

Bris or Brit milah (ritual circumcision)

According to Jewish law, a healthy baby boy is circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. The *brit milah*, the ritual ceremony of removing the foreskin which covers the glans of the penis, is a simple surgical procedure that can take place in the home or synagogue and marks the identification of a baby boy as a Jew.

The ceremony is traditionally conducted by a *mohel*, a highly trained and skilled individual, although a rabbi in conjunction with a physician may perform the *brit milah*. The *brit milah* is a joyous occasion for the parents, relatives and friends who celebrate in this momentous event.

At the *brit milah*, it is customary to appoint a *kvater* (a man) and a *kvaterin* (a woman), the equivalent of Jewish godparents, whose ritual role is to bring the child into the room for the circumcision. Another honor bestowed on a family member is the *sandak*, who is most often the baby's paternal grandfather or great-grandfather. This individual traditionally holds the baby during the circumcision ceremony.

The service involves a *kiddush* (prayer over wine), the circumcision, blessings, a *dvar torah* (a small teaching of the Torah) and the presentation of the Jewish name selected for the baby. During the *brit milah*, a chair is set aside for Elijah the prophet. Following the ceremony, a *seudat mitzvah* (celebratory meal) is available for the guests.

Please take note:

- Formal invitations for a *bris* are not sent out. Typically, guests are notified by phone or email.
- The baby's name is not given before the *bris*. Parents often do not divulge the name before the ceremony.
- A weekday *bris* is often held early in the morning to show that we are eager to perform the *mitzvah* without delay. Guests go to work or school after the ceremony.
- A *bris* is a celebratory event for the community. It is appropriate to bring children of any age.
- During or immediately before the meal, the parents of the child may speak about why they chose the names that they chose for their son. Because it is traditional for Ashkenazi Jews to name their children after someone who has died, people often use this time to speak about the person after whom their son has been named—what made that person special and what qualities that person had that they hope to pass on to their son.
- Since a *bris* will often take place on a weekday morning, work attire is appropriate. Otherwise, choose clothes suitable for any family party—festive but not suggestive.