

### **Baptism and the Christian community**

Sacraments can only be spoken of in relational terms. The new sacramental rites repeatedly speak of how the sacraments effect a deeper “relationship” or greater “conformity” with Christ and with the Church. Baptism happens not only to the individual, but also to Christ’s body, the Church. That’s why the rite insists that we celebrate Baptism in the Christian assembly, with the community present and actively participating. It is the community, after all, who is welcoming the new members, journeying with them, providing models for them, supporting and nourishing them. Baptism begins with God’s love and care revealed to us through Christ. It continues with us, the Church, living and enacting God’s love and care through Christ to the world. That’s a serious commitment.

### **Seven Practical Tips As You Prepare for Your Child’s Baptism**

1. If your parish has a program to help prepare parents for the Baptism of their child, participate in the program early in the pregnancy.
2. If not, contact the parish three or four months before the child’s birth. Ask for a copy of the Baptism ceremony and prayerfully study its rich symbols and prayers.
3. Choose godparents who will be a real and long-lasting help in the Christian formation of your child. It would be helpful if they could participate in the Baptism preparation with you. They are meant to be more than “honorary” sponsors.
4. Track down the family christening dress. And consider making or decorating the white baptismal garment used near the end of the ritual. You might also decorate the baptismal candle with baptismal symbols, using acrylic paints or nail polish. If there are other children in the family, they can help.
5. You might write a “Parents’ Prayer” or “Parents’ Wish” that includes your hopes and dreams for this new child. Check with the priest or parish leaders to see if there may be a time during or before the ceremony when you can pray or read it aloud. Or present it at a party afterwards.
6. Make the ceremony a community event. Invite relatives, friends and neighbors to participate in the Baptism liturgy. Some could serve as Scripture readers or musicians.
7. Keep the white garment, the candle, the prayers, photos and other symbols of the baptismal ceremony to share with your child in future years. These keepsakes can be brought out on the child’s anniversary of Baptism or birthday and serve as powerful reminders of the ongoing importance of the event.

*In the light of eternity, we’re here for a very short time, really. We’re here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley*

Sincerely,  
Fr. Jim Kaptein