God parenting is a joy and a challenge. I never cease to be thrilled and privileged to be asked to undertake this role. Today, and I’m sure I speak for Hugh, Kanjana and Mandy, it is an honour to be here to support and sponsor Shaikira.

The ceremonies that take place at the start and end of life bring people into church for very different occasions. We are brought, to each of them, by our loved ones and friends. We come to a Christening with joy to celebrate a new life and we come again, in a more subdued environment, at the end of one but again to celebrate a past life and the loves and achievement that it inspired.

At both events, the people for who the celebration is given are either not able or are too young to hear what is said for or about them!

So this afternoon, I am going to talk to Shaikira’s brother and sister. One day they might remember my stories and tell their sister in time but equally they are equally suited and have meaning for us older folk!

It concerns a little boy called Bobby.

Bobby had spent the day at school learning about how one of the most common aids to civilisation are made. Millions are made, borrowed, broken, chewed, every day...it is the pencil.

That night, at home in bed, he had an imaginary conversation with his pencil and in it the pencil said some very wise things.

When I was made, it said, I was blunt. I couldn’t do anything and certainly not what I was made for. I needed to be sharpened. So too we need to be sharpened as we grow. Through school, the influence of our families and friends and wise counsel and our own experiences of life we need to sharpen our minds and bodies to fulfil our lives well.

The pencil went on ‘When I was made the real important part of me was encased in wood. It is what’s inside me ‘the lead’ that does the job.’ And again, likewise the most important part of each of us is our heart and our character. How we display ourselves to others.

And another thing, the pencil said. ‘I can make my mark’. The pencil makes its mark with the lead inside it and we can make our mark on people around us, who we come into contact with. We can make good marks achieve at lot, show friendliness or we can let ourselves down and not reach our full potential.

And finally when Bobby was almost asleep the pencil made his final point – You know when I was made I bore my makers name. Hopefully, as a result of being here today and taking your own counsel you will one day choose to bear your maker’s name in some way .

We are able, if we choose, to bear our maker’s name. I hope you will.

I think this may well be the last time I’m called upon to be a god father – at least for this family – perhaps Tim ought to do the same as Mr Murphy....

Mrs Murphy was walking down the street when coming in the opposite direction was Father O’Rafferty. ‘Hello’ said the Father, ‘and how’s Mrs Murphy this fine morning ? Didn’t I marry you a couple of years ago?

‘You did that, Father.

And are there any little ones yet? he asked

No not yet Father.

Well now I’m off to Rome next week and while I’m there I’ll light a candle for you.

Thank you Father she said and went on her way.

The years went by and surely the Murphy’s had a lovely baby girl, then a boy, then beautiful if not boisterous twins, and on they came.

A few years on they met again.

Well now Mrs Murphy, said the Father, and how are you ? Any little ones yet ?

To be sure Father, we’ve three sets of twins and four singles, ten in all.

Now isn’t that wonderful, he said, and how’s your lovely husband?

He’s well Father but away at the moment he’s gone to Rome to blow that blessed candle out!’

In St Mark’s Gospel (Mark 10 13-16) we read what Jesus said to his disciples who sought to rebuke those that brought their children to him...

People were bringing the little children to Jesus to have Him them touch them but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands upon them and blessed them.

Shaikira, Kaihran, Indie, Tim and Sharon...today is a special day as you bring your child, and your sister to be baptized – and so I say to you...

Be pure for those who care

Be strong for there is much to suffer

Be brave for there is much to dare

Be friend to all, the foe the friendless

Be giving and forget the gift

Be humble for you know your weakness

And then look up, laugh, love and live.

May the love of God embrace you all today and in the days that are to be.