

Where did the idea of a godparent come from?

During Jesus' time, the people who changed their lives to follow him were Jews, steeped in the Bible and religious traditions. But as the church grew, new Christians had no knowledge of the special salvation history that began with Creation and led to the birth of the Messiah, nor did they know of the prophecies and the law which our Lord did not come to nullify but to fulfill.

So they became "catechumens" or people in the process of learning. They sought a "sponsor," a knowledgeable Christian to instruct, guide and pray with them. This was the beginning of the idea of "godparent."

For as long as three years, they would follow a serious routine of study, prayer, self-examination and frequent questioning by the bishop or elder.

They attended the instructional part of the Christian worship but left before communion was consecrated and distributed. We still retain a memory of this in our *Badarak* when the people sing *Marmin Deroonagan* (*the body of the Lord . . .*) and the deacon intones "*Mi vok herakhayitz*" (*let none of the catechumens . . . be present at this divine mystery*).

godparents

When they were ready to be baptized and become fully participating Christians, they were presented to the bishop, the men by their "fathers" and women by their "mothers." These early godparents would vouch for the readiness of their godchildren. The ideal day for baptisms was Easter Sunday; Lent was a time of intensive preparation.

As entire households were baptized, infant baptism entered the church very quickly. And with it, the continuing need for a sponsor and spiritual mentor who would pledge to support the person's Christian growth.

Today, baptism styles vary. Some churches gently lay the person down into the water and then lift them out again, as if being laid into a grave. Others sprinkle or pour water over the head of the child; still others submerge the child fully in water. All these styles are meant to suggest a death to the old way, a sharing in the death of Christ himself and then, as we are taken out of the water three times, in his resurrection.



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judgements

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