

Choosing Faith (by the Revd Ray Smith, from the first issue of Christian Life)

In baptism these children begin their journey in faith.

You speak for them today.

*Will you care for them, and help them to take their place
within the life and worship of Christ's Church?*

With the help of God, we will.

Baptism Service

Every year in Haywards Heath around 60 children are baptised in our four CofE Churches. And at every Baptism service parents promise to bring up their children to make sense of the Christian faith and to take part in the life of the church.

So if you have had your child baptised in one of our churches, how can our churches help you to fulfil those promises you have made as a parent?

Do nothing?

One option you do not have if you are going to fulfil the promises you have made is to do nothing, in the hope that your child will choose the Christian faith when he or she is older. How did it work for you? What we do know is that no-one chooses **for** something with no information. Do nothing, and you will be making the choice for your child, by giving them no choice.

Some people think that children will learn all about Christianity at school. Certainly they will learn something but still not enough to fully understand the church and the choices they can make.

Taking part

One picture I often paint at baptism preparation groups is the thought that we could explore the stadium of a Premier football club; we could be impressed by the pitch and the floodlights; amazed at the size of the ground and the seating; see the football boots hanging up and the team colours. And then we go home thinking we know all about football, without seeing a game, or experiencing the atmosphere of the crowd and the thrill of a win.

If we do not take part, we cannot know what it is like, and so it is with the church. Only by taking part, can we learn enough to make a proper choice about following Jesus' way of living.

In our day 72% of people claim to be Christians but less than a third of them attend church at sometime during the year. But I do not believe that those others have rejected faith. In many cases they have in fact never made a choice at all – for or against.

Explore faith with your child

So take your place in the church with your child. Your child will follow your example and take note of what you do. So do give your child the opportunity to make that choice. It is after all the choice you made at his or her baptism, and you promised to explore the Christian faith and to make sense of it with your child.

We must give our children some experience of the church – only then will they have enough information to let them to choose for themselves, and to be part of the church they joined on the day of their Baptism.