

BABY DEDICATION PREPARATION PACKET

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Dear Friend:

Your family is about to take one of the most important steps in your child's life and we here at Bethel Church rejoice and celebrate with you. The materials enclosed in this packet will help you in preparation for this next step in your child's spiritual journey. It is important that you to make full use of the information provided and jot down any questions you may wish to ask. This packet serves as a way for you to become acquainted with our theology about infant baptism and to provide some basic instructions about the baby dedication process. Please complete the "Baby Dedication Information Form" and return it to the Church Office. This provides us with information for a Dedication Certificate that we will mail to you.

Please note dedications are not a sacrament of the church and may be done privately apart from the congregation on a Saturday afternoon or at other times in the family home. Parents may also schedule the dedication during the Sunday morning worship services. We look forward to hearing from you soon. Please let me know if you have any questions.

In His Service,

Pastor Sidney Williams

BABY DEDICATION

WHAT IS INFANT BAPTISM?

The African Methodist Episcopal Church only baptizes infants who will become preparatory members of a local church and whose parents are active members of the same church. Those baptized in infancy or childhood cease to be preparatory members at 17 years of age according to the Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church. If the baptized person does not become a professing Christian while yet a teenager, the invitation and claim of God are still there at the ages of twenty or forty or eighty — waiting to be taken up by a response of faith. However, the AME Church does not permit a second baptism by water. Instead we believe that the second baptism will be by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). See Baptism Preparation Packet for more information about baptism services at Bethel.

WHAT IS A BABY DEDICATION?

At Bethel Church of Morristown, we realize that many parents who are not active members of our congregations may still desire to participate in a public ceremony that acknowledges their commitment as Christian parents and recognizes their need for God's help and guidance. Instead of baptism, we encourage parents to consider a baby dedication. While this is not a sacrament of the church, we do find several examples in the Bible of parents bringing their children to be prayed over and dedicated to the Lord by spiritual leadership. At Bethel, we call this a baby dedication.

A baby dedication is a ceremony in which believing parent(s)—and sometimes entire families— make a commitment before the Lord to submit a child to God's will and to raise that child according to God's Word and principles. By dedicating a child Christian parents are making a commitment to God to do everything within their power to raise that child in a godly way until they can make a decision on their own to follow God. Parents who make this commitment are instructed to raise the child in accordance with God's standards. Some of the responsibilities include:

- Leadership: Teaching, training, praying and setting standards for their child in accordance with God's Word.
- Modeling: Demonstrating an example of godliness, as well as modeling grace and forgiveness in their lives and home.
- Community: Participating in a community of faith to expose their child to community worship, discipleship, Christian service and community outreach.
- Dependence: To seek God's strength, grace and wisdom in raising a child.

Since a baby dedication to Christ fundamentally involves parental dedication to Christ, only those parents who have personally trusted in Christ as their Forgiver and who earnestly strive to follow Him as their Leader will be “eligible” to participate in this ceremony. If this is true for only one spouse, that spouse may dedicate their child alone and the other spouse is welcome and encouraged to observe the dedication in the ceremony.

Often, godparents or sponsors take a special responsibility to support the parents and for the spiritual welfare of the child. If you wish to include an individual or couple who is willing to take on the role of a godparent or sponsor, you are welcome to invite them to do so. They may stand behind you at the time of the dedication as an indication for their supportive role. If they are comfortable in doing so, they may place their hands upon your shoulder(s) as you express your vows and as you offer your words of dedication. Some of the responsibilities include:

- Regularly pray for your godchild and the child’s parent(s)
- Set an example of Christian living
- Encourage, support, and advise the parent or parents in their parenting, and spiritual nurture of their child or children; if the parent is married, offer the same to the couple in their marriage relationship.
- Give every encouragement to the godchild to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ

ARE BABY DEDICATIONS BIBLICAL?

Yes, baby dedications have a Biblical precedent. The Bible teaches us that children are a gift from God saying, “Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him” (Psalm 127:3 – NLT). As Christian parents, we are called to recognize that children belong first and foremost to God. God has given us the awesome responsibility of caring for this gift, as well as the wonderful privilege of enjoying them. Deuteronomy 6:4-7 commands parents to love God and to accept their responsibility to provide spiritual environment for their children to grow and develop in their own faith. We are told in 1 Samuel 1 that Hannah presented her son Samuel to the Lord. In Luke 2:22 we read that Mary and Joseph brought their baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem in order to present him before the Lord. Baby dedications are a modern way for Christian parents to make the same expression of faith.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A BABY DEDICATION?

Dedications are usually scheduled at the conclusion of one of Bethel’s Sunday morning worship services. Each dedication consists of the following:

- **Pre-Service Meeting:** A member of the pulpit staff will meet the parent(s) before service to brief them about how the dedication will be introduced and any logistics involved.
- **Introduction:** A member of the pulpit staff will introduce the family and ask them to assemble at the altar while making a brief statement about the purpose of baby dedications.
- **Pastoral Encouragement:** A member of the pulpit staff will give the parent(s) a brief word of encouragement concerning how to raise their child in a Christ-centered home.
- **Pastoral Prayer:** A member of the pulpit staff will then ask to hold the child (infants) or place their hand upon them (if older) while they pray a prayer of blessing upon them.
- **Presentation:** After the prayer, a member of the pulpit staff will present the child to the congregation and an Officer of the church will present the parent(s) with a dedication certificate.
- **Conclusion:** The family will return to their pew.

HOW DOES A PARENT SCHEDULE A BABY DEDICATION?

Dedications are not a sacrament of the church and may be done privately apart from the congregation on a Saturday afternoon or at other times in the family home. Parents may also schedule the dedication during the Sunday morning worship services. The process begins by:

- **Parent Request:** Interested parents should email the church office expressing their interest for the dedication ceremony. Unfortunately, we can only entertain requests by the parent(s) and not extended family.
- **Coordination:** A member of the pulpit staff will respond with information about the nature of baby dedications and evaluate the worship service calendar and propose potential dates.
- **Scheduling:** A member of the pulpit staff will then confirm the day with the parent(s) and schedule the baby dedication.

Prior to the dedication service, please fill out the attached “Baby Dedication Information” form and return it to the Church Office. This provides us with information for a Dedication Certificate that we will mail to you.

The following is a sample of the baby dedication service. This is provided to you in advance so that on the day of dedication, you will be enabled to dedicate your child with a full understanding of its significance. It is a public vow that you are making to God before His people. As you do so, I know it will bring God's smile of approval and that He will help you to fulfill your vows and that He will bless your child.

BABY DEDICATION CEREMONY

PRECEDENT OF PURPOSE OF DEDICATION

Let us hear the Word of the Lord as it comes to us in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NLT)

And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.

This is the commandment of God, that we should diligently rear our children in our most holy faith. In obedience to this command, these parents bring their children today to present them to the Lord.

The precedent for the ceremony of baby dedication may be found in Scripture, as in the presentation of Samuel by Hannah and of Jesus by Joseph and Mary. Paul reminded Timothy that "from a child" he had known the sacred Scriptures. Jesus considered "the little ones" infinitely precious, and he said "Permit the children to come to Me, do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

The purpose of baby dedication is really to be found in the purpose of the parents. Rightly understood, the ceremony is one of parental dedication as well as child dedication. The parents are publicly pledging themselves to obey the command of Paul, (Ephesians 6:4 NLT)

“... do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.”

This ceremony is meaningless unless parents dedicate themselves, as well as their child, to God.

- Do not provoke your children to anger - includes building up a child's positive self-image
- Bring them up – this word also includes nourish and nurture
- Discipline (not punish)– this word also includes instruction & spiritual guidance-training
- Instruction – this word also includes warnings & encouragements

COVENANT OF PARENTS

If it be your intention to present your child to the Lord, and to pledge yourselves to "bring your child up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," please answer we do to the following promises:

1. Do you here this day recognize your child as the gift of God, and give heartfelt thanks for God's blessing?
2. Do you here this day dedicate your child to the Lord who gave him or her?
3. Do you here this day pledge as parents that you will bring up your child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?
4. Do you here this day promise to give your child every possible benefit of home, of education, & of the church?
5. Do you here this day ask God's blessings upon your child's life, to guide, guard, and direct your child through all his or her years?

THE ACT OF DEDICATION

Parents will each individually say a word of dedication such as, "Lord Jesus, we present our child (name) to you, believing in your loving care, and with the prayer that (name) would respond to the work of your Spirit to bring him/her to trust in you as Savior." – other dedication samples appear below.

Pastor's brief prayer.

APPLICATION TO ADULTS

There is an important spiritual lesson that we adults are to learn from children, and that is simply to trust our souls to Jesus as a child would: Luke 18:15-17,

"Then people began to bring babies to him so that he could put his hands on them. But when the disciples noticed it, they frowned on them. But Jesus called them to him and said, You must let little children come to me, and you must never prevent their coming. The kingdom of God belongs to little children like these. I tell you, the man who will not accept the kingdom of God like a little child will never get into it at all."

PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATE AND GIFTS

Remarks by God Parents (or other relatives) if present.

Closing Prayer.

That is the conclusion of the ceremony.

BABY DEDICATION INFORMATION FORM

Child's full name (or how you would like it to appear):

Date of birth:

City of birth:

Parent's names as you would like it to appear on the certificate:

We do not expect you to select godparents. However, if you do, please list their name or names in the manner you would like them to appear:

Your post mail address:

Please return this form to the Church Office so that we can fill out the certificate.

NOTES:
