

Baptism

We've already mentioned the magic moment when the first Grandchild arrives; very soon afterwards follows the first decision. What about baptism? Normally one finds that Christian parents want their children to be christened, even though they're not practising themselves and Catholic parents, of course, would want Baptism in the Catholic Church. But the Church has wisely ruled that for a child to be accepted for Baptism, there must be at least a well-based hope that he or she will be brought up as a Catholic. If there is no such hope, Baptism is to be deferred - in the hope, presumably, that the parents might come to a better understanding of the sacrament as a foundation and preparation for life in Christ's Church.

*I*m sure that nowadays the strong support of fervent Grandparents is frequently quoted as the basis for hope for a Catholic upbringing. And certainly, when parents are contemplating this important step, Grandparents should show their support by their prayers and by their unobtrusive but sincere offer of help. For example, a very practical step would

be to offer to look after the baby while the parents attend the preparatory sessions which, nowadays, are held in most parishes before Baptism. In larger parishes, these are often held for groups of parents, which affords a golden opportunity for parents to meet other Catholic parents in the same situation. (All that we say here is especially important, of course,



after the arrival of the first child).

A decision to bring up a child as a Catholic carries with it the prospect of taking the child to Church at a quite early age, and this can be a difficult prospect for parents, especially if their



own observance has become rather slack. But it is a field in which Grandparents are uniquely qualified to help. They have - not too long ago - faced the same prospect themselves and have emerged pleased to find it much easier in practice than they had imagined. They are now in a strong position to advise and reassure. They can also offer real, practical

help. For instance, if they live nearby or visit often, they can accompany the parents (especially as the family grows) and share the burden. Or they can offer to take the children when parents are unwell or when a Mass at another time is more convenient for them. Or they can suggest dividing the family - some children (the more difficult ones) taken by Grandad and Grandma, the others by parents.

It's worth devoting some thought to this question of taking young children to Church, since it can be quite formidable to young and inexperienced parents. Moreover, it is important in its consequences; parents who attend church as a family with their children are thereby ensuring that they remain (or become again) members of the local Catholic community, meeting other families and talking to parents with children of the same age as their own, parents with similar hopes and



ambitions - and also similar problems. This can be enormously important when the next great moments of decision arrive - choice of schools and first Holy Communion, for instance.

But in all the invaluable help they can offer, Grandparents must always remember that they are simply helpers, albeit able and effective ones, and never give the impression that they are taking over control from the parents, who remain always the foremost educators of their own children. Calling to mind their own earlier experience, when their own children were growing up, will be a great safeguard here.