

## CHURCH BABIES

Do you know what a "church baby" is? Of course, you probably have infants and toddlers in your church nursery, but they are the real-live crying and diaper-wetting kind! However, in Elsie's time, "church babies" were tiny, old-fashioned dolls that a very young child would carry to church. Unlike a rattle or some noisy toy, these were perfectly acceptable for even the strictest parents because they were . . . well, silent!

Made simply from things they had at home, mothers showed their ingenuity by creating these tiny dolls that would amuse their wriggling children. And so, church babies were born! And like all handmade items, no two are exactly alike - which is what makes it that much more fun. If you had been born in Elsie's day, it is likely that you would have had a "church baby" in your carriage as your parents pushed it to church. Oh, what a sweet scene! But we have work to do!

One of the ministries that would benefit from these sweet and easy-to-make dolls is your own church nursery. Perhaps, if you and your friends made enough "church babies," then they could be given as a special token to each infant that is dedicated or baptized in your church. You could always make some for the nursery workers to keep on hand for that little one who just needs a special plaything while at church.

Or maybe you could see to it that there were always several of these dolls in a pretty basket for guests who visit with small children. Think of it! A new couple attends your worship services with their very young boy. He is fidgety, he is fussy, and because his parents are strangers and probably a little nervous, too, they keep him with them in the pew. What if someone were to hand the baby (or toddler) a "church baby" -- with a blue ribbon, of course! -- as a welcome gift? His parents would be grateful for the thoughtfulness and hospitality of your church and the small boy would be . . . well, silent! It's just the sort of gracious, little gesture that goes a long way toward making strangers into friends.

There are so many other uses for these soft, sweet dolls. How about the nursery of a local hospital, or a day care center, or pre-school, or any place that has small children that need to be reassured and loved. And there is hardly a sweeter baby gift than a handcrafted "church baby" for a new sister or brother or cousin or other newborn!

As always, use your wonderful creativity, and be generous and sweet in your giving. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver," the Bible says! So enjoy this next activity and spread good cheer. You are sure to be rewarded in smiles and thanks beyond what you can imagine.

## HOW TO MAKE CHURCH BABIES

Materials needed: Handkerchiefs (large men's handkerchiefs are good for the boys and lacy, embroidered or pretty ones are sweet for the girls); cotton balls or polyester batting, fine point fabric markers or paint pens, rubber bands, satin ribbon (blue, pink, green, yellow, peach and white), and scissors.

This craft is very, very easy! Why not have a "church baby" get-together and make lots of these dolls? First, all you do is take the handkerchief and pull it up in the center. Stuff the "head" with cotton until it feels soft but firm enough to draw a face on. Then wrap a rubber band to secure the "head" in place. What you should have at this point is a round ball, a fairly tight neck and a flowing gown. You may need to adjust and play with it yourself to get it to look just the way you want it.

Next, you'll design and draw a very simple face. Remember these are for young children and it's often better to let them use their active imaginations than to fill in too much detail. Besides, these are very tiny dolls and it might be overpowering or look more like a clown than an angel! A simple dot for each eye, maybe eyebrows, a tiny nose and a sweet mouth and you are done with the face. If you want you may draw or paint hair, but it usually looks really fine without it. It's up to you. However, don't add any buttons or glued on items or yarn hair that a child could swallow!

Now, the final step of the craft is as easy as the rest. Take some ribbon - blue for boys and pink for girls (use other colors when you don't know the gender of the child and for variety's sake!) and wrap that around the neck covering the rubber band. Tie it in a firm knot, then make a pretty bow and let the rest of the ribbon stream down onto the handkerchief. Important: after you have secured the ribbon, snip the rubber band away and remove all traces of it. We don't want anybody choking! Babies and young children love to stroke the satiny edges of blankets and dolls -- for some reason it is a comfort to them. So, don't scrimp on the ribbon! Be lavish with it. It's part of the old-fashioned charm and it's the only colorful part of the church baby. In fact, if you choose to, you may make an all-white "angel church baby" using white ribbon on a pure white hankie. Then you can add tiny dots for eyes and a smile using a gold or silver paint pen. Simply lovely!

So there you have it -- easy as pie. (Well, maybe easy as eating a pie is more like it!) Have a great time and feel free to experiment with different sizes and face designs and ribbon colors, but remember -- absolutely nothing that would choke a child, okay? Okay! God bless you as your hands do the work of the Lord. Be Creative and Have fun!