

WHAT MAKES *a perfect* godparent?

As the new royal parents prepare for baby George's private christening, Alex Williams reflects on how we choose godparents

Officially godparents attend a child's baptism and later offer spiritual guidance. Yet with the royal baby George being the future "Defender of the Faith, Supreme Governor of the Church of England" and more, the burden of choosing godparents would sit heavier on Kate and William than on most of us.

While the vast majority of us are not churchgoers, many of us still want to get married in a church. We then go on to appoint godparents and have our babies christened, so – even though I'm an agnostic and my husband is the sort of atheist that makes Richard Dawkins look undecided – when our first child was born nine years ago, we did exactly that.

As the old saying goes, you don't get to choose your family, so it's brilliant that you get a chance to label some of your favourite friends as special people in the lives of your children.

We opted for people we love and wanted in some way to honour as godparents. We were instinctive and haphazard in our choices, so now one of our three children has a far more diligent set than the other two, just as my elder brother did. This clearly still rankles today!

Everyone we asked said yes, although one insists on being referred to as a "godless father". We were lucky. One aspirational acquaintance asked someone distinguished and a little bit famous to be godmother to her firstborn, who politely turned down the request.

We smiled at her pretensions, but perhaps she was right to look upon choosing godparents as a way of getting

your child ahead in life, along with the private tutoring and the piano lessons.

Years ago, my flatmate went out with a jobless wastrel who, nonetheless, lived alone in a splendid house in Mayfair. It belonged to his godmother, while other "spiritual guides" in his life included a famous popstar and a captain of industry.

The really materialist parent looks to those with lots to leave and no children to leave it to. Back before they could adopt or choose surrogacy, gay men, with their disposable income and good taste, were a good bet. Elton John, for example, has ten godchildren, including two Beckhams, a Lennon and Liz Hurley's son.

"The people we chose are not the richest or most influential, but the kindest and funniest"

He has, however, failed to reciprocate, choosing instead Lady Gaga for both his sons, illustrating the godparent-as-fashion-signifier school of thought.

We know a wealthy childless couple whose will leaves the proceeds of selling their vast townhouse to their godchildren, while author Jeanette Winterson pays for the private education of her two god-daughters. All of which makes me feel rather sorry for my three godchildren, who are lucky to get a £20 iTunes voucher from me at Christmas.

It's not just material wealth that the forward-thinking parent should



target. There's also prestige. While I'm sure Prince Charles is an excellent spiritual guide, is that the only reason he has 28 godchildren? Still, he's a slacker in comparison to his great-grandmother Queen Victoria, who had more than 50.

Power and influence are always useful qualities, especially when it comes with an ability to provide work experience or even a job in later years. With some

parents actually paying for their children to do prestigious unpaid internships, how much better it would be if you could organise such things for free with just a word with your child's godmother, the newspaper

editor/film director/barrister.

All of which makes me feel like such a slacker. We just chose people that we liked. They're not the richest or most influential but, I'd argue, they're the kindest, warmest and funniest. They won't be able to offer my children religious guidance, rent-free central London houses or holiday jobs in the House of Commons, but I'm hoping that, over the years, there will be lots of laughter and kindness. Oh, and presents both on birthdays and at Christmas would be nice, if you're reading this. You know who you are... **w&h**