Baptism is the sacrament by which persons become part of the body of Christ. It has three dimensions. Persons are stripped of all that stands between them and Christ – through confessing sins. Then, following their public affirmation of faith in the God of Jesus Christ they are washed, which is both a cleansing and healing action and also a drowning of sin in a manner reminiscent of the drowning of the Israelites’ oppressors in the Red Sea. Finally they are clothed, an action that commissions and empowers them for service in the Church.

As baptism represents initiation into the Body of Christ and the universal Christian Church, we ask those desiring baptism for themselves or their children to indicate which congregation you intend to join. For those who already have a home church, we ask those requesting baptism in Duke University Chapel to notify the pastor of their home church of their intention to celebrate their baptism at Duke Chapel. For those still seeking a home church, we invite you to join the Congregation at Duke University Chapel, an inter-denominational congregation within Duke Chapel, by the time of the baptism.

Those considering baptism for themselves or their children or grandchildren must be full-time Duke students, Duke graduates, members of the Congregation at Duke University Chapel, or full-time employees of Duke University/Duke University Health System. Before approaching the Chapel to make a booking, you should arrange for a minister to conduct the ceremony. The minister should preferably be from the congregation of the person making the booking, but in any event the minister must be ordained or recognized in an equivalent manner by his or her Christian denomination. The minister will expect to offer those considering baptism for themselves or their children some preparation before agreeing to do a baptism. A large font is used for baptisms in Duke University Chapel and baptism by immersion is not available.

Because baptism involves the public affirmation of faith and commissioning for service in the Church, it therefore belongs in public worship. This emphasis is modified at Duke Chapel by three factors:

- the general character of the 11 a.m. Sunday service with its choral and preaching traditions and very large congregation
- the desire, at least during semesters, to keep the focus on students
- the practice in many churches of permitting ‘private’ baptisms outside public worship

For these reasons Duke Chapel maintains a ‘mixed economy’ in regard to baptisms. It offers four occasions each year when space is made available in the Sunday 11 a.m. service for baptisms for Congregation members and current Duke students. All those considering baptism for themselves or their children are encouraged to become part of the Congregation and to see these occasions as the regular time for such ceremonies. Typically, baptisms will be celebrated on a Sunday in the Easter season (usually the Sunday after Easter), Pentecost (April or May), Baptism of our Lord (January) and on All Saints’ Sunday (first Sunday in November).

However this is a University Chapel, and it explicitly seeks to offer opportunities for members of the University to celebrate key moments in their lives in prayerful ways. It also recognizes the diversity of the Christian tradition. Therefore if those considering baptism for themselves or their children do
not feel it would be appropriate for the ceremony to be part of a University service, they are welcome to seek to hold a baptism on another occasion.

Reservations for such ceremonies must be made through the Chapel Events Coordinator not more than one year in advance. The ceremonies should normally be conducted on Sundays following University worship, i.e. 1:00 p.m. Services are generally performed without music. There are several weekends during the year when baptisms may not be scheduled due to other events in the Chapel. The ceremony may take place in the Chapel crossing or the Memorial Chapel. There is no charge for a baptism, although a donation is welcome. (Checks made payable to Duke University Chapel).

A baptism is never a private matter, but a change in the identity of the person being baptized from being fundamentally an individual to being fundamentally a member of a deeper body, the body of Christ, stretching beyond the bounds of time and death, and entering the communion of saints. Therefore anyone may attend a baptism, and the Chapel is not closed to visitors during a baptism. A baptism is different from a wedding, in that a wedding is primarily a contract undertaken between two people in the presence of two witnesses, and therefore a private arrangement to which others may be invited; whereas a baptism is a covenant between the person, the Church, and God, and thus a cause of celebration for the whole Church.

For various reasons a family sometimes wishes to hold a thanksgiving or dedication ceremony after the birth of a child. For the reasons stated above this only becomes part of the Sunday 11 a.m. service in exceptional circumstances. However those who wish to hold such a ceremony in Duke Chapel are welcome to do so. No minister need be present, and we do not charge for the reservation, although again a donation would be welcome, and the Chapel is not closed for such ceremonies. No music is normally played. Ceremonies should be booked with the Events Coordinator and would normally happen on Sundays as for baptisms.

Chapel Event Coordinator 919 684-8150
Pastor, Congregation at Duke University Chapel 919 684-3917
Duke University Chapel
Baptism Reservation Form

Please complete and return to: Chapel Events Coordinator, Duke University Chapel, Box 90974, Durham, NC 27708-0974.

Name of Infant/Person to be Baptized:

Name and Contact Information of Parents/Baptized:

Affiliation with Duke University:

Person Officiating (Clergy/Minister):

Date and Time of Baptism:

Location (Memorial Chapel or Nave Crossing):

While there is no charge for a baptism, a donation to the Chapel is welcome.

Please confirm this reservation by telephone (919-684-8150) or by email (sara.blaine@duke.edu) at least ten days before the date of the Baptism.