

Child's Presentation Kimono

When a Japanese infant is about a month old, 31 days old for boys, 32 days old for girls, the family takes them to be presented at the local Shinto shrine. This ceremony is called “miyamairi” and is much like a Christian baptism. The child and family are blessed, thanks given for safe arrival of the child and the baby is welcomed into the community of the shrine. For boys, a special kimono is made or purchased which the baby will wear at the presentation and on subsequent visits until he passes into childhood. Usually, the father’s parents buy the kimono and present it to their grandchild and his parents.

In wealthy families, these can be quite ornate, with hand painted, woven or embroidered designs which signify wishes for wonderful things in the boy’s life:

- Bamboo for strength
- Hawks for bravery and cunning
- Pine for wisdom
- Mallet of luck for opportunity
- Crane pair for a happy marriage
- Scrolls for wisdom and learning
- Turtles for a lucky life
- Treasure ships for wealth and success
- War helmets, arrows or swords for bravery
- Carp for good health

Other symbols which may be important to the boy’s family may also be included. The kimono also has 5 family crests, 1 on the back in the center just below the neckline and one centered on the back upper of each sleeve. On the front the crests are on each side on the breast. These are small, about the size of a quarter. Other family crests, such as those of the mother’s family may be worked into the body design on the kimono. Usually, these kimonos are no more than 37 or 38 inches long – truly baby sized, but with some room for growth. They are silk, lined in silk and have ties to wrap around the little one to keep the kimono on, unlike adult kimonos.

The Shinto priest in full traditional costume and headgear officiates. This is a serious ceremony but a very happy one. At the presentation ceremony, the paternal grandmother holds the child during the priest’s blessing with the presentation kimono usually just draped over the baby, with the kimono ties draped around her neck and shoulders. As the child gets older he can actually wear the kimono. At the ceremony’s conclusion, the grandparents usually have a party for friends and family and the kimono is put away until the next temple visit.

The baby’s kimono can be very ornate and expensive, often with gold embossed designs and made by masters of kimono décor. The kimonos are usually saved by the family and passed down.

For girls, there is a less formal temple presentation, but their special kimonos are given for the 3-5-7 celebration called “shichi-go-san”, a little later in their lives.