

## Worship on the Web



### THE THANKSGIVING AND BLESSING OF A CHILD

At the General Assembly of 2003, the Panel on Worship undertook to provide orders for the thanksgiving for and blessing of a child. This reports work in progress and provides material which might be used in the meantime.

#### Proposed Order for those that are not members

The Panel here shares a working document which includes an order likely to be that on which the first of two orders are based. It is that in use in Montrose Old Parish Church. An introductory section explains the approach used and the reasons for it.

The Panel's Liturgical Committee is currently working on a second and fuller order intended for such situations as when parents are themselves church members but wish their children to come to their own decision in due course about baptism.

To many unchurched people, parish churches seem to give out contradictory signals: they emphasise that they are an inclusive body where everyone is unconditionally welcome, but then appear to indicate that baptism is an exception to the rule. Whereas most can understand why a church should feel protective about some things (e.g. sacraments), they don't understand why there should be one which is for anybody who wants it [communion], and one that is not [baptism].

That the church might abandon its understanding of the responsibilities involved in baptism simply in order to make life easier for itself raises issues of integrity, and these are already the subject of perennial debate. Montrose Old would oppose abandoning the church's traditional position since many parents respond well when confronted with those very responsibilities and go on to discover a commitment which otherwise would not have been awakened, had the challenge of them never been presented.

When an unchurched couple come seeking their child's baptism, they are offered two alternatives and invited to choose which they want to do.

There is baptism, but it involves certain commitments which are explained.

The alternative to this is a ceremony of infant blessing. This takes place at morning worship following the same pattern as that for baptism, except the wording is different, the promise(s) are different, and no water is used. The attraction of this is that nothing is required of the parents in either commitment or belief.

Has the practice been successful? Yes, for several reasons. First, the parents themselves decide what they are comfortable with, so the church cannot fairly be accused of being high-handed. Secondly, the similarity of the blessing procedure to that of baptism shows that the church does not regard the ceremony as trivial. This is underlined by the congregation keeping a display book where blessings [and baptisms] are recorded.

Have any difficulties presented themselves? Not in 14 years. The practice works in that it seems to meet that need which prompts parents to come. This need can most often be summarised as a desire for a ceremonial recognition that their child's arrival is important to other people - and other powers - besides themselves. (Thus, calling it a thanksgiving ceremony is not really sufficient, since that implies something we do rather than receive.)

## THE ORDER

[Suggested Hymn: **524** "Thy kingdom come, yea bid it come"]

"*N* and *N* have had their lives enriched and blessed by the gift of this child: ***N***. Today they have come here to thank God for his/her presence and the difference he/she has made to their lives.

Also, they have invited us as a congregation to share in their joy and on their behalf to ask God's blessing upon ***N***, **AND** upon them, that they may worthily face the challenges and privileges of parenthood in the years ahead.

This we gladly do, in the name of Jesus Christ whose express wish was that children should be brought to him, and not be kept back, that He might lay His hands upon them and bless them".

LET ALL STAND

[to parents]: **"In recognising the goodness of God in granting you the gift of the child you have brought before Him, do you earnestly desire that he/she be given Christ's blessing in the manner He has appointed, and do you promise that you will be worthy and loving parents as long as he shall live?"**

[minister takes child] " ***N***, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in representation of Him, I now lay my hand upon you and commend you to the gracious care and protection of God through all your days, and may His richest blessing rest and abide with you always."

CONGREGATION SINGS BLESSING

LET US PRAY: Hear us, Lord, as we pray for this family. In the trials and challenges of parenthood, surround them with your blessing. May they know that you are always there, always ready to love and protect, always able to lift us when we are cast down and to restore us to sanity and joy. Bless also the parents, go with them on their walk into the unknown future. Endow them with wisdom, courage and humour, so that with this child, your gift, they may explore with daily increasing wonder, the pathways of family life in peace and happiness. AMEN.