



Inviting baptism families at Halloween

Some parents aren't sure quite what to feel about Hallowe'en – is it just harmless fun, or are there aspects of it that don't fit in with how we want to see the world? A child's christening service is very honest about the reality of good and evil, and Hallowe'en can be a good time to talk about those things and how the love of Jesus can be a 'light in the darkness' for everyone.

The word "hallowe'en" actually means "the eve of all hallows' day" – in other words, the night before the church's festival celebrating All Saints. A Saint is sometimes thought to be an exceptionally holy person – someone really special, who did extraordinary things because of their faith in God.

The famous saints are all amazing examples of what it's like to live God's way. But in the Bible, St Paul calls all Christians saints – a saint is simply a friend of God, who seeks to live their life according to God's purposes. When someone is christened, they truly become a Saint, so All Saints' day is a celebration of the whole family of God.

Halloween can be a really good time to reconnect with baptism families and invite them to church to something different to a traditional Halloween party. Here are some ideas that are fun and will bless others too.

Light Party

Think about holding a light party' with fun activities for children and young people – these events are a lovely way to focus on all that's life-giving and positive around All Hallows.

Some churches also have a special service for All Souls day – a time when we remember our loved ones who have died. There might be an opportunity to go and light a candle to remember someone – even small children grieve in their own way, and may find comfort in this simple action.

Carve a pumpkin

Did you know that gargoyles (the scary looking faces carved in stone on churches) were originally made in medieval times to scare away evil spirits? The pumpkins with scary faces carved into them at Hallowe'en are a bit like that. But nowadays most people believe that you can't fight evil with evil – you can only fight evil by doing good, and that good will always win in the end.

So why not see if you can carve a friendly looking pumpkin this Hallowe'en, as a sign that you and your family are going to be a force for good this Hallowe'en? (And you can always use the offcuts from your pumpkin to make delicious soup!)

You can do the same with Hallowe'en costumes: superheroes make a great, positive alternative to scary witches and ghosts.

Give a treat

Not everyone is comfortable with the idea of children going round to neighbours' and just asking for treats. But if you don't want them to miss out on something their friends are doing, why not have a family baking session, and take a tray of cookies with you if you go out with them? Even little children can help stick a smiley face on an iced biscuit. That way, you have something lovely to give away to your neighbours, too!

Safety first

Many children's fancy dress costumes are highly flammable, so best to avoid real candles and flames. Many churches these days use small battery powered candles instead. If you can afford to buy a multipack of these electric candles they can be kept for other occasions such as Christingle.

Say a goodnight prayer

Even if you've steered clear of scary costumes, and even if your child has loved the evening, it can be reassuring to have a goodnight prayer that reminds them that love, and light, and good, are always going to be stronger than fear and evil. The ancient service of Compline (Night Prayer) has been used as this reminder for centuries, and many of its prayers are still well known today:

*Visit this place, O Lord, we pray
and drive far from it all snares of the enemy;
let your holy angels dwell with us
to preserve us in peace;
and let your blessing be upon us always
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Or, in a simpler children's version:

*Be with us, Lord,
and take away all fear,
may your angels protect us
and give us peace.
And bless us always.
Amen.*

You can encourage families to use these lovely prayers any time when they need a reminder that God is with them – especially at the end of a difficult day, or when something sad has happened.