
EXAMPLE BABY BLESSING CEREMONY

Situation

Purpose: The ceremony celebrates the birth of a new baby, offers a welcome and blessing to the newborn and affirms the love and support of the baby's parents and carers. The ceremony may be adapted for older children or adults who did not receive a blessing following their birth. The ceremony is designed to be deliberately simple and brief, avoiding unnecessary noise, light and paraphernalia that might upset the child. The baby is the central focus for the ceremony, and is addressed directly by the minister, parents, godparents (if any are chosen) and grandparents.

Audience: The congregation is likely to be small, comprising the baby's immediate family or guardians, other family members and well-wishers. These represent a community who loves the child. The congregation may include a mix of people of different faiths and none.

Points discussed with parents ahead of the ceremony:

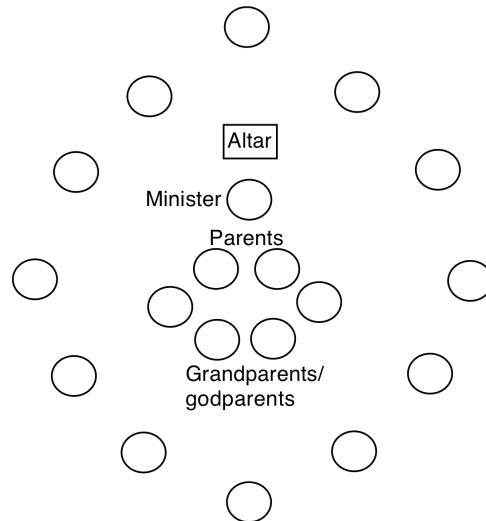
- ~ Is a 'traditional' type of service preferred (similar to, e.g., a Christening, but without the Christian focus)?
- ~ Should the ceremony include anointing of the baby? If so, should the minister's hand washing be made a part of the ceremony?
- ~ Will godparents/grandparents/others be present, and if so, what role might they play?
- ~ Do the parents (and others) want to create elements of the ceremony themselves, e.g. their promises, particular readings, prayers or music?
- ~ Should the baby's first name be referred to throughout the ceremony, or only during and after the baby naming part?

Preparation: A white altar cloth is laid with one large candle (representing The Divine). The candle is already lit at the start of the ceremony. Order of ceremony sheets are laid out on each seat ahead of the congregation arriving. Sheets containing the text to be spoken by the parents, grandparents and godparents are made available to them. A small vial with oil is kept by the minister (although the anointing is optional). The minister washes their hands prior to the service.

Seating: Several seats are offset behind the parents for grandparents, godparents and other guardians; two seats are provided for the parents (if a single-parent, one chair may be occupied by a supporter, if appropriate). The baby is held by the parents, or

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placed in a cradle on a small table in front of them (subject to earlier discussion). The minister stands between the altar and the parents. Other guests sit in a circle (or tight horseshoe) surrounding the altar, parents and other supporters. The ceremony may be held anywhere, including at the family home.



THE CEREMONY

Arrival music, as guests are gathering: *Berceuse / Dolly Suite: I* (or chosen by parents).

1. Welcome

Intention of the ceremony, why we have come together today: Welcome to this beautiful place to welcome this beautiful new baby. We are here to show [baby's name] that we love him/her and to offer our promise to keep him/her safe, to love and guide him/her. This is a time of celebration, gratitude and great joy, a time when we can show [baby's name] together that he/she is supported by a loving family, and a time to show [baby's name's] parents, grandparents and godparents that they are not alone in protecting, guiding and caring for her/him.

Invitation for the God of our understanding to embrace us and be at our centre: On the altar, you will see a candle representing the light that always shines, a reminder of the warmth, love and light offered by a power much greater than we can imagine. For those of you who can call upon a God of your understanding, I ask you now to join me in welcoming The Divine to be with us all right now.

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Great Spirit, Father, Mother God, Beautiful Creator, be with us now as we thank you for [baby's name]. Please bless him/her and each of us as we join to celebrate the wonderful gift of new life that you have given.

Minister speaks directly to the baby: [Baby's name], you are very welcome here, little one. Everyone here wants you to know that you are cherished and loved. You have brought so much joy to your new parents, your grandparents and everyone here today. We want you to know that you are not alone, that you will always be loved and encouraged, supported and cared for. Your mum and dad will take care of all your needs for food, for warmth, and for shelter. Now that your long journey to be here is over, you can rest safely in the care of these people who love you. Eat, sleep, be happy and at peace. You have nothing to worry about, nothing to pressure you. You have arrived and you are home.

2. Family's welcome and commitments

Minister invites grandparents to show their commitment to the baby: Now, your new granddads and grandmas have something to say to you. (Turning to them:) Grandmas and grandpas, please stand.

Grandparents say: Dearest [baby's name], we, your grannies and grandpas, promise to always stand by you and your mum and dad, to support, teach, care for and protect you. We will love you and cherish you, a beautiful and valued member of our family. We will stand in for mum and dad when they need to call upon our help, and we, your family, will never abandon you. You are our pride and our joy, our precious new son/daughter. We welcome you fully into our lives.

Minister invites godparents to show their commitment to the baby: Thank you, grandmas and grandpas. Please sit down again now. Now it's the turn of 'uncle'/'aunty' [godparents' names], your new godparents, to stand up and say 'hello'.

Godparents say: Dearest [baby's name], we, your godparents, the people that your mum and dad have chosen to help watch over you in supporting the unbreakable circle of love that they wish for you, promise to always stand by you. We promise to help or stand in for your parents if ever they need our help, to care for you, love you and show you the way in life. We are deeply proud to be called to be elder companions to you as you start your journey of life. We are your friends and your guardians, your holding hand. May you always be blessed, for you are very special to us.

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Minister invites parents to show their commitment to the baby (parents repeat each line after minister): Thank you, uncle/aunt [godparents' names]. You might now like to sit down. (Turning to the parents:) Mum and dad, we haven't forgotten you. Now it's your turn to stand, if that now feels right, and to say what you most want [baby's name] to know. As you stand by and hold [baby's name] close to you, please repeat the words that you have chosen. (One parent embraces or cradles the child, whilst the other holds the words to be repeated).

Minister: Dearest [baby's name], we, your mum and dad, love you more than you will ever know.

Parents repeat: Dearest [baby's name], we, your mum and dad, love you more than you will ever know.

Minister: You are our deep joy, a precious miracle, our world.

Parents repeat: You are our deep joy, a precious miracle, our world.

Minister: We will never leave you nor wittingly cause you harm.

Parents repeat: We will never leave you nor wittingly cause you harm.

Minister: We will always protect and stand by you, even when you may face times of trial.

Parents repeat: We will always protect and stand by you, even when you may face times of trial.

Minister: In our care you are safe.

Parents repeat: In our care you are safe.

Minister: We will teach you what we know, guide you in what is right, share all of ourselves with you.

Parents repeat: We will teach you what we know, guide you in what is right, share all of ourselves with you.

Minister: You are our bright star, our dear child.

Parents repeat: You are our bright star, our dear child.

Minister: We will always love you.

Parents repeat: We will always love you.

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Minister: We are always here.

Parents repeat: We are always here.

Minister: Thank you, mum and dad. You may sit down now, as I invite everyone else who can to stand as we pray for [parents' names].

All who can stand, except parents.

Prayer for parents and helpers: Almighty Creator, Great Spirit, we ask that you will always guide the parents, grandparents and godparents of [baby's name], along with everyone here and not here who holds him/her in love. May you give them the wisdom to know how to guide, the strength and sustenance to protect, and your eternal light to inspire this precious child. May you be with them in times of difficulty, and lead them through times of uncertainty. May you comfort and lead them, that they might be fully equipped to mother and father their dear daughter/son. Be with them always. And may we, the people who love [parents' names] and their newborn [baby's name] be diligent in our support for them and for the care, wellbeing and healthy raising of this child. May it be so.

Minister invites congregation to sit.

3. Reflection

Reflection (brief address): On the gift of new life and the promise of a new life ahead.

4. Anointing and naming

Anointing (optional; addressed directly to the baby): [Baby's name], we now come to mark this special moment by placing a little oil on the crown of your head, so that you might know that you are special and blessed by the One who has given you life.

Minister rubs a small amount of oil onto the baby's head and says: With this oil, we mark your special and sacred majesty, dear one. You are at one with All That Is. You are protected. You are blessed.

Naming: Now, your parents will let you know the name that they have chosen for you. This is a special name, carefully and lovingly chosen for you. It means [meaning of the name, e.g. characteristics it embodies]. May you show the world these beautiful qualities of yours. (Minister turns to parents:) Mum and dad, what name do you now offer to your daughter/son?

Parents: We offer you this, your precious name [full name], with our love.

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Blessing: [Baby's full name], as you are a gift for us, we offer this, your name, as a gift for you. May you always be held in the care of the Light of the Universe, may you grow into a strong and beautiful person, a blessing for those who come to know you.

5. Blessing and Closing

And now, as we end our time together today, let us go forward with gratitude for the new joy that's been given to us in [baby's name], in celebration of his/her coming, and in friendship. Before our closing prayer, I would just like to read a few words from a poem by Thomas Hardy.

Reading:

I am the family face;

Flesh perishes, I live on,

Projecting trait and trace

Through time to times anon,

And leaping from place to place

Over oblivion.

– From *Heredity*, Thomas Hardy

A blessing for the gathered congregation, as we end our time together today: May our hearts be filled with the light that surpasses all understanding. May we be filled with awe, respect and love for [baby's name], for her/his [parents], [grandparents] and [godparents]. And may we now all go in joy and peace, strengthened and blessed by our coming together today, living in the grace of The One Whom we may call our protector and provider. Amen.

Closing music, as guests prepare to leave: J. S. Bach / *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II* (or chosen by parents).