

From John Terry - 6/6/07.

JRL
/copy

BY WATER AND THE SPIRIT

We are very happy that you want to have your child baptized in the Federated Church of Hyannis, and we want to be part of the joy and celebration at this very important point in your family life. Baptism is a symbolic act of our church family. As such, it has at least three aspects which should be understood by parents and god-parents or sponsors in order for you to better carry out the commitments which are involved.

1. God's Initiative

First, the church celebrates the fact that God loves your child quite apart from anything that he/she (or you) could do to deserve that love! We believe that in the divine order of events, our lives have worth because we all belong to the family of God. This is strikingly seen, for example, in the Biblical accounts of Jesus' approach to people. He invariably reached out to them, just as they were, taking children in his arms and inviting all manner of men and women to dine with him. Baptism is an act of rejoicing and thanksgiving because God takes the initiative in coming to us. The brightness of baptism is the great joy of knowing that God loves your child and offers the possibility of living as a child of his Kingdom. Thus, baptism is not a "giving away" of your child to God, but rather, we thank God that your child is his already.

2. Our Response

Second, in baptism, children are publicly received by a community of Christians who pledge that they will express God's love in concrete ways. Neither human love nor divine love is ever a vague generality. Our Lord, for example, did not simply dispense sweet sayings; he lived out God's love for us and God's demand upon us. And the church exists to continue this work of redemption and of calling us to fullness of life. Children are baptized, therefore, with the prayer that they will come to accept for themselves what Christ has done for them and that they will be instruments of God's blessing in the world.

Baptism is also properly celebrated within the regular service of worship. It is not simply a private rite for the family and invited guests. In the course of the service, the members of our family of faith vow to support you in providing appropriate environment and education to help your growing child know God as revealed in Jesus Christ. They promise to pray for and with your child and your family, and to guide, support, and encourage you in your commitment as parents.

3. Gift of the Spirit

Third, in baptism we pray that your child may be filled with the spirit of God and may know fulfillment and freedom of life as God's child. The disciples found that their lives took on new purpose and value through their association with our Lord. The apostle Paul experienced a similar transformation though he never knew Jesus in the flesh. These followers and Christians ever since, have tried to account for the effect that Jesus Christ has had on them. They have described it as newness of life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism has to do with the promise of this gift and with the belief and experience of Christians that it is through association with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection that one becomes aware of the possibility of new life and is enabled to receive the gift of the Spirit.

Thus, we see that through the service of baptism, the church declares:

- that God loves us freely, quite apart from any merit on our part;
- that God takes the initiative in addressing each individual; calling, forgiving, and enabling us to live abundantly in response to him;
- that baptized persons have become part of the community of Christ and that the church thereafter has a continuing responsibility for them;
- that baptized persons are joined to Christ and through Christ's experience of life and death are offered the assurance that may free them to trust God completely;
- that the promise of the Holy Spirit and the experience of an abundant life are God's gifts, freely offered to all and known by those who receive the gift of faith.

The words and action of the service of baptism are directly related to these declarations. There are two primary symbols. Water symbolizes cleansing or forgiveness. It also signifies our entrusting ourselves to God so that he may work in us for his purposes. This is our faith, our response to God's initiative. Laying on of hands symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit, God actively working in us. These two symbols are inseparable, for baptism means both cleansing and flooding with new life.

There are also certain secondary symbols in the baptismal service. The bestowal of the name signifies that each person is called by God as a unique individual. The vows of the parents and of the congregation are their response to God and the acceptance of the responsibility to lead the newly baptized person into the way of Christ. The holding of the child by

the pastor symbolizes the tender love of God, and it is a sign of being taken into the love and care of the church.

Who Shall Be Baptized?

Since baptism is a rite of entry into the church, it is intended for children whose parents are active church members. Those who are members of another church but who wish to have their child baptized here need to provide a letter from the pastor of that church confirming their membership. The church's concern is for the child, that the parents, through their commitment, provide their child with an exemplary life of commitment to Christ and his church.

Please do not take flash pictures during the worship service. Photo opportunities will be provided afterward.

A staffed nursery is available for infants

and children who may become restless