

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

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Baptism

This week my boss, Justin Welby who is the Archbishop of Canterbury, has declared a hope that Prince George's baptism will inspire many others to consider a Christening for their own children. I am certainly hoping to be overrun with requests up here in Blackmoor, Whitehill and Greatham and look forward to your calls! I love a good baptism as it is the type of work we do where everyone is happy and smiling...even if the baby starts crying, everyone else smiles even more!



Since the earliest days of Christianity baptism has been seen as the very first public act of faith, an acknowledgement that we belong to something bigger and better. For that reason Jesus himself came to be baptized by John as a sign of a changing point in his life as he began his public ministry. Infant baptism is a much more recent tradition though. On one hand infant baptism is a celebration of a new life bursting into the world but on a deeper level it is also an exercise in orientation. No parent knows the exact future for their children, but we can be sure that there will be highs and lows, challenges and moments of glory. We don't know if faith will be important to our children. But what we do have is hope. Hope for the best for them, and the opportunity to point them in the right direction as they navigate through the first stages of life. Infant baptism places far greater responsibility on the parents than the child though. Parents and Godparents are asked to pray for the infant, be a good example, encourage them in faith and point them towards a community of believers.

Prince George's Christening was a grand affair, but the principle and the meaning will be exactly the same as for anyone else. George is no more special or valued by God than anyone else. Indeed I doubt if God even recognizes any distinction. For that reason I hope that others do feel encouraged to give it a go. And you don't need to be a baby to have it done. Any age is a good age to explore faith and, if you think it is right for you, make a public declaration like this. Look out for an Alpha Course going on in your area, talk to others who have faith and make up your own mind.

In a few weeks I will be baptizing two older boys up here in Blackmoor by immersing them completely in an inflatable swimming pool - it's going to be fun, different, memorable, meaningful and definitely very wet! It could also be life changing.