

Protecting children

In keeping with the attitude and actions of Jesus, the church welcomes children and takes seriously His invitation, *'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me'* (Matthew 18:5). To receive a child in his name, is to do honour to Jesus and to receive His grace through the child; how we treat children is a sign of our true devotion to Jesus. Jesus' invitation is immediately accompanied by the warning, *'If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in my name, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea'* (Matthew 18:6).

To damage a child is a very grievous action and not to be tolerated. A child is in the process of formation and to distort this is to leave a trail of damage that will last into adulthood and produce great unhappiness. Knaphill Baptist Church therefore tries its best to be a place where children are safe from harm, welcomed, supported, guided and loved in a secure and wholesome environment.

We are helped in achieving this by implementing policies developed by the Baptist Union of Great Britain (called Safe To Grow). These processes include ensuring that children are only ever in the care of adults who are fully aware of their responsibilities and have a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), Disclosure or other relevant legal clearance.

(leaflet adapted from the BUGB publication 'Children in the Church' © 2009).

For further information on thanksgiving, dedication or baptismal services, or any other issue, please contact the church or the Rev'd Richard Sherlock and we would only be too happy to help.

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Thanksgiving for a child



A bit of background

In the Bible, children are regarded as a blessing from God. God gave the command in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve, *'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'* (Genesis 1 :28). Children were seen as a gift and a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5) and daughters gave birth to and nurtured the next generation (Psalm 1:8 and Ruth 4:11-12 for example).

It was the duty of parents to pass on their faith and its ways to the next generation, and this was done by a process of story-telling and instruction (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Children were regarded in Israel as belonging to the covenant people by virtue of their birth into the nation. In the New Testament, the promise of salvation is clearly understood to be inclusive of all nations and people, not just Israel. It is *'for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him'* (Acts 2:39). The church is therefore open to all people, young and old, and the benefits of God's salvation are offered to all, not least to children.

Welcoming children

Baptist churches welcome children into the community by means of special services known as 'thanksgiving' or 'dedication' services. The latter is where the church and the parents dedicate themselves to help bring up the child in a safe and nurturing environment before God, whereas the former recognises the wonder of the gift of children and is an opportunity to give thanks to God.

The presentation of children is based on the story of Jesus where He said *"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."* And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).

Infant presentation does not claim to make the child a Christian. But the service celebrates the fact that children belong within and are embraced by a wider community. It provides an opportunity to publicly express something of the wonder and mystery of the birth of a child and to give thanks.



Knaphill Baptist Church is sensitive to the varying circumstances in which people come, whether as single parents, cohabiting couples, or those of, as yet, uncertain faith. We are more than willing to adapt it so that it fits your particular situation in the belief that the child's welfare and blessing before God is the most important thing. We will also ensure that no-one is asked to make promises that they are unable or unwilling to fulfil.

Why not Baptism?



Infant baptism is sometimes justified on the basis that the children should be brought to Jesus for baptism and not hindered, as in Mark 10:13-16. But when the children were brought on this occasion Jesus did not baptise them, but blessed them, and this was enough.

We believe that only the individual can make the decision to become a disciple of Jesus for themselves, and the New Testament teaches that we do not become members of God's people through birth but through new birth (John 3:3). The occasion for baptism should not therefore be when we are born but when we are born again as believers in Christ and choose to follow Him and own His name.

However, it is a real privilege for children to be in the Christian community: the community has the blessing of young lives growing in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52) and children have the benefit of being surrounded by a worshipping community, hearing of Christ and being in an atmosphere of faith and encouragement.