

Meet and Greet



Families with small children typically arrive harried, their minds on many practical details of parenting. They are also often in awe, living in amazement of the small life with which they have been entrusted. As a result, you do well to attend to practical details at the beginning of the session that can help the family participate more smoothly and comfortably.

As needed, address these practical matters: a place to store car seat and diaper bag; opportunity to nurse, warm bottles, change diapers, and use bathrooms. Be gracious and remind the family they can take a break to address family needs as they arise, and consider moving around to different places in the church during the session; hold or rock the baby yourself if it is appropriate and you are comfortable doing so.

Begin by celebrating the gift of new life. Ask the family questions about the baby if you have not already done so: name, weight, length, stories about the choice of name, recovery from pregnancy, room decorating, etc.

After this initial conversation, pray, breathe, and ask if the family has come with any special questions or concerns. Then dive immediately into the session itself. Time is precious, so make the most of it.

Discover: Liturgy as Formation



How does the baptismal liturgy juxtapose with the larger context of the worship and prayer life of the congregation? Some families bring children for baptism remembering (or even requesting) private baptisms separated from the regular worship of the congregation. It is good to keep in mind that “the sacrament itself normally takes place in the midst of the worshiping assembly as a sign that in baptism we are made one with Christ and with the whole people of God” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 225; see also *The Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 21).

Not only does the sacrament normally take place in the midst of the worshiping assembly, but it is often encouraged to take place on those days when baptism connects most strongly to the church year. Consider encouraging families to schedule the baptism of their child at the Baptism of Our Lord, Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, or All Saints Day, in order to amplify baptism’s connection to those aspects of the story of salvation. But keep in mind that the family may be trying to schedule the baptism on a day when most of their family, sponsors, and friends are able to be present.

Finally, consider when the baptism will take place in the worship service. In some congregations, baptism follows the hymn of the day. In other congregations, baptism takes place within the gathering rite, where it takes the place of thanksgiving for baptism or confession and forgiveness. Both practices provide an opportunity to instruct regarding

If the child to be baptized or other accompanying children are old enough to participate in the session in some way, see pages 51-58, 70-72, and 106-108 for suggestions and resources.

Supplies

- Copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*
- A lectionary calendar for personal reference
- Luther’s Small Catechism

For more on baptism and the church year, see *The Christian Life* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008), pp. 52-55.

the role and function of baptism within the overall service. **At the beginning of worship, baptism invites the entire assembly to remember their baptism, to welcome the newest brother or sister in Christ into the assembly, and to make their promises before God, all of which are appropriate reminders of how to begin Christian worship.** If this is the practice, worship continues with the greeting.

If the baptism follows the hymn of the day, it can signify baptism's intimate connection to hearing and believing the word of God. The baptism is a response to the word, an affirmation of faith, as the creed's placement within the service attests. Baptism at this point offers the chance to celebrate the specific baptism, and then it gathers the assembly in a broader perspective, praying the prayers of intercession. Prayers for the newly baptized are included in the prayers of intercession.

1. Presentation (and Promises)

Focus text: The Holy Spirit calls and invites us to receive God's grace. Sponsors present those to be baptized, and we promise our support.

The pastor begins the liturgy of Holy Baptism by speaking what is, in effect, the thesis statement, or introduction, of the whole liturgy. It packs the whole of baptism into very few words. Open *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* to page 227, and walk slowly through the second introduction as if it were a poem, scrutinizing each clause, word, and phrase.

In baptism . . . We name the holy sacrament we are engaging in.
our gracious heavenly Father . . . We name the kind of God who acts.
frees us from sin and death . . . We declare what this God does.
by joining us . . . We point to the one who accomplishes this freedom for us.
to the death and resurrection . . . We confess participation in Christ's life.
of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . We name the Son of God, who is our new life.
We are born children of a fallen humanity; . . . We confess our current bondage.
by water and the Holy Spirit . . . We name the one who comes to free us.
we are reborn children of God . . . We declare the new people we are through baptism.
and made members of the church, . . . We name the community we join.
the body of Christ. . . . We remember this community is Christ's body.
Living with Christ . . . We are Christ's body, but he also lives with us as brother.
and in the communion of saints, . . . We remember the many others also baptized.
we grow . . . Baptism is once, remembered again and again, more and more.
in faith, . . . It gives faith.
love, . . . It shapes us in love.
and obedience . . . It is a new way of life.
to the will of God. . . . And we end as we began, with God.

Following the introduction, parents and sponsors are asked questions. It is good to be very clear and direct in reminding parents and sponsors of the obligations they take on at the baptism of their child. They are being entrusted with sacred responsibilities. Glossing over this or lessening it is inappropriate to the gravity of the sacrament.