of the language to talk about such a huge mystery. Two small books might be helpful: **Gathered for God** by Jeffrey Lee and Dent Davidson (Small 265.03 Lee) and the chapter on baptism in **The Way of Love Worship** (CUR 269 Wor) might fill that bill.



Valerie Reinke has adapted the baptism lesson in the Godly Play materials for multiage groups. We’ve included that curriculum below.

All these resources regard baptism as a life changing beginning, not merely a Sunday morning event. “Baptism makes the baptized person a Christian; it tells us the truth about ourselves. But to become Christian, we need to spend the rest of our lives living into our baptism, becoming who we already are.”

Baptism is being adopted into the household of God. Baptism is not to be taken lightly at any age. The priest draws a cross on the baptisand’s head saying, “you are marked as Christ’s own forever.” What an amazing promise and act of inclusion. Christ’s own. Forever.

Borrow a copy of any of these books by e-mailing Sue: [resource@ecww.org](mailto:resource@ecww.org)

# Baptism – An Overview for Older Children

*A young teen is being baptized and the rector wants the older children to be there during the sacrament. This overview is a modification of the Godly Play curriculum for baptism and is designed to introduce/reinforce baptismal concepts for older children so they can witness with understanding. It is brief introduction – 15- 20 minutes – so after this briefing they can return to the sanctuary in time for the baptism.*

## You will need:

- Underlay – 3 white felt circles
- Water jug and larger bowl for font
- Christ candle and matches
- Fragrant oil
- Shell
- Bulletins for each child/Book of Common Prayer [show them where the baptism falls in the service and how they can follow along]

## Introduction

Today we will have a baptism and Father/Mother \_\_\_\_\_ would like you all there to witness it. You may know \_\_\_\_\_. S/he is \_\_\_\_\_ years old and s/he is the one being baptized today. Before we go into the sanctuary to support her/him, I thought we'd talk a little bit about the meaning of baptism...

## Wondering Questions

- What do you remember about your own baptism? If you were only a baby when it happened, have you been told any stories about what happened?
- I wonder why we baptize people?
- How do you think it will be different for \_\_\_\_\_ to be baptized as a young adult rather than as a baby?

## Casual Re-enactment!

Ask for a volunteer to be the one who is baptized

Ask for volunteers to be parents and godparents. What is the role of godparents?

As you place the three white felt circles on the table in a triangular shape one at a time, say:  
We baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## **Introduce the Symbols of Baptism:**

### **Hold up the water and say:**

“This is the water of creation, the water of the flood, the water Jesus was baptized in and so much more.” Place the water bowl and jug on one of the felt circles. “Today you will hear Father/Mother \_\_\_\_\_ bless the water. What does the water symbolize?” (Cleanliness, new life, being reborn, life giving, life sustaining, source of life, etc.!)

### **Light the Christ Candle and say:**

“Jesus said ‘I am the light’ and we light the Christ candle to remind us that Jesus is always with us.” Place the candle on the second felt circle. “What do you think the light symbolizes?” (Brightness, goodness, guidance, clarity, etc.!)

### **Hold up the little vial of oil and say:**

“The fragrant oil is for the anointing and it reminds us of the Holy Spirit, who is with us always.” Let everyone sniff the oil while you ask, “What do you think the oil symbolizes?” (special occasion, God’s protection, embalming, soothing, healing, etc.)

“So now that you understand some of the symbols of baptism, this is how it will happen:”

### **Put your hand on the shoulder of the one to be baptized and ask the ‘parents’:**

What is your child’s name? [Whatever name they come up with, within reason, go with it!]

### **Ask the parents and godparents:**

Will you be responsible for seeing that this child is nurtured in the Christian life of faith, hope and love?

**Ask the one to be baptized** [tell the kids that since it’s an older child, not a baby, Father/Mother \_\_\_\_\_ will ask him/her directly]: Do you want to be baptized?

### **Ask everyone in the room:**

Will you who witness these vows and do all in your power to support [name] in her new life in Christ? [They should respond: “We will!” – You may have to practice that a few times!]

*Ask the candidate to lean over the pitcher and bowl and PRETEND to pour the water over his/her head three times as you say:*

I baptize you [name] in the name of the Father, the Creator, and the Son, the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of all life. Amen.

*Then take the oil and mark the child’s forehead with the sign of the cross, saying:*

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.

*To everyone:*

Let us welcome the newly baptized! [Applause]

## Hands-On Bible

If there's time, look for the reference to Jesus' baptism – Mark 1:9-11.

- Pass out the Bibles.
- Start in the Table of Contents. “Will the story about Jesus’ baptism be in the Old or New Testament? How do you know this?” [Something to the effect that the Old Testament is stories before Jesus was born; the New Testament is made up of the stories of his life and after.]
- “So let’s go to the Book of Mark in the New Testament. What page does the book of Mark start on? [p. 975] Turn to that page.” [wait for everyone!]
- “I’m looking for the first chapter and verses 9 – 11 – see those tiny numbers in the text?”
- “Would anyone like to read verses 9 – 11?”

Mark 1:9-11  
New Living Translation (NLT)

## The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

<sup>9</sup>One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. <sup>10</sup>As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”