

REMEMBERING BAPTISM

“Newborns who are treated gently are very beautiful. I have seen in their eyes very wise old souls in tiny bodies fresh from God. I heard the following true story at my office. After one couple had their second son, their four-year-old kept wanting time alone with the baby. They were a bit reluctant, feeling that sibling rivalry might be a factor. But the four-year-old kept insisting. Finally, they let him have some time alone with the baby. Listening quietly at the door, they heard him ask the baby the following: “Please tell me what God is like. I am starting to forget.”

I read that and it moved me a great deal. It made me wonder. Do little ones have a memory of life before this life? Here we are, in the year of Our Lord 2022. High technology. Earth with literally billions of people. Our earth at risk in many ways. A growing secular culture flexing its muscles often. And then we hear a little story like this one and everything stops. God enters the picture. God enters into a family’s life through the words of their four-year-old. Through the presence of a newborn baby. God draws near.

God has always wanted to draw near to us. God made us. From before the sin of our first parents, the Book of Genesis says that God would come each day to walk with them in the cool of the late afternoon and early evening. Our God has always wanted to walk with us, be with us. Before sin that was the divine intention. After sin though? It is still the divine intention but now in a very different way.

God would not allow the destructive dynamic and the disharmony of sin to destroy what he had made, destroy his creation, or ruin the design of love freely returned after having been freely given. All was to be restored. God would create anew. There would be a new Eve who would be obedient and a new Adam who would remain faithful and true. Mary. And her son Jesus. And God would prepare for the day of his coming. It would take a couple thousands of earth years. God is a patient. Very patient.

At the time of the visitation and the beginning of the deliverance, God would designate and send one last prophet to announce the glad tidings. And to prepare for the way of the Lord. His name was John. He offered every person an opportunity to be washed clean of their past sins and be given a new start. If only they repented of their sins. He baptized with a baptism of repentance. Many, many came to him. The ordinary people of that time. Those who had no doubt or misgivings about their own sins. But not everyone came to John. The Scribes and Pharisees did not, nor did the members of the Sanhedrin nor did those from the household and party of the High Priests.

They did not come for the baptism because they did not think they needed it. They were not really sinners like these others. They were the good people, the faithful ones. They did not need to be washed clean. They had kept the law and made many sacrifices in the Temple. They felt no need to repent. But the One Whom God did send to accomplish the new creation, that

One, did undergo the baptism of John. Not because he had sinned and needed to repent but because we had. And he wanted to be one with us. Besides, he brought something to the baptism of John that it did not have. The Holy Spirit. And after his own baptism, Jesus was praying and the heavens opened and his Father spoke a word: “This is my beloved Son; in whom I am well-pleased.” And then, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon the person of Jesus. And all those baptized into Christ would receive that very same Holy Spirit. This was a moment of his anointing—with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of God. And we have all been baptized into him. And at our baptisms we are twice anointed, before and after the water is poured.

We come from God, live on earth for a time and are destined to live with God in the kingdom that will never end. If only we say our own “Yes” and place our faith in Jesus Christ. That is why we are baptized into him. That is what happened to us when we were baptized. Even though we have no living memory of our baptism—or of our life in God before that. We believe even though we do not see. Each of us has been baptized into Christ and we have been given his great gift, the Holy Spirit. We have what we need. Let us ask from our hearts this day, for the grace of a truly deeper and extensive faith in Jesus Christ. And enter into communion with him this day.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.