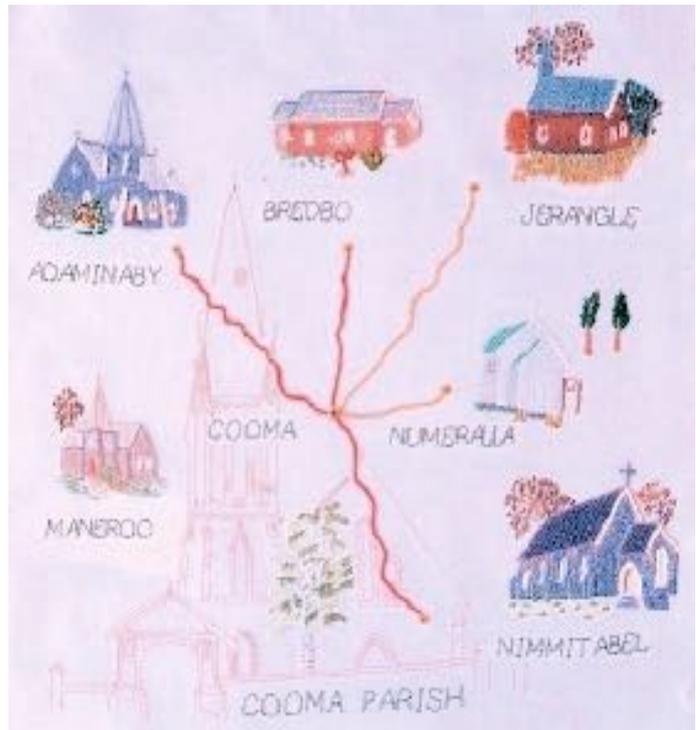


CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF YOUR CHILD in the Cooma-Monaro Anglican Parish

We're delighted to hear of the birth of your child. It's always such wonderful news; and yet at the same time it's a little scary. It's both an awesome privilege and a great responsibility that God has given you. We're also especially glad and honoured to be approached about a ceremony to mark this very special event. One of our ministers would be glad to meet with you so you can work out together what will be best.

What we most want is to help you to celebrate the gift of your precious little one in a way that's truly right and meaningful for you at this point in your lives. So the big question is what kind of ceremony *will* be right and best?



This booklet is designed to help you begin to explore this, before we talk together.

Thanksgiving or Baptism?

We're a collection of Anglican church families across the Monaro region. Nowadays we provide two alternative ways for publicly marking a child's birth in God's name. Our Senior Minister explains it like this ...

Hello,

I'm Lance, and I'm the Senior Minister of the Cooma-Monaro Anglican Church. Through many conversations over many years with new parents who express interest in celebrating the gift of their child in church, I've observed that whilst there are some universal concerns and values, I'm really meeting two groups of parents with some quite distinctive needs.

Most share a belief that their child is a gift from God, and wish to thank Him and seek His blessing on their parenting and family life. They want

this to happen in a church context, because they value the church and want a connection with the church for themselves and their children.

But there are also some clear differences. One group of parents are telling me that they've already made a personal commitment to following Jesus as active members of the Church, and that they want to nurture their children into that same commitment. They recognise the other church members as their local Christian family who are already a core part of their lives, and they want them to be a part of their children's lives also.

For those families, the service of Baptism is ideal because it simply reaffirms the same commitment to Christ and the local church that they've made for themselves already. And the service also involves the church members publicly committing to support the parents in an ongoing way, as they nurture their children within the church community.

In contrast I meet many other parents who are at a different point in their journey. They're telling me that whilst they definitely want to acknowledge God and make a connection between their child and the church, they're not at the point of publicly committing themselves to God, or coming to church regularly. As we talk further they may tell me that they want to be true to themselves and not be hypocrites by making public promises they're not yet confident of keeping. A few add that they want their child to make his/her own choice when old enough, instead of deciding for them. Others might say: "We want more time to think through the commitment side."

For these families, the Baptism service is not the best fit, even if they or other family members have been baptised before. Partly for this reason, the Thanksgiving service has been developed to provide an equally special occasion which is more realistic for their stage of spiritual exploration and allows them to be fair to themselves.

Lance

So both services are a type of 'christening', in the sense that they both involve formally naming the child in the presence of God. In each case, the ceremony will be recorded in the registers of the church, with the names and contact details of the parents and child. So a relationship is established and remembered.

The main difference between the two is that the Thanksgiving service enables parents to thank God for the birth of their child, with no obligation either on them or the church members. Baptism, on the other hand, is a sign of membership in God's

church, expressed locally. It is a ceremony which symbolises Jesus' death and our death, and therefore carries with it various responsibilities. Baptism is a sign of discipleship which, for Jesus' followers, involves a complete change of lifestyle, including a commitment to meet together with God's people week by week.

One final thing to note ... There's no fork in the road. That is, choosing either of the two ceremonies now doesn't in any way preclude taking up the other later on. Some families, for instance, have chosen a Thanksgiving service as more appropriate initially, but have then taken the opportunity to explore the spiritual commitment involved in Baptism before later proceeding to have their child baptised.

Let's now have a closer look at what each service entails ...

“Thanksgiving for a Child”

The Thanksgiving service centres on thanksgiving prayers for the gift of the child, listening to God's word the Bible, naming the child, and prayers for God's blessing on the child and the family. The family are not asked to profess faith or commitment, either to Christ or the church. However the parents may optionally read a statement of thanksgiving to God. The church members are not asked to express a specific ongoing commitment to the family (though some may choose to offer this personally .. and we're a friendly bunch!).

By having a Thanksgiving, you express an acknowledgement of God's connection with your child, and you establish (or reaffirm) a link with the church here in this parish.

Because the Thanksgiving service - unlike Baptism - doesn't express ongoing church membership, it needn't necessarily take place during a Sunday service in the church building. The people of your local Anglican congregation would be delighted to share the occasion with you in that way if that's your wish; but a ceremony at another time and/or place would be equally appropriate. Just ask the minister if interested in this possibility.

Baptism

A Baptism service involves all that the Thanksgiving involves (see above), but centres on the parents and sponsors (or godparents) publicly affirming their faith in Jesus as their saviour and master, their determination to live a changed lifestyle, and their considered intention to be active members of the church together with their children from now on. Those solemn affirmations are the foundation on which any

child (or adult) is baptised with water in accordance with Jesus' instruction to his first followers.

The service also involves a public commitment by the church members to supporting the parents in their promises. They can do this meaningfully and in good conscience because they know the family and will continue to share in their lives closely.

Two things are very important in order for a baptism to be a truly meaningful occasion for you. Both are a normal expectation for Christian Baptism in most churches, and certainly Anglican churches. Our ministers are accountable to the wider church leadership for ensuring that these are met as far as possible, in the best spiritual interests of you - the family.

One of these is appropriate preparation, so that you can be sure of understanding what it means to be a follower of Jesus and a member of God's family, the church. You will then be in a position to realistically assess whether the commitments involved in Baptism are right for you now. Should you request a baptism, we encourage you to allow unhurried time for this to happen, and would recommend at least one month (ideally two).

The other element is beginning a relationship with a local church community. The next section explores this element further ...

For those who live elsewhere: Your local church community ...

If you choose Baptism - and you don't presently live in the Monaro region, naturally we'll introduce you to a local church in your area so that you can live out your Christian faith commitment meaningfully and raise your children in a Christian community. We'd be delighted if you visited us again on occasion, but if our community is a very long drive from home, we'd be much more delighted to know that you're growing in following Jesus through sharing in the ongoing life of his people in your own community. That way we can know that you and your children are in the best possible place for your child's baptism to be the beginning of something that lasts.

If this doesn't make much sense to you right now, we simply encourage you to approach your baptism preparation (see above) with openness. The more you grasp what following Jesus means the more natural it will be to *want* to gather with his people week by week. And a local Christian community is the best place to do that.

And while we're on the subject of baptism preparation, a local church is by far the best place for that to happen also -- even if the baptism ceremony still takes place in

one of the churches of our parish. Our community is centred on the Monaro region, and so that's where our responsibility lies. The minister will be very happy to discuss this special occasion with you, and (if desired) to conduct a service for your child here -- but cannot realistically invest significant time in families who live a long distance away. Your local church and minister can serve you much better as you prepare for such a special occasion.

It's because the Christian faith is intended to be lived out in local communities that we in the Anglican Church work hard to build up and encourage each local faith community. So as well as believing that the local church is the best place for you, we also express our loyalty to one another as churches and/or ministers by encouraging people we meet to consider their local church. In other words, it's good for everyone - individuals, families, the local church, ministers, and the local community.

For all these reasons, whilst still willing to provide either a Thanksgiving or a Baptism in one of our churches, we'd be very happy indeed if your contact with a local church led to you celebrating the gift of your child there rather than here. But that decision remains yours.

One more consideration is worth a mention. Though many families with children have been a part of one of our church communities, it's rarely the case just at present in most of our congregations. That's one of our current challenges. It may well be that a church in your area will be not only closer but also better placed to provide for you and your children at this time.



So, what next ... ?

- Read this booklet carefully and discuss it together. Try to be as realistic, fair and honest with yourselves as you can.
- If still interested in a Thanksgiving or Baptism in this parish:
 - Complete the application form included with this booklet.
 - Either post the form to:
The Administrator
Anglican Parish of Cooma
PO Box 43
Cooma NSW 2630
 - or (even better) e-mail the form or the details to:
office@coomaanglican.org.au
 - phone on 6452-1544 for an appointment with one of our ministers
 - the minister will help you explore the best options for you, answer any questions you may have, and reach a decision together with you
 - (in the case of baptism) the minister will arrange for appropriate preparation

Other (please describe in your own words):

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.....
.....

Ceremony details:

Preferred church or other location:

(a Baptism would normally be held in a church; a thanksgiving needn't be)

Preferred date of ceremony:

NB: Baptisms are normally held in a Sunday service - usually the second Sunday of a month if at St Paul's Cooma. Thanksgivings may be held on other days, and various times are possible.

Names of sponsors (= godparents) - if any:

(first names & surname)

For applicants from outside the Monaro region

Reason for choosing this parish:

Tick one:

- We are happy for the minister to supply our contact details to the minister of a church local to us with a view to arranging an appointment.
- We would like to contact a local minister ourselves.
- At present, we do not wish to have contact with a local church or minister.

Information provided on the application form will be retained to enable completion of Church registers. Your contact details will be stored in our Parish

records which can be accessed by our ministers, and may occasionally be used for official Church correspondence.