

Introduction to the series

Many schools are increasingly interested in exploring Christianity as a world faith in their religious education and collective worship. In [Where in the World?](#) (BRF, 2018), we sketched out some of the many ways Christians around the world express and live out their faith. The study of church buildings provides another useful window into understanding this multicultural and international phenomenon followed by roughly one-third of people on the planet.

Church buildings reflect a country's history, its human geography and the beliefs and traditions of that branch of the Christian world that uses them. Across the world, many churches of a similar tradition ('denomination') will show international similarities in design and usage, while others reflect their local cultures and communities. Each has a story to tell that reflects something of the Jesus story that has affected billions of people through the centuries.

Each of the churches in this series supplements others that can be found in [Churches from around the World](#) (BRF, 2019).

As with the collection of [crosses from around the world](#), the overall aim remains the same:

- to enable children and adults to see churches through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why they continue to be significant places for so many communities;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived out their faith together using buildings like this.

You will need to show photos of the following three baptismal fonts together on one screen:

[Font in Uttstein monastery church, Norway \(photo\)](#)

[Font in Alnmouth friary, UK \(photo\)](#)

[Font in Brinkburn priory, UK \(photo\)](#)

[All three fonts together](#)

You will also need a realistic looking baby doll and a bowl of water, if you want to re-enact a christening, plus items to demonstrate some of the things we can do with water, such as a water pistol if appropriate.

Introduction: three fonts

Show the three images on one display screen.



Let's play a game. Here are three pictures of three objects. In what way could you say two are similar to each other, and one is different? (*Discuss in pairs and feed back answers.*)

If it doesn't emerge in feedback, explain that all three are found inside churches, and each one is called a font.

No, that's not a style of typeface we write with on a laptop. This font is short for fountain. Each one is designed for a purpose involving water. Does anyone know what?

Baptism. At some point early on, every Christian around the world is baptised with water. It's a sign of the old life dying and the new life beginning as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Some people call it being 'christened', but it means the same thing.

All sorts of people can be baptised or christened at the start of their Christian lives - babies, children, young people and adults - depending on the type of church they belong to. If they're old enough, they will make promises to God, but for babies some churches have the parents making the promises on their behalf, until the child is old enough to make the promises for themselves. In some churches, after the promises are made, that person is sprinkled with water and prayed for.

You could re-enact a 'christening' with the doll here.

In other churches, they go completely under the water - so some Christians will be baptised at their local swimming pool, river, lake or even their nearest beach, where they are dunked in the sea! But why do Christians do this? It's all about starting a fresh new life with God.

Development 1: a fresh start

Let's think of all the things we can do with water.

1. We need water to live. Without it, we will die. (That's why drinking water is a Good Thing.) Our bodies need a good supply of fresh water through the day, to work well. We can drink it, dilute drinks with it, mix things up with it, freeze it into ice lollies.
2. We also use water for washing ourselves, for cleaning our hair and teeth, for cleaning our clothes, for cleaning knives and forks and plates and everything we use for eating and drinking.
3. And we can use water for fun! We can swim in it, shoot it with water pistols, float boats and rubber rings on it, and even go sailing on it. When the weather is hot, we can cool ourselves down with it!
4. But water can be dangerous too. We can drown in it (Careful!) if it gets into the lungs we use for breathing. That's why it's good to learn to swim and float, to learn about lifesaving and to be careful near deep water.
5. And water can contain germs that could make us sick if we drink it. In the past, where was the best water for drinking or washing? In streams, where the water was moving, where the water had come fresh from the mountain snow and rain, and there was less chance of pollution. But



we now know that even then, water like that still needs to be cleaned and boiled first before drinking, to remove germs.

So, we need water to live, but it might be dangerous too!

And Baptism is about a kind of death and a new life as well. When Christians get baptised, it's saying that their old way of life is dying, and a new life with God through Jesus Christ is beginning. Instead of doing whatever they feel like and not caring, a Christian has to listen out for what God might be saying that's new, to work out what to do next. That's big!

In Egypt, when Orthodox Christians are being baptised, they first make their promises to God by facing west, where the sun sets, to say goodbye to the old life. Then, they turn east, to welcome in the new life with Christ. And they all get to wear special crowns, because for them baptism is a sign of hope as they join God's royal family of faith.

I wonder... were you christened or baptised long ago? Do you know what happened? If you knew someone in your class was going to be baptised soon, what might be your most interesting questions for them? And I wonder how they might answer?

Reflection

I wonder what's got you thinking most, about this? Is it the water... or the idea of making a fresh start... or something else?

Prayer: the words of an old song

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.
His mercies never come to an end.
They are new every morning, new every morning.
Great is your faithfulness, O Lord. Great is your faithfulness.
Thank you, Lord. Amen*

Development 2: the candle

This story uses a 'christening' to explore the experience of having a new sibling with special needs, from a child's perspective.

Has anyone here got a younger brother or sister? Do you remember what it was like when they were first born? What did you feel like? (*Discuss.*)

Here's a story about someone getting a new brother.

The candle

Helen watched the priest take her little brother in his arms. Her brother looked very small. He was wrapped in a large white christening shawl that had been in the family for years. His little wrinkled face made him look like an old man, although his eyes showed he was very curious about everything happening around him.

Helen watched as the priest carried her brother towards the font, which was a big bowl of water on a wooden stand. She knew what was going to happen next. Her parents had already made the promises to bring Paul up to follow Jesus. Now it was time for the water.

She thought about the day she'd gone with Dad to see her new brother, right after he was born in hospital. The grown-ups were using all sorts of long words, but she'd gathered that Paul was a very special baby. The hospital had to keep him warm and snuggled up in a large clear plastic box that would help him to breathe more easily. Helen was allowed to reach inside the box through a special hole to touch his little hand. He was very small. It was hard to believe he could grow any bigger.

They'd also gone to see Mum, who was sitting up in bed nearby. She looked tired, but she smiled when Helen gave her the flowers. It was only when Paul and Mum came home that Dad had sat down to have a special talk with her.

'Helen, you know that people were saying that Paul is special? Well, he is. He has something called Downs' Syndrome. That means he will find it very hard to learn and remember things, and he will need lots of help to grow up, lots more help than you ever needed. I'm telling you this now, because in future, you might feel that we love him more than we love you because we have to spend so much time caring for him. Well, that wouldn't be true, because we both love you just as much - but we now have someone else who needs our love as well. Do you understand that?'

Helen nodded.

Dad continued, 'It means we'll need your help in caring for him too. He'll need a big sister to play with and show him what to do. Do you think you can help with that?'

Helen wasn't sure. 'I don't know yet,' she said.

Dad left it there for now.

The priest was now holding her brother over the font, pouring water over his head, saying, 'I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I sign you with the sign of the cross, the sign of Christ.' He made the mark of the cross on Paul's forehead. There were some more words, and then Paul was given back to Mum.

Then the priest lit a candle, and turned towards Helen. 'Helen,' he said, 'sometimes when a child is baptised, we give a lighted candle to the brother or sister to show that their help is important too. It shows that Paul has passed from darkness to light. Paul will need your help as he grows up in God's



world. Will you shine as a light in the world as you hold this light for him?’

She thought hard, then stretched out her hand to take the candle. With a loud, clear voice, Helen answered so loudly, people could hear it at the back of the church. ‘Yes! I will!’

Prayer/reflection

Think for a moment about any younger children in your own family, or somebody you know who is younger than you. I’ll say this prayer – if you agree with it, then say ‘Amen’ at the end.

Father God, thank you for our younger brothers and sisters, and thank you for all our friends who are younger than we are. Help us to care for them and to set them a good example, so they grow up doing good things. Amen