

For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

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P R E S S

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## For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

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## “Daddy, how are little children made? From where do they come?”

These are the types of questions that filled our minds as children. We were concerned with how the profound miracle of life was begun and we wanted to begin to understand the mystery of God’s gift of sexuality. Such questions fade as we enter adolescence and adulthood. Most parents do not have questions relating to reproduction. It is the complex process of raising the child following conception and birth that troubles them. As this process begins, and throughout it, a crucial question often in the mind of faithful Christian parents is, “How can I raise my children to be faithful followers of Christ?” To phrase it in another way - “From where do Christian children come?”

I have a confession to make. It would have been much easier to write this article before my wife and I were blessed with our two children, Stephan, 3 and Lauren, 1. As any parent will confess, raising children is much easier in theory than it is in practice. Not only is it more difficult to write about a subject in light of the challenges posed by real life situations, but I have only begun my parental journey and am far from a seasoned veteran in this position. Nevertheless, I hope that the wisdom of God’s Word will combine with my pastoral and parental experiences to shed some light on factors that lead a baby to mature into a committed Christian adult.

### A Theological Understanding Of Your Newborn

Do you understand your child from a theological perspective? Many people think that theology has little to do with children. They are wrong. Theology is foundational for our understanding of the origin of all life, especially the life of a human being. Two theological observations about newborns should be made that are foundational for the raising of Christian children. First, when you gaze in wonderment at a newborn child, you are beholding the miracle of God’s handiwork in creation. It is vital that we take the step beyond seeing this child as merely the result of a biological process, and see the Creator who has made His creation so marvelous. As we peer at the precious children that the Lord has given us, we are led to exclaim with the Psalmist, “I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful; wonderful are thy works” (Psalm 139:14). This perspective impacts the understanding of our children’s identity and entire being. They are living miracles of God’s creative work!

The second theological observation concerning young children

is understanding their sinful condition from the moment of conception. King David, reflecting upon his sinful state, brings this truth out very clearly. “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). The fact that a child can die before birth—before committing a single sin outside the womb—is testimony to the reality of our sinful condition or original sin. Being cognizant of this sinful condition, a parent can then be more prepared for rebellion that sin causes in the lives of each child. Children do not need to be taught how to be selfish, disrespectful, rude or obstinant. A child’s sinful nature raises its ugly head all too often to remind parents that parenting is not a matter of watching from the sidelines as a child blossoms. We understand a child theologically. That means we see the child as spiritually dead at birth and in desperate need of God’s forgiveness and breath of new life. It also means that we take seriously the lifelong struggle that our child’s sinful nature poses.

### The Rebirth in Holy Baptism

Holy Baptism is the central act of God by which He makes our children His own. The part that parents play in bringing their child to this sacrament is illustrated well by one of the interesting Old Testament accounts of the birth and raising of a child, that of Hannah and Samuel. Hannah had longed for a child and the Lord answered her fervent prayers with a son, Samuel. Rather than cloistering Samuel in her own home and raising him to be loyal to her, she took this answer to prayer to the temple and declared, “For this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:27-28).

Although God does all the work in baptism, it is faithful parents like Hannah who bring their child to the font and give this precious gift back to God so that He can reclaim and renew His creation with the Water and Word of baptism. How thankful we can be for faithful parents who brought us to the font for rebirth and who viewed their responsibility as one of raising their child for the Lord who had placed His name and righteousness upon us in Holy Baptism! Holy Baptism is a great comfort to Christian parents who want to raise Christian children. This “washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5) is what makes lost sinners become children of God. What we cannot do, God does and continues to do by bringing our children to faith in Jesus Christ and keeping them in this baptismal grace.



# From Where Do “Christian” Children Come?

By Rev. Dr. Charles A. Gieschen

It is our duty as parents to help keep our child in mind of their baptism and that they remember its boundless benefits and live in its priceless power.

A child should not be led to believe that it is at confirmation that they become a member of God's kingdom. We should do all we can to help children appreciate the status they are blessed with as children of the Heavenly Father through baptism. Neither should baptism be taught as something just for young kids. The grace and new life given in Holy Baptism is a life-long gift that can be treasured and built upon throughout all the changing scenes of life.

### The Presence of God in Christ

Many of us grew up with the understanding that God is up in heaven while we are down here on earth. This is only partially correct. If this perspective is emphasized too much, it is difficult for a child to understand how God can be present with us now, especially through His Word and Sacraments. For this reason it is important to emphasize God's presence with us on earth, especially as we bring our children to the Divine Service—He unites Himself with us in baptism, He speaks through His Word and He gives us His very Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Nurturing this baptismal faith does not simply involve giving our child Bible history lessons. It involves proclaiming and teaching about Christ. We can help children know the God of this universe by simply teaching them about the God who became flesh and blood in Jesus Christ. God becomes tangible and understandable in Jesus. The Apostle Paul states that Christ is "the likeness of God" and now we "behold the Glory of God in the face of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:4, 6). In other terms, to know Christ is to know God!

### Catechesis During the First Year of Life?

When should we begin catechesis with our children? Whatever you do, do not wait until seventh grade! Very young children have an amazing capacity to learn. That is why I am a firm believer in leading my children to the gifts that will nurture their faith for many years to come—the Word of God in liturgy, hymnody and prayers. This use of the sacred texts need not happen only in the context of the church sanctuary. Christian parents can build on what the child has experienced in public worship through the use of liturgy, hymns and prayers in the home.

Martin Luther emphasized the importance of Christian catechesis in the home. He wrote the following phrase in Luther's Small Catechism as an introduction to the various chief parts, "As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his family." Speaking these texts regularly in the home will lead children to learn them.

### Conclusion: Balancing Law and Gospel

All of us want our children to love us. Sometimes we even do things to try to earn their love—but the best way to cultivate a

love for us within our children, however, is not to be guided by their whims. One of the tools of preaching has been a great help in my parenting. We are taught to always have Law and Gospel in our sermons, with the Gospel predominating. I, as a pastor, seek to convict people of their sin through proclaiming the Law and also seek to assure them of their salvation through proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I, as a parent, seek to confront my children with their sin on a regular basis with the Law and also seek to assure them of my love and forgiveness by virtue of the Gospel. I have found that it is very important to often

follow up the sting of the Law (a spanking) with an embrace of the Gospel (a hug)! Confession and Absolution is central to our relationship with God each Lord's day in the Divine Service and it is central to our daily life with our spouse and children. Cultivating a respect for parents leads children to have respect for other authoritative figures, especially our Heavenly Father.

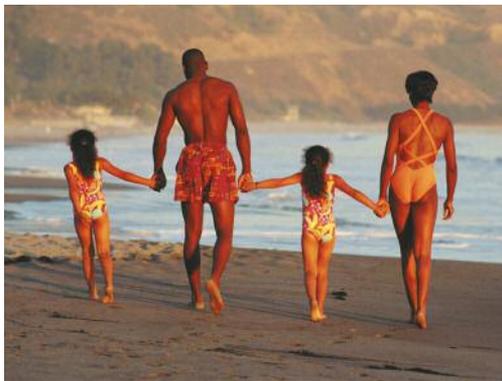
Our God did not hesitate to communicate His unconditional love for us as stated in Romans 5:8, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Above all, we should not hesitate to communicate our love for our children in all we do. Like the depths of God's love for us, our children may not realize the extent of our love for them during these early years of their lives. In fact, it is only now as a parent that I have begun to truly appreciate the love my own parents had for their six children as they daily fed, diapered, disciplined and loved each of us. It is in these seemingly humble daily duties of parenting, often carried on by faithful mothers, that children learn of the tangible and real

love of their Heavenly Father who shed the blood of His only true son so that we all can now be His children.

One final thought. Parenting is a difficult task requiring much strength for the challenges and much forgiveness for the failures. Christ offers both to us.

In our baptism He washed us with forgiveness and renewed us with the power of the Spirit. Each Lord's day He feeds and forgives us with the bread of life in His Body and Blood at His table. His Word daily comforts and challenges us. All of this Divine Service reminds us that we do not make and keep ourselves Christians - God makes and keeps us His children through His means of grace. So, too, with our children. We do not make our children Christians. That is a work He accomplishes as He uses parents and pastors as His mouth, His hands and His feet in delivering His gifts to His children so that they are brought to faith in Jesus Christ and graciously kept in it unto eternal life.

*Rev. Dr. Charles A. Gieschen is an assistant professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.*



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