

Dear Parent or Godparent,

May God's gracious love for you and for the child you bring to baptism guide, sustain, and bless you.

You are embarking on a journey of faith, responsible not only for your own spiritual wellbeing, but for your child's or godchild's spiritual nurture now as well. This journal is designed to help you prepare for the baptism—and beyond. Part of the preparation is self-examination, a chance to think about your own religious background, your spiritual journey, your current beliefs, dreams, hopes and fears. Another part of the preparation focuses specifically on the child.

The final part of the journal looks beyond baptism, asking you to consider ways of helping your child or godchild live into the baptismal vows you will make on his or her behalf.

You may be asked to look at certain parts of the journal before meeting with the clergy or layperson who will oversee the final preparation and/or follow-up for the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Read through the passages and questions, even if you don't have time to answer them all. It may be that you will feel called to respond in depth—or it may be that you will come back and answer some questions six months or even a year later.

If this is the second or more time you have brought a child to be baptized, you may find that you are called to different questions, and that your answers change as the family grows or the number of godchildren increases. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you in your interaction with this journal.

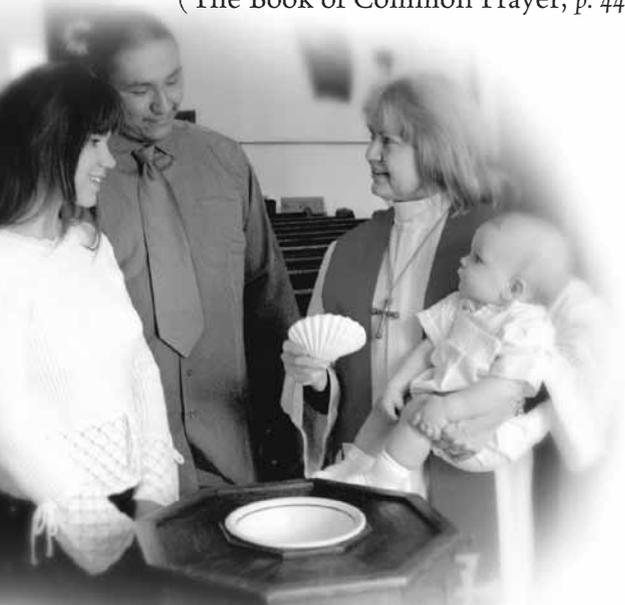
Take seriously the vows you will make, and be intentional in honoring them through involving your child or godchild

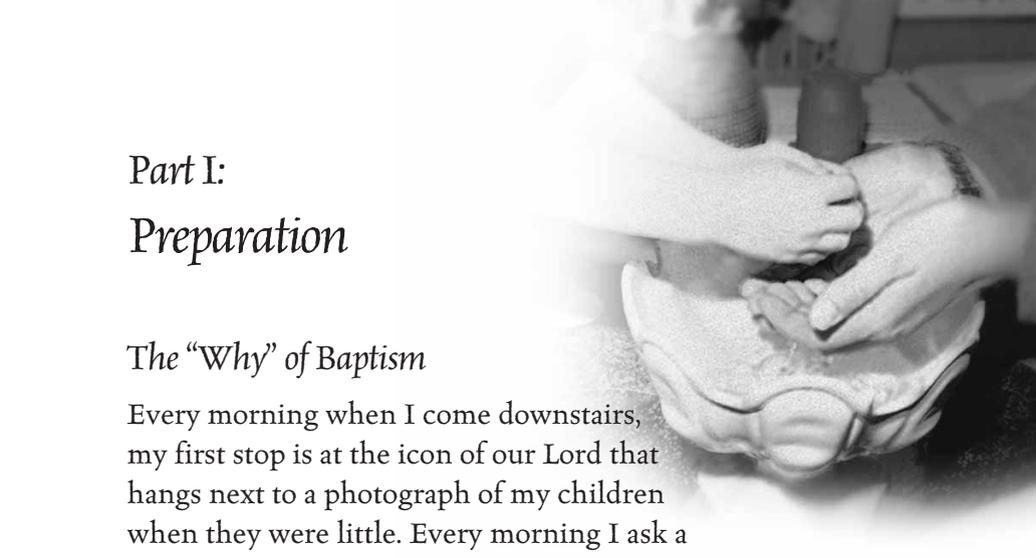
in a life of prayer and communal worship. One of the gifts of baptism is that it brings the child into the wider church family. Never feel that you are in the business of parenting or godparenting alone.

Use this journal as a way of acknowledging and deepening your own spirituality, and as a resource for helping your child or godchild develop a deeply grounded spiritual life as a beloved child of God.

O God, you have taught us through your blessed Son that whoever receives a little child in the name of Christ receives Christ himself: We give you thanks for the blessing you have bestowed upon this family in giving them a child. Confirm their joy by a lively sense of your presence with them, and give them calm strength and patient wisdom as they seek to bring this child to love all that is true and noble, just and pure, lovable and gracious, excellent and admirable, following the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
(The Book of Common Prayer, p. 443)

Mary Lee Wile
August 15, 2002





Part I:

Preparation

The “Why” of Baptism

Every morning when I come downstairs, my first stop is at the icon of our Lord that hangs next to a photograph of my children when they were little. Every morning I ask a blessing, and then I close my prayers by making the sign of the cross on my children’s foreheads, repeating words from the baptismal service: “you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.” Although my children are grown and gone now into the fullness of their own lives, they remain not only my children, but God’s. In this troubling and uncertain world, their eternal adoption into God’s family through the waters of baptism matters deeply. As the apostle Paul reminded the Romans, “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” My morning ritual reminds me that my children are held in the heart of God, incorporated into the Body of Christ, and that nothing—not even death—can separate them from the love of God.

You hold this journal in your hands because you have begun the process of preparing for your child’s or godchild’s baptism. You have said “yes” to the promptings of your own heart and perhaps to the encouragement of friends or relatives. Baptism used to be a societal norm, something that was automatically “done” to a child. In the early years of this new mil-



lennium, however, saying yes to baptism is a different, deeper choice.

Spend some time pondering what led you to seek Holy Baptism for your child, or, if you are to be a godparent, what led you to accept that role:

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Priest and professor John Westerhoff writes that, “It is God who is the prior actor in baptism, an action to which we can only respond.” In other words, according to Westerhoff, no matter what other reasons you might name, one reason that you have engaged in this preparatory process is that God invited you and, on behalf of the child, you said yes. With that thought in mind, what stand out as specific moments or significant events in which you sensed God’s presence or God’s action in your life, moving you toward this place in your jour-

ney, this choice for your child or godchild?

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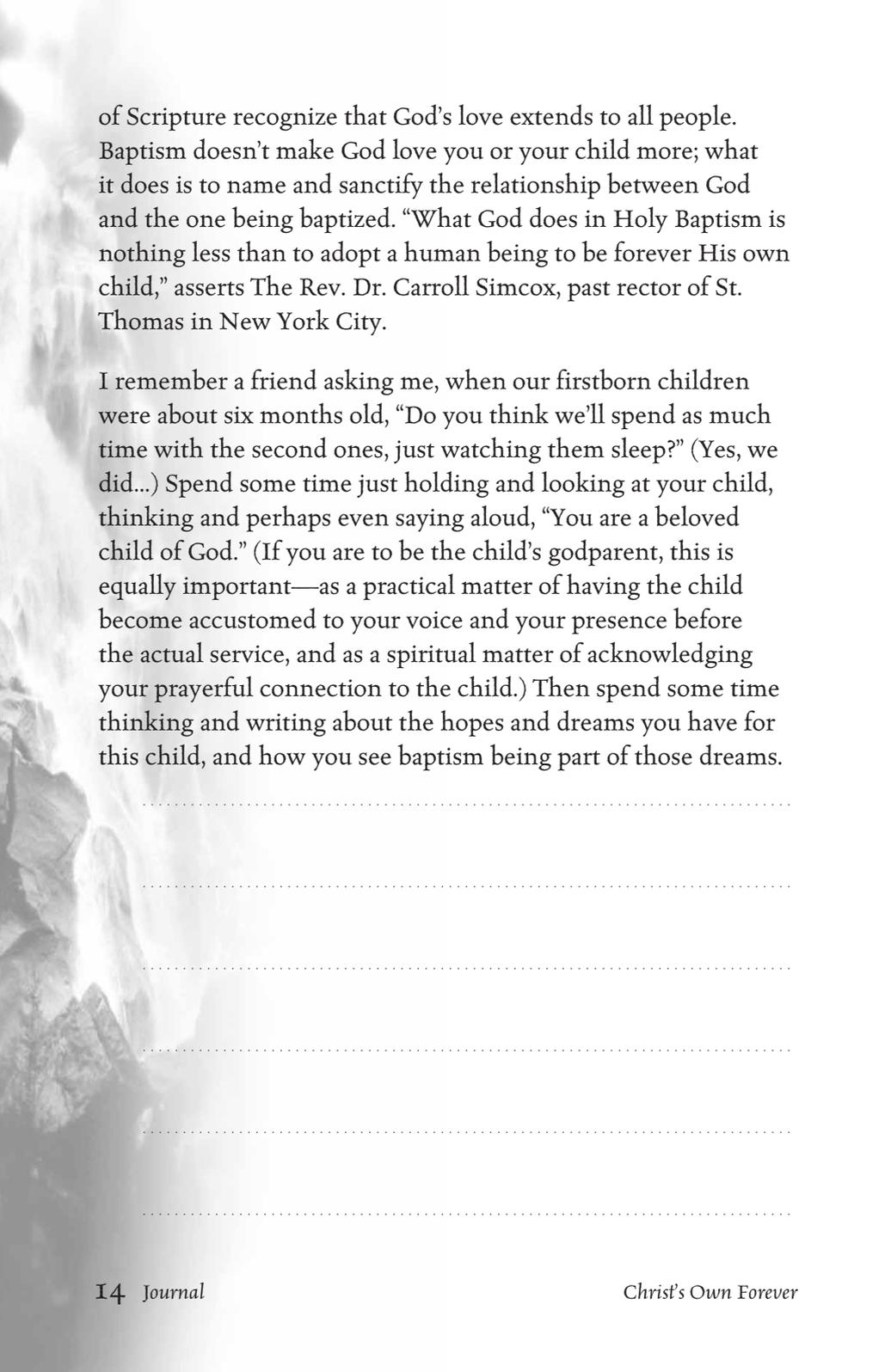
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In saying yes to baptism, just what is it that you have undertaken on behalf of your child? What is Holy Baptism? If you look at page 298 in *The Book of Common Prayer*, the official rubrics tell us that “Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in baptism is indissoluble.” What that means is that through baptism, your child becomes part of an extended family of fellow-Christians; your child enters a covenanted relationship with God.

People used to fear that the unbaptized remained exiled from God and could never attain salvation; more recent readings



of Scripture recognize that God's love extends to all people. Baptism doesn't make God love you or your child more; what it does is to name and sanctify the relationship between God and the one being baptized. "What God does in Holy Baptism is nothing less than to adopt a human being to be forever His own child," asserts The Rev. Dr. Carroll Simcox, past rector of St. Thomas in New York City.

I remember a friend asking me, when our firstborn children were about six months old, "Do you think we'll spend as much time with the second ones, just watching them sleep?" (Yes, we did...) Spend some time just holding and looking at your child, thinking and perhaps even saying aloud, "You are a beloved child of God." (If you are to be the child's godparent, this is equally important—as a practical matter of having the child become accustomed to your voice and your presence before the actual service, and as a spiritual matter of acknowledging your prayerful connection to the child.) Then spend some time thinking and writing about the hopes and dreams you have for this child, and how you see baptism being part of those dreams.

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