

## **I N F A N T B A P T I S M : B o n d i n g , P r o m i s e s , a n d F a i t h**

These are introductory thoughts about baptism that I share with parents in preparation for the sacrament. There's a lot more to say about baptism (Trust me.), but this speaks to the heart of the sacrament. I hope it sparks thoughts and questions and faith for you. - Rev. Bob Kuntz

### **W h a t i s b a p t i s m , a n y w a y ?**

Holding a new-born baby in your arms for the first time is a wonderful moment in life. We hold in our hands an awesome gift, this tiny living person who comes to us out of God's mystery and love.

Often, this moment forges a spiritual connection. We give ourselves to this child. We promise ourselves to this new-born person. We say, "You belong to me and I belong to you. I'll watch over you. I'll protect you. You aren't just any child; you're mine and I'm yours. You're special and unique and I love you."

I believe that this bonding and these promises happen between parent and child because the Holy Spirit has touched us. The Spirit puts in our heart part of the love God has for this child. The Spirit speaks to our heart a great truth of God – that this child, this miracle, has been entrusted to us.

### **T h i s e x p e r i e n c e o f b o n d i n g h e l p s u s s e e h o w f o l l o w e r s o f C h r i s t u n d e r s t a n d B a p t i s m .**

First, both start with God. Bonding happens because God has created a new baby and touched our soul so we give this child a place in our heart. Baptism is our statement of faith that God has given this child a place in God's heart, that God has bonded with this baby and will claim this child forever. Baptism is our trust that God always has and always will love your child. (Thus, it's not a matter of the sacrament causing God to love, favor, or bless your child.

Baptism is our act of faith that God already does love, claim, and bless your child.)

Secondly, both bonding and baptism are about promises. Baptism celebrates that God claims us as his own. God promises Himself to this child (and all of us). **God shows His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5:8)

When adults are baptized, we proclaim God's eternal love for us and we respond with our promises: "Lord, I know you love me and claim me as your own. In return, I claim you. I love you and will live as your child."

When babies are baptized, the parents make this promise for their child, "Lord, we know that you love, forgive, and claim this child. We promise to raise our child to know you, love you, and walk in your ways."

**The Promises of Baptism** are our response to God forgiving us and claiming us in Christ crucified. These promises have been worked out over centuries of experience and prayer. They tell us what it is to follow Christ, to be His disciple, to live a life that is given to God. To refuse these promises is to refuse life with God.

It's like driving a car. Promises we might give before driving include: "I promise to get into the car. I promise to turn on the ignition. I promise to use the pedals to stop and go." You cannot drive a car without doing those things. In the same way, we cannot live a life with God without keeping these promises of Baptism.

*The First Promise of Baptism is to turn away from evil.* This is asked in three ways:

**□ Do you, in the name of this child, renounce the devil and all the spiritual forces of wickedness, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?**

**Parents: We renounce them.**

**□ Do you renounce the evil and empty powers of this world, with all desires of greed and gain, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?**

**Parents: We renounce them.**

**□ Do you renounce the sinful and destructive desires of human nature, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?**

**Parents: We renounce them.**

The threefold renouncing comes because we experience evil from three sources:

1) Evil powers from outside people. (Some people call this “evil.” Others experience a personal maliciousness in this evil and call it “the devil”).

2) Evil from society and other people (‘the evil and empty powers of this world’).

3) Evil within our own heart (‘the sinful and destructive desires of human nature’).

Our promise is to *renounce* these sources of evil. We are not saying that we are perfect, but that we will not cooperate with evil. We will refuse it, turn away from it. We put evil out of our lives in order to give ourselves to Christ. (Can we be perfect in doing this? Of course not. But when we wrestle with tug, lies, and snares of hold these destructive forces, God sends his Spirit to help us overcome. By God’s grace, we can triumph over the forces of evil.)

*The Second Promise of baptism is to receive Christ crucified.*  
This is also asked in three ways:

**□ Do you, also, in the name of this child, confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as your Lord?**

**Parents: We do.**

**□ Do you promise to live and to keep this child within the fellowship of God’s people, the church?**

**Parents: We do.**

**□ Do you promise to live before this child a life that becomes the gospel; to see that he is brought up in the Christian faith, is taught the Holy Scriptures, and learns to give reverent attendance upon the public and private worship of God?**

**Parents: We do.**

These promises are our commitment to trust God. We turn our lives over to Jesus. We yield to Him as the one who forgives us (Savior) and the one who leads us (Lord). We unite ourselves with God's People, the Church. (Not the United Methodist church but the universal church – all those who believe and follow Christ.) Belonging to the universal Church involves taking our place in a local congregation. There we experience God through worship, prayer, fellowship, learning, Scripture. In the company of God's people, we hear God's word and find ourselves changed to become more like Christ.

**Some people have been hurt by the church.** The church is like every other group in this fallen world. It has hypocrites, cruel and sinful people. Baptism is NOT joining that church. Baptism expresses our faith that even though people mess up, God reveals Himself to and through the church. We promise ourselves to the fellowship that God's Spirit is creating and guiding. Sometimes we cannot see that church clearly, but we trust that the unseen and living God is still working to touch us, change us, and make us His family who cares for others.

These things are necessary to live as God's people. We cannot live in a relationship with God without doing these things any more than we can drive a car without getting in, turning on the ignition, and using the pedals.

**Taking the Promises Seriously.** I ask, as you consider baptism for your child, that you would take these promises seriously. They are life-long, life-changing promises – like marriage vows. Marriage vows change how a couple lives. He is no longer “just one of the guys.” Now, he's a husband. He lives with his wife and cares for her. She is no longer “just one of the siblings.” She doesn't live with her brothers and sisters. Now she lives with her husband and cares for him.

**In the same way, the baptismal vows change how we live.** First, we open our hearts to receive God's forgiveness through Christ. All of us have failed. We have all done things that we knew were wrong. We have hurt others. To promise our self to Christ as Savior is to admit this to God and let God's mercy wash away our guilt and shame. (We do this not once, but in an ongoing way, just as a husband and wife give and receive forgiveness many times in their life together.)

The second change in the way we live comes as we give our lives to Jesus as Lord. This means we let Christ be in charge of our life, we surrender our will to His will. We give up our ways of solving problems and handling life for His way. (Again, we do this not just once, but as a way of living.)

The third change in how we live comes as we join God's family, the church. God has not adopted us in baptism to be an only child, but to be one of a great number of brothers and sisters. Together with God's family, we worship, learn, pray, and grow. We enjoy the fellowship and friendship of those who love God and are loved by God.

There is no rule that says how often this must be done. The marriage promises

don't require the husband and wife to talk to each other a certain number of times each day. (What foolishness that would be!) In the same way, baptismal promises don't require you to attend church a certain number of times a month. (Which would be the same kind of foolishness.) But these promises are your pledge to make a significant place in your life for worship, prayer, Scripture, and fellowship with those who follow Jesus. Through these activities and relationships, you will come to know Christ in a deeper way. You will receive His life-changing love and power, be touched by His Spirit, and know Christ's will for your life.

You are the most important influence on your child. Your child's faith will be modeled on your faith. You are the primary people in your child's life who make real God's love, forgiveness, truth, goodness. How you pray will open the door for your child to pray. How you seek God's light and experience the mystery of God will spill over onto your child's life.

The parents make promises at baptism on the child's behalf because if you are growing and serving in faith, then God will work through His Spirit to awaken faith in your child.

**Preparing for Baptism.** Please talk with each other as husband and wife. How have you experienced God and God's love for you? What helps you grow closer to God or experience God's presence?

How will you keep your promise to live and grow as part of God's people? How will you teach your child to pray? How will you teach the Scriptures? What activities of God's family will help you grow in faith and service?

It may help to talk with each other about how these things were done (or were not done) when you were growing up. If you had a bad experience with church or faith (Many of us have.), tell your spouse about it. We don't want to pass negative things on to our children. AND, at the same time, we don't want our child to be totally ignorant of math because we had a bad experience in fourth grade arithmetic.

When we meet together, I'll talk with you about some of these things. Perhaps you have other questions. I enjoy the great variety of different ways that parents have found to introduce their child to the Presence and love of Christ.

I'm looking forward to our time together.

God bless you as parents.

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