

**August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2026**

**Lammas and Baptism**

**10.30am Holy Communion and baptism at All Saints  
Oakham**

*Leviticus 23.9-14, 1 Corinthians 15.12-20, Luke 2.21-24*

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I suspect that it passed most of you by, but yesterday was the festival of Lammas, the festival of “first fruits”, the start of the harvest, a very ancient festival, but still celebrated in agricultural communities. The word derives from the Old English words for “loaf mass” when a loaf is presented in church baked from the newly harvested grain, and used as communion bread – and indeed that is what will have happened at St Edmunds in Egleston this morning and at S. Peters Brooke this evening. It is a celebration of God’s provision, and the dedication to him of the first fruits of the harvest. Similar festivals can be found in a range of other countries and cultures – for example Lunasa in Ireland where it is one of the four major calendar feasts that occur on the first days of February, May, August and November. Lammas has a distinctively harvest aspect, and, as we can see from our Old Testament reading, something similar was practiced in Israel 3000 or more years ago. There we read of a sheaf of wheat, the first fruits of the harvest, being offered by the priest, together with the sacrifice of a lamb, and the offering of flour and wine.

In Israel, this led to the concept of offering the first borne animal or child, as the first fruits of the womb, to God, and it became a tradition that the first born child should be brought to the temple and presented before the priests there. We can see the outworking of that tradition in the story of the infant Jesus in the gospel reading, where Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, the mark of his incorporation into the covenant that the Jewish people has with God, and given his name, which means Yahweh is salvation or God saves. Then on the 40th day after his birth he was brought into the Temple and presented before God, and the customary sacrifices offered.

And in this we can see that the festival of Lammas is, perhaps surprisingly, rather an appropriate time for a baptism. Their parents today bring Harriet and Eloise for baptism, and one aspect of this is simply presenting them to God, in thankfulness and praise for their birth and their growth, and asking for God’s blessing and protection on them. A time of joy and thanksgiving.

But there is much more to baptism than that. The liturgy we will use this morning has some remarkably rich language. Could I ask you to turn to your Worship for the Week please on page 14, to the prayer that I will use in a few moments time at the font – the prayer over the water. In this prayer baptism is described in terms of two images. Firstly the prayer give thanks to God for his gift of water,

*to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life.*

Water, the necessity of life, needed for all things to grow and flourish, for the wheat to grow and the grain to fill, for the Lammas loaf to be made. Then baptism is related to the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, from slavery to freedom through the waters of the Red Sea

*Through water you led the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.*

And the prayer then talks of baptism in terms of washing away all our sins, all that stops us becoming the person God wants us to be.

*Now sanctify this water that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, they may be cleansed from sin and born again.*

But the prayer also speaks of baptism in terms of another, perhaps darker, image, that of death and resurrection.

*We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection.*

And this is the core of the matter, the guts of Christianity. Jesus left his divinity aside to become a man, died on the cross and rose again, so that our sins might be forgiven and that we might be free to live as he intended for us. Baptism is the beginning the Christian life, of following Jesus, who broke the power of death and rose to new life – a new life that is promised to us his followers. A life that begins now and continues beyond the grave, beyond physical death. Being a Christian isn't just about leading a good life, caring for others, caring for the world. It is about these things of course, and we are all called to follow Jesus's teaching and example, but at its centre is this hope of eternal life, following Jesus through death and resurrection. Baptism is a sign and promise of that.

The Lammas reading that was used for our second lesson, from one of St Paul's letters to the Corinthians is a strong proclamation of the truth of the resurrection and ends with the words

*Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.*

Jesus, the first to break the bonds of death, the first fruits of the greater harvest, the resurrection of the dead.

So we bring these children to baptism today, giving thanks for them, asking for God's blessing on their lives. Promises will be made on their behalf, that we will help them, as far as we are able, to become followers of Jesus and, as they grow up, to know his love in deeper and deeper ways and to follow his example and calling. But ultimately baptism is a sign, a sacrament, of being raised to new life, a life that begins in the here and now, and extends beyond the grave.

In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen