

Baptism
Mark 10: 13-16

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One of the most joyful and exciting experiences for a family is the beginning of a new life. When a baby enters the world or a couple begins a new life together in marriage, it is a time when we thank God for His blessings and celebrate His grace. Today, we gather to celebrate another blessing, the baptism of Marley Wynn Maynard.

One of the most exciting and joyful things for me to witness is the new life that occurs when someone begins a new relationship with God and people receive Jesus as their savior. As a church family we are filled with the same enthusiasm that greets new parents in the delivery room, and we are reminded of how God works in our lives through His grace. At such times one of the ways God celebrates and confirms His love and mercy for us is by extending some special gifts including the gift of baptism.

I was baptized as an infant in this very church...well, not in this church but the old church that burned in 1982. My parents stood where our young parents will stand today, bringing their child to be baptized.

And, I in turn stood where my parents stood in the old church 4 different times, baptizing my 4 infants.

The Sacrament of Baptism is a true Thanksgiving and blessing for the parents. While parents thank the Lord for giving them a new baby to raise, we accept that this child is a gift of grace.

And so as the parents present their child, they are saying, "Oh God, Grant us all the love, the wisdom, the strength, and all the necessary patience to be godly parents."

The sacrament of infant baptism is for the parents an act of commitment. Not only do the parents commit their child to the Lord, but they also commit themselves to the Lord. They take vows in which they pledge before God and the congregation to raise their child "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

When Christian parents present their children for baptism, they are trusting that God may reward their faith by saving their child. Christian parents do not ask, "Should we have our child baptized or not?" They recognize that, as people of faith, it is their duty to present the child for the sacrament of baptism.

It's very obvious that an infant is too young to understand what is transpiring and so the blessing from this service is recognized by their parents. But understanding what is transpiring during the baptism is not a prerequisite for the blessing of baptism. God blesses us, not because we understand but because He is gracious.

When we bring forth a child to the altar for baptism, the baptism is for the child, a sign of promise. A child born to Christian parents is a member of God's covenant family and can claim the promise of salvation given to the parents. Just because a child is baptized does not mean that that child will automatically be saved. The Scripture clearly says that faith is always the condition for receiving

salvation. And so, it is important that parents raise their children in the Spirit of the Lord.

A story is told of a young boy riding a bus home from Sunday School one Sunday afternoon very proud of a card he was given. It was a picture with a caption on it that read "Have Faith in God." As the bus was going down the road the picture flew out the window. The boy cried out to the driver "Stop the bus I've lost my faith in God!" When the driver pulled over to let the boy retrieve his prize possession, a rider made a snide remark about his innocence. A more observant adult said "We all should be more concerned about our faith."

As our children grow, we as parents need to encourage the child in their faith. We need to tell them that before they were old enough to know God, God knew them. Before they were old enough to love God, God loved them.

To encourage our children in faith, faith should be consistent. Faith should be strong even when it is not convenient. Faith should be seen in our daily lives. When people see you they should see your faith. They should see your faithfulness when you walk, talk, and in your actions thru adversity. Adversities face each and every one of us. How we handle our troubles reflects our faithfulness in God. We all have troubles in our lives when our faith could be questioned.

We need to pray that God will help us during these times. If you believe that God sent his son to die for our sins then you should believe that he will bring you thru whatever comes your way. Our faithfulness when seen can be a great witness for Christ.

As an example of faith, faith is building an ark 100 miles from an ocean. That's what Noah did. In Holy fear, Noah built an ark that would save his family. This story is about saving grace. The Lord spoke to Noah and Noah had the faith to listen and follow God's directions. Noah stood against the whole world. Everyone was laughing at crazy old Noah, building a boat nearly one and a half times the size of a football field. I'm sure he was feeling like he was standing by himself in his faith. It's hard to hide from the ridicule and laughter of other people, especially when you're building an ark in the middle of nowhere. Yet, in his faith, Noah kept working. He kept on doing God's work. In one of life's greatest steps of faith, Noah and his family stepped on the Ark

After their release from over 400 years of slavery the Jews found themselves between a rock and a hard place. Moses was leading them to the Promised Land. The Red Sea was before them, and they had absolutely no natural means by which to cross it. And to make matters worse, Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, the most powerful army in the world, were coming up from behind.

What were they to do? Did they have faith in God that he would take care of them. Did they trust God! Now I know that we don't have to cross a sea like the Israelites did, but there are other things that come up in our lives that test our faith. God has a plan, a purpose and a promise for each one of us.

Jesus teaches us that baptism is a sacred act done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then He shows us that baptism is a key part of God's plan for making disciples. Jesus was very explicit in his directions to his

disciples. In Matthew 28, Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The promise is if you receive Jesus Christ by faith, he will cleanse you from your sin. He has not only made that promise, but sealed it with the sign of your baptism. Teach your children that it is a sign of God's grace and favor that they were born to Christian parents and that they grew up in a home where they were sent to Sunday School, where they were taught the stories in the Bible and learned to love Jesus. Parents need to teach their children that their baptism serves as a sign of the promise of salvation which is offered by Jesus.

The practice of naming particular godparents for a child is comforting knowing that if anything happens to the parents, the Godparents are there to keep the promise they are making today to nurture the child in Christ's holy church, to teach and uphold the acceptance of God's grace and to profess their faith and to lead a Christian life.

As professing Christians, we are all to act as Godparents to this child. We are spiritual guardians of all children and share our love and our talents, supporting, teaching and helping with the responsibility in the training and instruction of the Lord. That is why all church members take a vow to assist the parents in the Christian nurture of the child. And as this responsibility is faithfully carried out, there are great blessings for the congregation.

Dylan and Ashley have come here today to pledge that they will bring Marley up – so that Marley will learn to trust Jesus for herself. So, she can learn to receive the Kingdom of God like a little child.

They can do that by reading Bible stories to her. They can do that by praying for her. They can do that by bringing her to church regularly. They can do that by teaching her how to pray.

In short, they can introduce her to Jesus – but at the end of the day, Marley will have to make the decision one day for herself whether or not she will want to follow Jesus.

May it be our prayer that Marley will make that choice for herself?

So, let us ask God to give us all a deeper understanding of this sacrament, a growing awareness of our own responsibility, and a prayerful desire to see the salvation of our children who have been baptized. Amen and Amen.