

### **Q. What is the difference between baptism and Christening?**

Although the terms ‘baptism’ and ‘Christening’ tend to be used inter-changeably, these refer to two separate acts which are generally incorporated into one ceremony welcoming an individual into the Body of Christ. Baptism, from the Greek word *baptizo* – to submerge, dip, dye, or colour, refers to the act of washing, the use of water to initiate someone into the life of faith. Christening, from the Greek word *Christos* – Anointed (which is where we get the term “Christ”), refers to the anointing of the person’s forehead with oil after the baptism, accompanied by the words ‘*I sign you with the sign of the cross and mark you as Christ’s own forever.*’

Whereas baptism has been consistently practiced in the Christian community since the earliest records of the church, the practice of Christening was, for a time, lost. I know that when I was baptized as a baby, I was not anointed as part of that ceremony. I also know that my baptism was referred to as a Christening. It’s funny how our language and practices get mixed up over time.

In fact, the Christening is a powerful part of the sacrament which we celebrate today. A sacrament is an outward sign of an invisible gift. The outward sign of being anointed with oil has a long and rich history of meaning within our faith tradition, and therefore allows a wealth of meaning to be communicated about what we understand is happening. The Scriptures team with those designated as a “Christ” figure – anointed by God to offer particular work, or serve a particular purpose, in God’s kingdom. Three types of people were typically included in this title Anointed:

1. **Prophets** – the ones who call us to return to God when we have gone away. The Prophet says ‘no’ to the sin and brokenness in our lives, reminding us all that there is always a way home.
2. **Priests** – the ones who offer thanks. The Priest says ‘yes’ to the ways God is visible and active in our world, and calls us to a posture of gratitude.
3. **Kings/Queens** – as seen in Jesus, God’s Royal Family engage in acts of loving service for the sake of the world God loves.

Tate is being anointed for all three of these purposes in his Baptism & Christening today. It’s a tall order. As Christians, our ‘Job Description’ can be summarized with the above three titles. Christians are called to be honest about sin and brokenness, to be grateful for the blessings we are given, and to generously offer ourselves and our resources in service of God’s world. It’s a tall order – for Tate, for all of us. That is why God forms us into community to support one another along the way. And that is why God promises – in Jesus, in Scripture, in bread and wine – to be with us on the journey.