



A Letter About Baby Dedication



Dear Parents,

I get asked often by parents about baptisms or christenings for their children. Depending on one's religious affiliation, these things can take on a wide variety of meanings. This small letter has been prepared to walk you through our take on such traditions and more importantly to point you to the teaching of the ancient Scriptures. So many fads in our modern world come and go, but the ancient text of the Bible is a time-tested resource for families raising children. In this letter, we will consider what the Bible says about ceremonies for children and unpack for you the very special act of baby dedication.

It surprises many people to learn that in the Bible there are no examples of kids being christened or baptized. At Del Rey Church we are not into religion for religion's sake or silly denominational beefs. We just try our best to stick with what the Bible teaches. Since the Bible does not speak of baptizing or christening little children, we don't practice these religious or denominational rites. Rather, we practice what we do see in the Bible, that is, baby dedication. It is important to know what a baby dedication is and what it is not. If you are interested in having your child dedicated please read this paper, let us know if you are cool with our take and then we'll schedule a special time to dedicate your child or children (or to talk further if you have any questions).

So let's talk about baby dedications. Some of you may be wondering – what exactly is this practice all about? Well, *Webster's Dictionary* defines the word dedicate as “to set apart for sacred use.” In a baby dedication, parents (and sometimes entire families) stand before the church as a symbolism of dedication to raise their child according to God's will. As the parents (or family) stand before the church, a pastor will offer a charge to the family and say a prayer of blessing over the child. This time of dedication is not just for the child, it is also for the parents and family as they stand before the community dedicating themselves to God, each other and their child. It is really a beautiful ceremony that lasts just a few minutes, but the memory is forever.

In the Bible we see parents dedicating their children to God. In fact, Jesus himself was dedicated by his parents. In Luke 2:21-22 we read that when Jesus was a baby his mom and step-dad brought him before God's people to be dedicated (they or “present[ed] him to the Lord” v.22). Notice by the way that Jesus was not baptized until he was an adult. In the Old Testament we read about a mother named Hannah who dedicated her son to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:24-28). It is worth saying that a dedication ceremony means nothing when parents are not dedicated themselves. The ceremony is an expression of a dedication that is already there in a person's heart and an intention to make good on that dedication by raising one's child in a godly way, otherwise the ceremony is an empty prayer or worse just meaningless religion.

Where did this religious ceremony of Baby Dedication originate and what does it mean to us today? In the times before Christ, believers were bound by the Mosaic Law of God as recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. Thus, when a boy was exactly eight days old according to the Law, he was brought to the temple for circumcision and consecration. A parallel rite of consecration was performed for little girls. The ceremony, once completed, marked the child's entrance into God's covenant community. After the ceremony, the priest would pronounce a blessing upon the child and upon his parents. When the blessing was complete, family members and friends in attendance all would shout “Amen!”

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A Letter About Baby Dedication

In these days after Christ, circumcision no longer marks one as a covenant believer (though many of us circumcise our kids for medical reasons and see spiritual significance to it in a commemorative sort of way). Why not? Because the Bible says that “Christ is the end of the Law” (Rom. 10:4; see also 2 Cor. 3:11, Heb. 7:18, 8:13, Eph. 2:15). The sacrifice of Christ on the cross fulfilled the Law and its sacrifices. While we do not live under the Law of the Old Testament, we still - as a family of God - practice baby dedication as a new symbol in the new covenant to set aside our little ones to the Lord. Today, all who profess Christ as Savior are included in God’s new covenant community and are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Simply put, to be a child of God you must believe in Christ. That’s it, believe in Christ and repent from your sins and you will be saved (Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19, 16:31, 26:20; John 20:31). Since this is not a decision parents can make for their children, the ceremony of dedication expresses the parent’s hope for their child’s salvation and also their commitment to be dedicated to raising children in a biblical manner.

There’s no doubt in our minds that God desires our children to be dedicated to Him. God definitely has a special place in His heart for children. The Bible tells us that children are a wonderful gift from God. Psalm 127:3 says, “Children are a gift from the LORD...” A dedication ceremony is a time where we acknowledge that our kids ultimately belong to God and in a sense He has loaned them to us to raise them as He desires. Such an acknowledgment is pleasing to God, because He loves our kids with a perfect love that endures forever and His way of raising kids is far better than our own.

Hopefully it is not a surprise to hear that God loves children. We read in the Bible about how Jesus enjoyed children. Mark 10 and Matthew 19 tell us that people brought their children to Him that He might fellowship with them and pray for them. The young disciples ignorantly rebuked these parents saying, He has more important things to attend to. But Jesus quickly said, “Let them bring their children and don’t prohibit the children to come unto me.” So, as Matthew tells us, Jesus lifted each child onto his lap, placed His hands upon them and blessed them. Like these parents in the days of Jesus, we as a church family want to bring our children to the Lord. Why? So that He might bless them in the same way. We must remember that Jesus is as much alive today as He was in the first-century. So, as a church, we come together to “dedicate” our children before the living Lord.

God wants us to be dedicated to Him, that is, to be set apart for His use. As parents this is something we truly want for our children too. We want them to be dedicated to God. Yet we realize that this is a decision that they must make. Truly, there are no arranged marriages for with God. Here at Del Rey Church, we want our kids to follow God, but we don’t want them to follow God simply because we follow Him or think it is a good idea. We desire that they would have their own individual and personal relationship with God that would start at an early age and continue throughout their life. We know that ultimately salvation is a God-thing and we just want to be faithful as parents in living for God and pointing our kids to Him.

As I wrap up this letter, I just want to make sure that I have made it clear that there are no ceremonies that give kids a ticket to heaven or make them a Christian. In fact, that’s how baby baptisms began, when superstitious people wanted to make sure their kids had “fire-insurance” from hell, just in case something happened while they were little. This is horrible distortion of the Bible and the fundamental message of Christ, not to mention (if I can be frank) a rather arbitrary and petty view of God. God does not punish people on a religious technicality of not performing rituals. The Bible is very clear that salvation is by faith alone in Christ and not by religious rites or being spiritual. God would not send someone to hell because their parents didn’t sprinkle water on them. No one is saved by baptism or any religious ceremony or spiritual behavior for that matter. The fact is we all need God’s forgiveness in Christ (even so-called

A Letter About Baby Dedication

“good people”) because we have all sinned against God. Thankfully, Christ offers that to anyone of any background or culture. Jesus does not discriminate – He loves the whole world. We really believe that He died for our sins and forgives us. And let me tell you, this reality changes the way we parent. It changes the way we pray for our kids and the way we live before them as examples and instructors of God’s truth.

I say all of the above to make sure that as a parent you understand what a Baby Dedication is all about. I do not want you to do something that you do not understand. A baby dedication is not a baptism. Baptism is a rite that one undergoes after having made a decision to become a Christian. We like to say that baptism is an outward sign (being dunked or sprinkled in water) of an inward reality (being saved by Christ). If you want to learn more about baptism let us know and we'll give you a paper that explains its significance today in the life of believers. The sad thing is, many folks go through religious exercises without knowing what they mean. Many do things just because that’s what their parents made them do. I try to emphasize that we do things because it is what God wants and it can be found in the Bible. Because of this I want to make sure that a parent understands that a baby dedication does not save a child or give them a ticket to heaven. Faith in Christ saves people and it’s our job as parents to model Christ and explain the gospel to our kids. A baby dedication is an expression of our commitment to do just that, to live for God as parents and to do the things necessary to point our kids to God, like loving God, being involved at our church, serving the poor, studying the Bible (and of course obeying what we study) and loving our neighbors.

If you have a newborn or young child and would like to have him or her dedicated just let us know. If reading this paper raised a bunch of questions for you and you’re not sure about dedication, please let us know too. We would love to interact and talk about this or whatever else is on your heart. If you have a date in mind for the dedication just call the church office and we’ll set the date and time for your child (or even children) to be dedicated. On the chosen Sunday morning, we will bring your family before the church and read some Scriptures of dedication, then recite parental vows and have a time of prayer. It is a very simple and yet very meaningful time. Some families have requested to have a baby dedication at their home and that can be arranged as well. It is a time to share with others so we encourage you to invite the family and record the moment for posterity. The church will provide a small certificate of dedication as a keepsake as well.

Children truly are a gift from the Lord and we as a church family want to join in the privilege of presenting your little one to Him. It is our prayer that God richly blesses you as you serve him in your ministry of parenthood.

Your friendly neighborhood pastor,



Pastor Matt Jones

DRC Baby Dedication Request Form

Instructions:

This form must be submitted at least one month in advance. Submission of this form does not imply an approval of your requested date. Baby dedications are scheduled to occur on any Sunday morning church service besides the first Sunday of the month. At least one parent must be (at least) an active attendee of Del Rey Church.

Requested Date: _____ Alternate Date: _____ Service Time: _____

Child's Full Name: _____ Gender: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Siblings: _____

Mother's Full Name: _____

Father's Full Name: _____

Parents Marital Status: _____ Married _____ Separated _____ Divorced _____ Engaged _____ It's complicated

Mailing Address: _____

Street City State Zip

Email addresses: _____

Mom Dad

Phone numbers: _____

Mom Dad

Do you have godparents for your child? _____ If so, who and will they participate in the ceremony? _____

MOM:

- I was raised Christian
- I'm sympathetic to Christianity
- I'm in-and-out of church
- I'm a real committed Christian
- I'm exploring this Jesus thing
- I belong to another religion

(If so, what? _____)

- I don't believe in God

DAD:

- I was raised Christian
- I'm sympathetic to Christianity
- I'm in-and-out of church
- I'm a real committed Christian
- I'm exploring this Jesus thing
- I belong to another religion

(If so, what? _____)

- I don't believe in God

Check the box that most closely describes your religious/spiritual background today:

Below are areas of responsibility that DRC feels burdened by God to review and assist you as you parent and raise your child before the Lord. Do you agree to:

1. Pray for my child(ren) and for us as parents, asking God to help us raise our child(ren).
2. Instruct my child(ren) in God's ways, teaching him/her (or them) the Scripture.
3. Live out the gospel of Jesus as genuine examples of God's love and truth before our child(ren).
4. Raise our child(ren) around the church, as a support system in my life and parenting.
5. Sacrifice and fight for our family, marriage, children and God, leaving a faithful legacy behind.

We/I understand and agree with DRC's position on baby dedications and accept my God-given responsibility to my child and my family.

Signed: _____ Signed: _____

Mom

Dad

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Followed-Up by: _____ Date confirmed: ___/___/___ Dedication date: ___/___/___

Comments: _____