



On the way

with Jesus

A handout for the baptism of children  
in the Catholic Church of Heidelberg

# Catholic Church in Heidelberg: Stadtkirche Heidelberg

Since 2015, the 12 parishes in Heidelberg and Eppelheim form a single large pastoral unit, the “Stadtkirche Heidelberg“. Although this is a much larger framework the parish council, in which all the parishes are represented, and the team of priests and professionals understand the Stadtkirche as an opportunity for better and more intensive cooperation between full-time and voluntary workers, to fulfill our Christian vocation based on baptism and confirmation. Mutual trust and the willingness to be on the way together are central pillars of this.

The guiding motive for our activities is to experience the city as a place to sense God’s presence and to shape a new togetherness as a church. Being the Catholic Church in this urban context means we enter into a dialogue with all those who live and work in Heidelberg and Eppelheim. Based on our faith we seek answers to people’s questions and offer ourselves as partners in the conversation, open for anyone who is socialized in the church as well as for those who see themselves as far away from the church.

In the Stadtkirche there are various teams in which priests, deacons, community leaders, and pastoral workers cooperate on different topics. The **“Thematic Team Baptism Catechesis”** coordinates the celebration of Baptism in the single parishes.

The team has prepared this booklet for the baptism of infants and young children. We intend to help parents and godparents to prepare for the admission of their child to the church. In conversation with lay catechists and the priest or deacon, the celebration of your **child’s** baptism will thus be lively and appealing.

We welcome you and your children in the Heidelberg City Church!

# Baptism - a story of relationship

At the beginning there is always a story. – A story of relationship: Between John and Jesus. Between Jesus and his father. Between Jesus and those who follow him as well as those who want to follow him in the future. A story between Jesus and me, between God and me. That is why baptism is primarily a matter of relationship. I say yes to myself and yes to God. Celebrating the baptism of a child, the parents say yes on behalf of their child.

## The story of a new beginning

Jesus wishes to be baptized – and he lets John baptize him. This changes his path. Probably after years working as an artisan, he leads his steps in a new direction. In the desert, he recognizes his calling. Something new begins.

Baptism is a sacrament of initiation:

- Something new begins.
- I confess Jesus.
- New standards apply to my life. Following the message of Jesus, I learn to see with new eyes.
- He opens my eyes to the tenderness of God and the wonders of life.

## The story of the successors

It is the story of those who set out to give shape to the message of Jesus in their own lives – and who offer their new experiences to others. “Every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved, and many were **baptized,**” reports the bible. With my baptism I become a member of this community, I am part of it.

## The story of life defeating death

No longer is death the lot, but life, and forever. This is Jesus’ message to his disciples, his message to us: life overcomes death. Moreover, this is more than a message because it is already happening here and now. Death is not the end, but life in fullness awaits us. This is the initiation of a new reality, not starting after our death, but now. The kingdom of God breaks forth within me when I decide to do so.

## Baptism – a decisive step

For you as parents, it is natural that you teach your child to eat, speak and walk. Your child needs you for this in the first years of his or her life – no question about that. Besides these basic human needs there is more required to fulfill a child's everyday life.



A child must also learn to believe. To enable a young person to decide consciously for the Christian faith, it is important to make him or her familiar with it from childhood on. If you introduce your child to the faith, give him or her a feeling for God, show him or her a way how to live, then you do not take anything out of your child's hands. For one thing is certain: the person who is still so dependent on advice and help will eventually find his or her own independent way.

Baptism is therefore a decisive step – and yet one that does not make a final decision. A path begins – and with baptism, you are quite consciously giving your child a direction.

This is a beginning, so to speak, the departure on a path that your child will take more and more into its own hands over the years. Christian life will not develop by itself; it needs the will to get involved in it every day. Young people should expressly affirm this later, when they (still as children) go to First Communion, or when they (already as teenagers) receive the sacrament of Confirmation.

# Companions on the path of faith

When small children are baptized, parents and godparents have a special responsibility. They should support and complement each other in order to open up faith as a dimension of life for their child, in addition to everyday skills and abilities.

## The parents

are the first “teachers of faith“ - by helping their child to interpret and understand his or her life. It is not always about pious words or prayer and worship. Even the basic attitude towards life, our environment, our fellow human beings can be shaped by faith. In dealing with each other, in gestures and attitudes, and also in many answers that you give your child, he or she can make first experiences of faith.

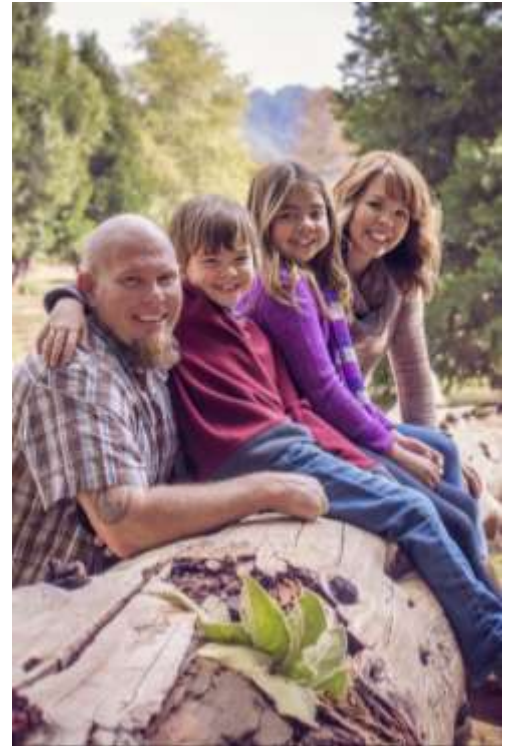
## The godparents

in the early church were members of the Christian community, who introduced adults to the church and accompanied them in their life of faith. Today godparenthood usually looks different. They are supposed to support the parents, and later on be a friend and companion for their godchild.

The requirement for baptism is that at least one godparent is available; in our country it is customary to appoint two people to this office. At least one of them should be baptized and confirmed in the Catholic Church. Questions about this can be clarified in conversation with the baptismal officiant.

## The Christian community

will also accompany a child after the baptism. Christianity is based on communion, and with baptism a person is accepted into the people of God, into the community of the church. Thus, the congregation will also play a role in accompanying a child on its journey after baptism. Through church services and celebrations, through kindergarten and religious instruction, through groups and events, the church offers many opportunities to get to know and practice the faith.



## Baptism as a sacrament – as a **“sign of salvation”**

A sacrament is an outer, visible sign of an inner, invisible effect. In the celebration of the sacraments people testify to their faith and at the same time God becomes tangible for people. The sacraments make visible and audible God’s promise of salvation: people encounter the love of God and receive a gift from God.

Baptism is the first of the sacraments and establishes a life-long covenant between man and God. God promises us his nearness and blessing, and we humans promise to orient ourselves to God’s word.

The symbols of the baptismal celebration make this mystery visible and evident. We would like to familiarize you with these signs. Perhaps you will find an idea of how you would like to emphasize and design one or more of them in your baptismal celebration in a very personal way.



### The sign of the cross

The best-known characteristic of Christians and at the same time a summary of their faith is the cross, the confession of the Father, Son and Spirit. For this reason the priest or deacon draws a cross on the forehead of the child, and after that parents and godparents are also invited to do so. The sign of the cross reminds us that a child is under God’s protection and belongs to Jesus Christ. Later on, the cross can be a blessing sign from the parents, for example, when the child goes to sleep or when he or she leaves the house.

## Imposition of hands



The imposition of hands is a sign of protection that does not need much explanation. God has given this new life in our hands and in our care, and he holds his hand over the child. You as parents are responsible for the child, but you cannot be at hand at all times. How good that you can trust in the protection of God. Jesus also laid his hands on children. He shall protect your child from all that is inhuman and evil.

## Pouring water over the head

Water is open to many interpretations: cleaning, refreshing, cooling, revitalizing, quenching thirst. We also know water in a negative context, such as floods or a torrential river. Both come together in the symbolism of baptism: Water that takes life, water that gives life.

In the past, this was shown very clearly by submerging adults with their whole body to baptize them. This happened to illustrate the relationship with Jesus, who died and rose again. The submersion as a symbol of the “dying of the old man” (as the apostle Paul says), and the emersion as a symbol of gaining new life from the water.

In the life of your child, there will be many ups and downs to overcome. We express through the baptism with water that Jesus goes through these ups and downs. He will not abandon us. During baptism, the priest or deacon addresses the person to be baptized by name: “..., I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”





### Anointment with Chrism

Chrism is a mixture of olive oil and balsam. The original Greek word means “anointing oil”; from this word is also derived Jesus’ name of honour “Christ“, which means “the anointed“. In former times, kings and prophets were anointed with oil to show that they had a divine mission. Today the anointing as a fixed element belongs to baptism, confirmation and priestly ordination, to show that a person is taken into the priestly, royal people of God (e.g. it is written in the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Peter).

### Putting on the christening gown

The custom of the christening gown originates from the baptism of adults in the early church: the newly baptized put on a new white dress, which they wore in prayers and services during the following week. In the Epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul writes: “All of you are now adult daughters and sons of God. For when you were **baptized into Christ, you put on Christ like a garment.**” He who is baptized bears Jesus Christ on himself, has put him on like a garment.





### Lighting the baptismal candle

For Christians, Jesus is the light of the world. The light of the candle symbolizes this and is lit from the Easter candle. With it, parents and godparents express that they want to receive the light of Jesus for their child. Through their example the parents make it clear to the child how God can bring light into life. At the same time, they express the wish that Jesus, the light, will always brightly illuminate the path of their child's life.

### God's blessing

The blessing at the end of the baptismal celebration reminds us that we can trust in God's guidance and power when accompanying a newly baptized child. The blessing is spoken, and at the same time given with the hand in the form of the cross, or with hands spread out. In this way, the "hands of God" are symbolized, promising to give us support and protection. As Christians, we are not alone. God accompanies us through life with his blessing, and he will strengthen us.



# The ceremony of christening

Baptism can be celebrated in a separate ceremony. For your orientation you will find a scheme for the procedure here – as a “skeleton” so to speak. **With the priest or deacon you decide how the individual points will be designed.** If the baptism is celebrated in a service of the community, it will be embedded in the celebration so that the individual elements will appear differently.



## Opening

- Questions about readiness of parents and godparents
- Sign of the cross
- Prayer

## Scripture reading and address

## Prayer for the child

- Invocation of the saints
- Intercessions

## Preparation for the baptism

- Blessing of the water
- Questions of faith
- Confession of Faith

## Christening

## Interpreting signs

- Anointing with Chrism
- Putting on the baptism gown
- Lighting the baptismal candle

## Our Father and blessing

## Questions to parents and godparents

Twice in the ceremony parents and godparents will be asked for a personal answer:

- At the beginning you will be asked about your willingness to take responsibility for your child and for his or her way to an own faith.
- Directly before the baptism you will be asked about the faith that should also shape your life, so that you can pass this on to your child or godchild.

Celebrant Do you reject sin and all bad influence in our world  
so as to live in the **freedom of God's children?**

Parents and godparents I do.

Celebrant Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

Parents and godparents I do.

Celebrant Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,  
our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary,  
was crucified, died, and was buried,  
rose from the dead, and is now seated at the  
right hand of the Father?

Parents and godparents I do.

Celebrant Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the one christian Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the dead,  
and life everlasting?

Parents and godparents I do.

Celebrant This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church.  
We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Afterwards, all express their Christian faith through the common profession of faith.

## Scripture reading

Part of the ceremony will be a reading of Scripture. It makes sense that this should be a text that also has a substantive reference to baptism. Perhaps you yourself know a text in the Bible that has become important for your personal faith. You are invited to look for a text that appeals to you.

## Intercessions

In the baptismal celebration we present our concerns to God. Our prayer need not be verbose or particularly polished, because "your Father knows that you need this" (Lk 12:30). You will find many examples on the Internet. You, the godparents, or other relatives are most welcome to formulate even more beautiful and appropriate intercessions in your own words.

## Baptismal verse

It is a good custom to give a child a baptismal verse, a kind of motto. When parents choose a verse for their child, they give him or her a word to take along on the way, which can serve as a guide again and again. On a saying card, on the baptismal candle, on a baptismal certificate, this word can then **also be "before your eyes" again and again.**

If you search the Internet for baptismal verses, you will find countless suggestions, including aids to making a suitable selection.

## Other texts

During the course of the baptismal celebration there are many opportunities to express what moves us with proverbs, stories or other texts. There is no fixed place for such texts – but together with the priest or deacon you can consider whether and how to recite a text during the baptismal ceremony.

## Music

Music can give the celebration a solemn, contemplative, calm, cheerful, romantic or hopeful accent. When people sing together, community develops and grows. Perhaps someone would like to help shape the celebration with instrumental music.

The conception of the preparation for baptism in the Stadtkirche Heidelberg and the compilation of this booklet were developed by the Team Baptismal Catechesis:

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