

Baptism in the United Benefice of Holland Park

Watching a child sleep peacefully is sheer joy for any parent. The wonder of life is something to be truly thankful for and should be celebrated.

But, while a child is a miracle, the responsibility can be scary. Children are an endless source of fascination, concern, delight, anxiety and joy but nobody teaches us how to bring up children.

Parents have to sort out and make the best they can of all the experience, insights and truths available to them.

Having a baby makes us acutely aware both of all that is most precious and all that is wrong and frightening in the world.

Of course, when children are small we want to protect them but sooner than any of us realise we discover that we have to prepare our children to live in this world. And nothing challenges a sense of who we are and what we believe as much as becoming a parent. Parents quickly find themselves faced with big questions and no easy answers.

Whether or not you were brought up to believe in God or the Christian faith, new parents often find themselves looking at the questions of faith afresh and maybe this is why you are seeking baptism for your child.

Maybe you see baptism as a way of introducing your child to the faith you were brought up in, or maybe you feel drawn to exploring a faith you never had, or maybe you simply want to thank God for the gift of a child.

Whatever your reasons – baptism is about the beginning of a journey, discovering God and allowing ourselves to be formed according to the teachings and life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In order for your child to be baptised you do not have to know lots of facts about the faith but you do have to feel confident that the Christian journey is something you wish your child to set out on with yourself as a supportive and encouraging companion. It is an act of trust and commitment – as with any important relationship.

We wish to help you with this journey in the following ways.



First, you are invited to a Baptism Preparation evening. These are held monthly, on the first Wednesday of every month. At these sessions, you may meet other parents, learn more about baptism and explore what it means to you, and have a chance to talk about issues facing parents and how the life of the church relates to these.

Second, the baptism itself. You will receive a warm welcome on the day. If you are having a baptism outside the main Sunday service, it is very important, prior to the baptism, that you attend a Sunday service so you can meet other members of the church community as well as the clergy who will be conducting the baptism. We really do wish to support and encourage you. We are all at different stages on the journey of discovering God. Having a party and celebrating is right and proper and is a wonderful opportunity for bringing family members together and, we hope, for making new friendships.

You may, of course, decide that baptism is not yet something you wish to commit your child to. If so, we can offer a service of thanksgiving for your child.

Whether baptised or not, God loves each one of us unconditionally and your baby is still treasured by God. You will also continue to be most welcome at church services and valued as members of the community. If you would like to explore questions about God and church further, then do please think about joining our United Tuesdays education group, or speaking to the vicar.

What is Baptism?

Jesus told his disciples to become 'fishers of people'. Originally, baptism was for adults who had been 'hooked' by Christ.

The images of fishing and being 'hooked' are good descriptions of the followers of Jesus. The first disciples were fishermen. Jesus 'fed the 5000' with a miraculous meal of loaves and fishes. The secret sign of the early church was the shape of a fish scratched in the sand outside a house to signify where a gathering of Christians was taking place.

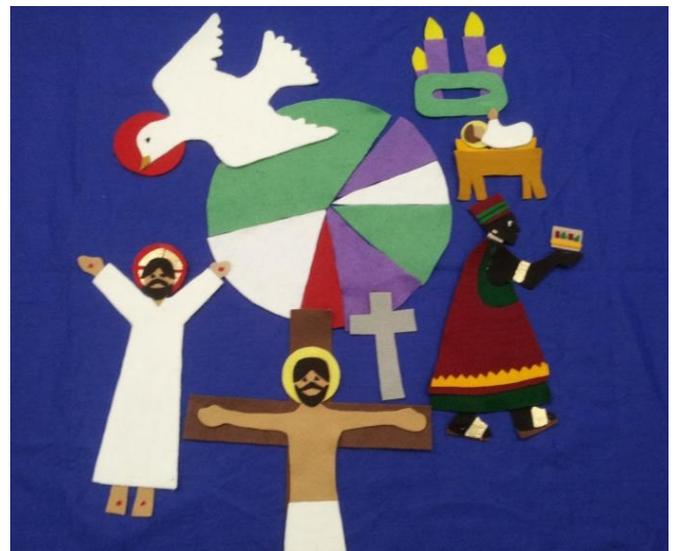
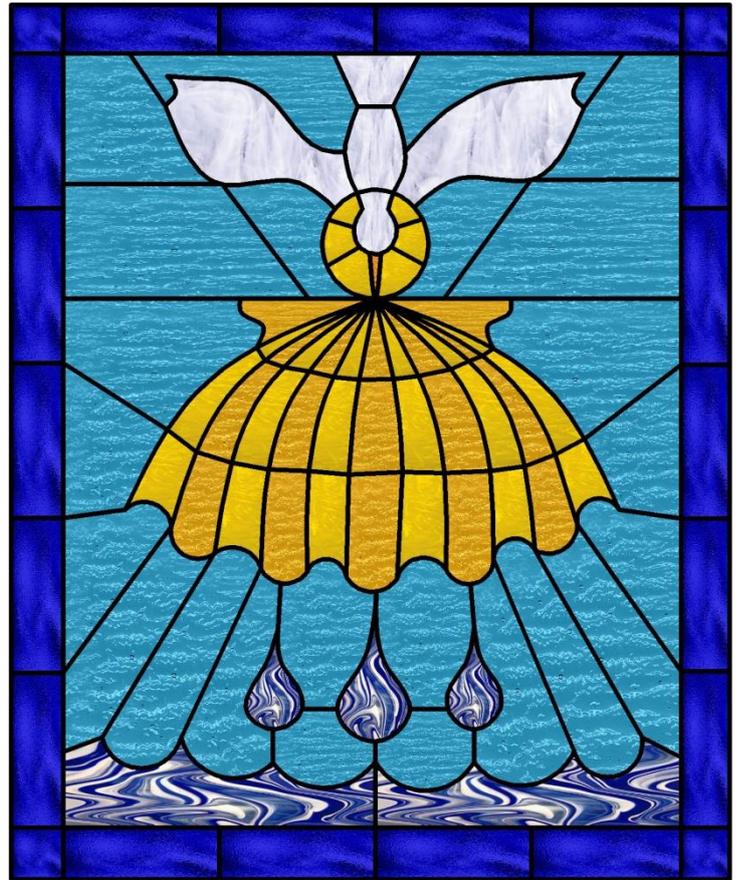
No doubt there was a strong reminder of the imagery of fish when people saw new Christians being baptised and submerged under water and then coming up gasping and spluttering for air. Being submerged was for

adults a new birth, the turning over of a new leaf. Baptism helped lift people's eyes from old, self-centred ways and, instead, focus on Christ and the coming of God's kingdom on earth. The prayers and rites of the baptism service used today have been handed down over 2000 years.

Because baptism is about birth into a new life with God, it became the custom for babies and children to be baptised too. A shell was often used to pour the water as they were used by pilgrims as simple drinking cups. In this way, shells remind us that following Christ is a journey, both the journey *of* a lifetime and a journey *that lasts* a lifetime - and beyond.

The seasonal cycle of the church year continues the idea of a journey. It starts with expectant hope in the season of Advent during December. Then expectancy becomes reality with the birth of Jesus at Christmas. There then follows the story of his life, suffering, death and the new life of the resurrection. The church year ends in the month of November when, with the festivals of All Saints, All Souls and Remembrance Sunday, we remember how death comes to all of us but is not the end.

Embarking on the journey of faith is an act of trust and we need a guide. Jesus said 'I am the light of



the world' and for this reason a candle symbolises Christ as that light leading the way. Each one of us is known and loved individually by God. There is a lovely passage in the Book of Isaiah where God says *'I will never forget you my people, I have carved your name on the palm of my hand.'* The child is named and so marked by God as water is poured over the head in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Having been washed, the child is wrapped in a shawl. For centuries shawls have symbolised the universal embrace in prayer by an inclusive, unconditionally loving, God. The newly baptised is not only named and held in prayer by God but is also anointed with oil as a sign of all the good things that God has given us. Oil is also a promise that we will all share in the kingdom of heaven.

The Day of the Baptism

Baptisms can take place during the main Sunday service or at another time (usually on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon).

Having your child baptised during the Sunday service is a wonderful way of celebrating the fact that we are not just baptised into an individual relationship with God, but into the family of the church.



What happens after the baptism?

Immediately after the baptism we hope you have a jolly good party!

If you are having your child baptised during the main Sunday service, you are very welcome to bring a cake or drinks to share with the congregation afterwards. We are always delighted to welcome our newest members.

You will receive a card on the anniversary of your child's baptism. We suggest you light your child's baptism candle on the anniversary each year and explain the pictures on the candle as a way of teaching them about the special day when they became a member of the church.

How much does a baptism cost?

There are no fees for baptisms. If you would like to make a donation, please use the Gift Aid envelopes, available at church, so that we can supplement any donation of yours by reclaiming the tax.

Not everyone can afford to contribute to the church, and we are grateful to those members of the congregation who give generously. But we do not want funds just to maintain buildings and salaries; we also want to do much more in the community and for God's mission in the world.

This parish has been looked after by the love and care of the people of Kensington over many, many years – your child's baptism and his or her future life in this church is an important part of this ongoing tradition. But whatever you can give – thank *you* very much!

If you would like hymns in a baptism outside the main service, the organist's fee is £110.

Are there any rules for choosing godparents?

Those you choose to be godparents must be people you trust to be a good friend and mentor to your child in the years to come, people who will take an interest and keep in touch with them and who will be able to give support when needed. Godparents must have been baptised (christened)

and, if possible, confirmed. They will be saying the same baptism promises on behalf of the children as you do.

Godparents are asked to pray for their godchildren, give them a good example to follow and encourage them to play a full part in the Christian community. Godparents should be chosen with the needs of the child in mind not simply to satisfy the wishes and desires of the adults. A godparent is not a legal guardian. If that is what you want your godparents to be you will need to have a separate discussion with them about this.

The traditional number of godparents is three: two women and one man for a girl and two men and one woman for a boy. However, this is not a hard and fast rule – if you have more people you would like to be godparents, you are welcome to include them.

What if a godparent is not baptised?

Those who are not baptised, but whom you wish to act in a godparent role, are called sponsors. Sponsors are asked to care for the child and support him or her in their journey of faith.

Being a Godparent

Congratulations! It is very exciting to be invited to be a godparent, but it can also feel quite daunting as you are being asked to have a very special role in a child's upbringing, which is more than being a favourite aunty or uncle. As a godparent you have a very particular task, you have a spiritual role as well as a caring role.

Are there any rules for being godparents?

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Godparents must have been baptised (christened) and, if possible, confirmed. As a godparent you are asked to pray for your godchildren, give them a good example to follow and generally encourage them to play a full part in the Christian community.

What if a godparent is not confirmed?

You will be making the same baptism promises on behalf of your godchild as were made for you by your godparents at your baptism. If you have not been confirmed then maybe this is the right time for you to think about your own faith journey and perhaps to be confirmed yourself.

What if a godparent is not baptised?

Those who are not baptised but who are invited to act in a godparent role, are called sponsors. Sponsors are asked to care for the child and support him or her in their chosen journey of faith.

Does being a godparent involve being a legal guardian as well?

No. A godparent is not a legal guardian but the parents may be thinking of you in this role should anything happen to them. You may like to discuss this with them

What exactly is a godparent promising?

Although it is God who enables faith to grow, what we do or do not do can help or hinder the process. The parents and godparents are therefore asked two questions:

Will you pray for the children, draw them by your example into the community of faith and walk with them in the way of Christ?

and

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?



Above: Margaret, our Families Pastor, with her godparents, November 1982.

The first question is asking you to make a commitment to the child and the second question is asking you to make a commitment to help them grow in the Christian faith. In answer to both these questions you reply: **'With the help of God we will'**.

There then follow another three questions. This time you are answering on behalf of the child who is too young to make a responsible commitment for himself or herself. The questions are:

Do you turn to Christ?

I turn to Christ.

Do you repent of your sins?

I repent of my sins.

Do you renounce evil?

I renounce evil.

What sort of gifts do godparents give their godchildren?

We asked some godparents for their suggestions:

- A Noah's ark set
- A nativity set
- A rainbow maker
- The donation of a tree or an animal or a water well through a charity in the developing world.
- A tiny amount of money each month, which will build up to make a gift on their 18th birthday (this can be dedicated for university fees if you like).
- Taking your godchild to church
- Attending their first holy communion and/or confirmation
- A book of prayers
- An illustrated bible that looks attractive to read and one that you would enjoy reading to your God child
- A book about the saints
- A picture or an icon
- An Advent calendar

Godparents should not be expected to buy lavish, expensive gifts. Simple, meaningful ones, especially if accompanied with a letter, will be appreciated and mean more. Time and interest are what matter most. Even when the child does not seem interested, keep trying; don't feel silly, still send them a postcard. You never know when they will need to turn to you.

We look forward to welcoming you on the day!



What is there for my child at St George's after baptism?

For information on any of our programmes, contact Margaret, our Families Pastor, at margaret@stgeorgescampdenhill.com or in the Parish Office on 020 3602 9873.

Children's groups on Sunday at St George's Church

We have the following groups during our 10am service every week:

Prophets Group (age 0-5)

Story, singing, free play, art materials, and age-appropriate prayers

Apostles Group (age 5-11)

Story, prayer, discussion, and a time for creative exploration.

Children start the service with their parents in the main church and go to their groups when we sing the Gloria. The Prophets Group meets in the nursery room (at the front of the church, on the right, through the door by the pillars). The Apostles Group meets in the upper room (at the back of the church, through the door in the brick tower and up the stairs).

For young children who want to stay in church with their parents, we have our Pray and Play area. This has spiritually imaginative toys, books, and puzzles for children. This is perfect for young children who may not be able to sit still for a whole hour (who is, really?) – they can stay in the service, explore images of Christianity through play, and yet still be free to move around.

We also have three or four All-Age Eucharists each year, when children play an active role in leading our worship.

Youth Group

Our Youth Group, for secondary school children, currently meets every other Sunday from 11:30 to 1:00. This may be moving to every other Friday evening. We do Bible Study, discussions about current events, charity projects, and special events, like a trip to the West End to see *Les Miserables*.

We base our Youth Group around the “Journey to Adulthood” (J2A) curriculum, thinking about what it means to grow into manhood and womanhood with God. For more information on J2A, go to http://leaderresources.org/j2a_youth

Children’s Groups During the Week at St George’s

Baby and Toddler Groups

Tuesday, 10-11:30

Wednesday, 9:30-11:30

All children under 5 and those who care for them are welcome. We ask a donation of £2 per child to cover costs.

Joyful Noise, worship for babies and toddlers

Wednesday, 9:15-9:30 (followed by playgroup). Story, action songs, and interactive prayers. This is a great way to worship with your child if you find the Sunday service a bit too much for your child.

Special Events

At important festivals in the Christian calendar, we have special events for the children. Here is an example of how a year might go:

September – blessing of the school bags at start of term

October – Harvest Festival All-Age Eucharist

Blessing of the pets at St Francis Day (this takes place in St John’s Holland Road).

November – Family Day for Halloween and All Saints Day

All-Age Eucharist for All Saints Day

December – Carolling around the neighbourhood

Christmas Pageant

Carols round the Crib, our family service on Christmas Eve

January – Epiphany party

February – Sleepover in the church to mark the beginning of Lent (age 9+)

Half-Term Holiday Club

All-Age Eucharist for Candlemas

March – Family Day for Lent/Easter

All-Age Eucharist for Mothering Sunday

April – Family service on Maundy Thursday, with dinner and foot-washing

Children's Stations of the Cross on Good Friday

Easter Sunday Easter Egg Hunt

May – First Communion celebration

Half-term holiday club

June – Rite 13 for the 13-year-olds

July – End-of-year blessing

August – Summer Holiday Club

Prayers for – and with – your child

A prayer for parents and godparents

from *Making the Most of Your Child's Baptism*, by Ally Barrett

Lord Jesus, may the sign of your cross
Keep me strong and faithful when life is hard.

When I am tired or burdened
By things I have done wrong,
Refresh me and wash me clean.

The world sometimes seems a very dark place.
Shine your light in my heart
And help me shine as a light for others.
Amen.

Breton Fisherman's Prayer

Dear Lord, be good to me.
The sea is so wide, and my boat is so small.

Praying with children

A good way to pray at the end of the day. Sit with your child in bed and say:
"God bless ..." and, with your child, list names of friends, family, etc. Often toddlers will start to suggest names to add. Then say:
"Thank you for ..." mentioning favourite things that have happened that day. And finally, say:
"Please help ..." and pray for anyone you know in need, or any problems your child is having.

Prayers without words

Set aside a corner in your house where you can put "holy" things, which might include a children's Bible, a cross or a candle (but not the matches). You could also include special objects that your child has collected, or toys like a Noah's Ark, a shepherd and sheep set, etc.

Allow yourself time to share your child's wonder at the world. Every so often, take a leisurely walk – stop and look at things together, and marvel at the beauty of God's creation!

A Thanksgiving Prayer, *The Baptism Service, 2000*

God our creator,
we thank you for the wonder of new life
and for the mystery of human love.
We give thanks for all whose support and skill
surround and sustain the beginning of life.

As Jesus knew love and discipline
within a human family, may our children
grow in strength and wisdom.
As Mary knew the joys and pains of motherhood,
give us, as parents, your sustaining grace and love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

A Blessing, *The Lion Book of Best-Loved Prayers, 2006*

Wherever you go
May God the Father be with you.
Wherever you go
May God the Son be with you.
Wherever you go
May God the Spirit be with you.
May the road rise to meet you;
May the wind be always at your back;
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon the fields and,
Until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

The Lord bless you and keep you,
may his face shine upon you
and grant you his peace this day and evermore. Amen

A prayer for an adoption, *from Common Prayer: a liturgy for ordinary radicals.*

Generous and divine God,
We give thanks for the presence of your Son, Jesus Christ, in the world.
Through him we are all adopted children of God.
We are brought into God's loving embrace.
May the adoption of this beloved child, *(name of child)*, be blessed.
May we the family of this beloved child enjoy the presence of God in our life together.
May this child be blessed by the mysterious presence, mercy, and grace of you, O God.
Amen.

Prayer for a new baby, *from Common Prayer: a liturgy for ordinary radicals.*

The blessing of Christ
Comes to us in this child.
Welcome, *(name of child)*,
Child of love.
God is here to bless you
And blessed are you beyond telling

To be born to parents who love you and each other.
Grow gently, (*name of child*)
In love of God.
We bless you and pray Christ be near you
Now and each hour of your life.

Suggested Readings for Baptism

Biblical Readings

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, "Give them up,"
and to the south, "Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth —
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

- Isaiah 43:1-3a, 4-7

O Lord, you have searched me and know me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You mark out my journeys and my resting places,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.
You encompass me, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,

so high that I cannot attain it...
For you yourself created my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I thank you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Marvellous are your works; my soul knows well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
and woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my form as yet unfinished;
already in your book were all my members written,
As day by day they were fashioned
when as yet there was none of them.
How deep are your counsels to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
If I count them they are more in number than the sand;
and in the end—I am still in your presence.

- From Psalm 139

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

- Luke 18:15-17

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away the judgements against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,

so that you will not bear reproach for it.
I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord.
- Zephaniah 3:14-20

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.'

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.
- Exodus 14:15-22

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death

he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

- Romans 6:3-11

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

- Matthew 3:13-17

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

- 1 Corinthians 12:14-23

Readings From Sources Other Than Scripture

Know you what it is to be a child? ... It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowliness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, - for each child has a fairy god-mother in his/her own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and count yourself the king/queen of infinite space; it is: To see the World in a grain of sand, And a heaven in a wild flower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And eternity in an hour.

- Francis Thompson and William Blake

There is a song in man
There is a song in woman
And that is the child's song.
When that song comes
There will be no words.

Do not ask where they are.
Just listen to the song.
Listen to it -
Learn it -
It is the greatest song of all.
- Spike Milligan

In the beginning was God,
In the beginning the source of all that is,
In the beginning God yearning, God moaning,
God labouring, God giving birth, God rejoicing.
And God loved what she had made, and God said,
"It is good". And God knowing that all that is good is shared, held the earth tenderly in her arms.
God yearned for relationship. God longed to share the good earth.
And humanity was born to share the earth.
- Carter Hayward

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and bends you with might that the arrows
may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as the Archer loves the arrow that flies, so the Archer also loves the bow that is stable.
- Kahlil Gibran

And so the children come.
And so they have been coming.
Always in the same way they come -
Born of the seed of man and woman.
No angels herald their beginning,
No prophets predict their future courses,
No wise men see a star to point their way
To find the babe that may save humankind.

Yet each night a child is born is a holy night.
Fathers and Mothers -
Sitting beside their children's cribs -
Feel glory in the wondrous sight of a life beginning.
They ask: "When or how will this new life end?
Or will it ever end?"
Each night a child is born is a holy night.
- Sophia Lyon Fahs

we can never be born enough. we are human beings for whom birth is a supremely welcome
mystery. the mystery of growing, the mystery which happens only and whenever we are faithful to
ourselves. life for eternal us is now.
- E. E. Cummings

Hello babies. Welcome to Earth. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's round and wet
and crowded. On the outside, babies, you've got a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I
know of, babies- "you've got to be kind."
- Kurt Vonnegut