

For the

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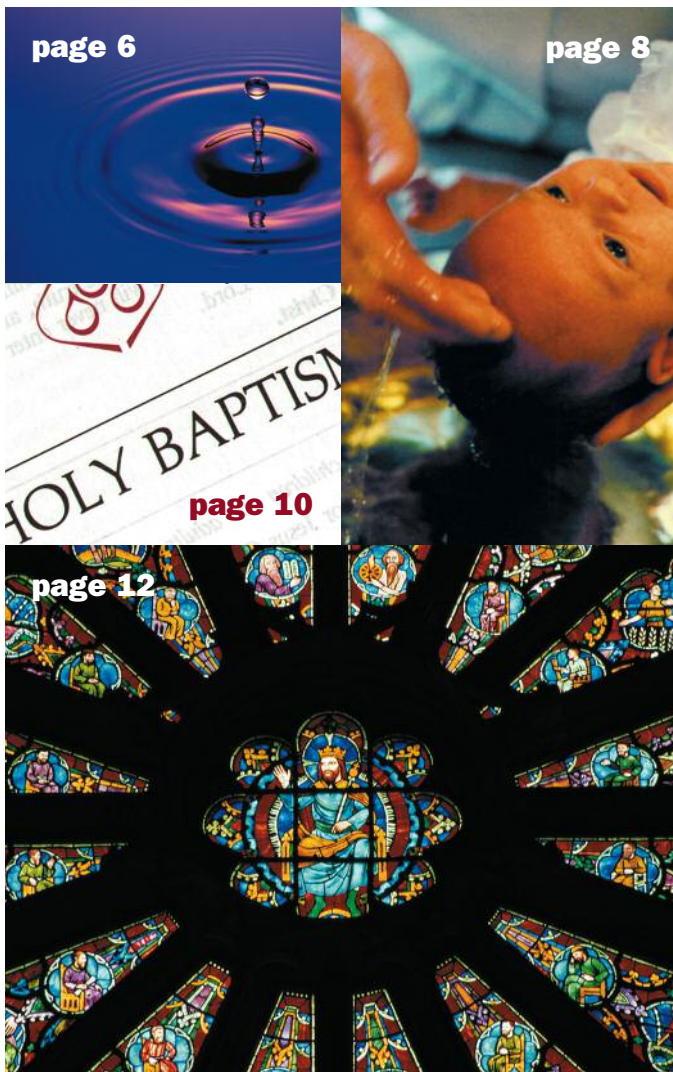
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Infant Baptism



An Ongoing Event in the Christian Life

By the Rev. Peter J. Scaer

In the past couple of years, the PBS television program *Antiques Road Homeshow* has acquired quite a following. The idea behind the show is intriguing. Each week, a group of appraisers visits a typical American town and invites the locals for a free appraisal. People bring in everything from old paintings and antique chairs, to Coca-cola signs and first-edition comic books. Right there and then, an expert appraises the items. Though you wonder how this makes for good television, the reason for the show's popularity is clear. Audience members, this one included, are left wondering if they too might possess an heirloom, a treasure in their closet or attic. That old coffee table? The one you were going to send out to the Good-

will store? It may be worth hundreds, even thousands of dollars!

Perhaps then, we ought to do a "spiritual" appraisal and ask whether we as Christians are the possessors of some hidden or neglected treasure. Some tell us to be on the lookout for hidden talents and abilities. But such gifts, though good and useful tools for service in God's Kingdom, are hardly the treasure for which we search. Perhaps then, we ought to keep our eyes out for flashy spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues or the gift of healing. But typically such treasures prove to be fakes. I picture the dear woman who comes to the *Roadshow* thinking she has a diamond, only to find that her ex-husband gave her a cubic zirconium.

Meanwhile, another item remains, as it were, on our shelf gathering dust. We really ought to take a closer look.

And so, we look at our Baptism, and what do we see? Any right appraisal of Baptism must take into account all its accompanying benefits. For starters, Baptism makes us sons of God, and heirs of life eternal. As the water was poured over my head, the sin of my soul was washed away, and I was given the white garment of Christ's righteousness. There, in the baptismal font, I received a second birth, a birth from on high, and was made alive. In Baptism, our Heavenly Father bestowed upon me the power of the Holy Spirit, instilled me with the life of Christ, and called me His beloved son. Victory over sin, death, and the devil is now mine.

Because Baptism is so powerful, Luther tells us that we should remember it every day. Funny thing though, I do not remember a thing about my own Baptism. After all, I was less than a month old at the time.

For this reason, someone might disparage my Baptism saying, "You had nothing to do with it. You did not choose to be baptized." And then, typically, the person will proceed to tell of a treasured moment when he or she made a decision to fly right and follow Christ.

Now, we win no friends by belittling the religious experience of a fellow Christian. Yet, this is a time when we must stand up and make a good confession. For infant Baptism, more than any other act of the Church, expresses the essence of the Christian faith and the love of our Triune God. Infant Baptism gives expression to the truth that we have been saved by grace alone, apart from works. Infant Baptism is God's love made concrete and real.

But what can we say to the person who tells us that our Baptism is somehow less meaningful because we cannot remember it? Because we did not choose it? Of course, such talk is silly. None of us, after all, remembers the day of our birth. None of us chose to be born. Does this make our biological life any less real?

I am reminded of a fellow in our own congregation who recently went into the hospital for an operation to repair a painful and life-threatening condition. His wife, not he, made the decision for him to be operated upon, and, to this day, he does not remember a thing about it. Nevertheless, the surgeon did his job, and the man is alive and well today.

So also with infant Baptism. A child cannot say, "I have been born with the sin of Adam. Heal me." Nevertheless, Christian parents instinctively know to bring their children to Jesus.

But does Baptism work? Can infants really believe? When the disciples tried to prevent mothers from bringing their little children to be blessed, our Lord rebuked them, saying, "Allow the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." Accordingly, our Lord says that to enter the kingdom of God, we must become like little children. What does He mean? He means that we must repent of our adult reason and ego, which prevents us from entering through

salvation's narrow door.

Does Baptism work? The proof is, as they say, in the pudding. For two thousand years the church catholic has baptized her babies, and for two thousand years, God has been leading His children into heaven. Does Baptism work? I can look at my own children, ages three and one, and see its effect. As such, we might add that Baptism has the additional effect of providing an antidote to our pride. Simply watch a one-year-old, who has been baptized and brought up in the church. Watch as they begin to fold their hands for prayer and coo along with the liturgy. There you will see faith at its purest.

Now, before we go, we must come back to the idea of remembering. Though I have no recollection of the event, I am still called upon to remember my Baptism. What does this mean? It means that I claim my rightful inheritance. I remember that because I have been baptized, I have a new status in the eyes of God. A credit card commercial reminds us that "membership has its privileges." A U.S. passport still carries weight overseas. So also, our Baptism offers us powerful privileges—the privilege of calling upon God, our Father, knowing that He will hear us as His dear children; the privilege of coming to Him with our sin, knowing that He will forgive us.

How best to remember my Baptism, and draw upon its power? The best thing we can do is regularly to be nourished within the body of Christ and to receive His strength from Word and Sacrament in the worship life of Christ's Church. As each service begins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we will remember and be blessed once again with the name which we have been given at our Baptism.

Then, also, each day, we are called to draw Baptism's power. Each day, as we rise, we repent of our sin and acknowledge our indebtedness to

God. Then, having done so, we draw upon our Baptism as the assurance that God loves us and forgives us. In this sense, Baptism is like a bank account, in which there is more than enough treasure to pay for all of our debts.

Here, Luther once again is our teacher. He tells us that each morning and night we should make the sign of the cross, as a reminder of our Baptism, and then we should proceed on with the Creed and Lord's Prayer. In this way, we remember who we are, that we are no longer children of this world, but of God who is "Our Father."

And then finally, when our last hour comes, and when the devil tries to frighten us with our sin and our unworthiness, we can smile, and point to our Baptism, and say, "Get thee behind me Satan. I am baptized into Christ." Then, knowing that our soul is in God's hands, and that our sin has been paid for, we rest in peace.

As such, I daily draw upon the power of my Baptism to live the life He has so freely given me.

The Rev. Peter J. Scaer is pastor at Emanuel Lutheran Church, Arcadia, Ind.



Infant Baptism, more than any other act of the Church, expresses the essence of the Christian faith and the love of our Triune God. Infant Baptism gives expression to the truth that we have been saved by grace alone, apart from works. Infant Baptism is God's love made concrete and real.