

9 Pentecost Year A – Baptism
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Trinity Episcopal Church
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Welcoming a Daughter
Matthew 11: 16 – 19; 25 – 30

One of the reasons we love babies so much is that they remind us of ourselves, before life became so complicated. And in everything they do, they encourage us – and sometimes force us – to get back to basics, to live in the present moment, eating when we're hungry, crying when we're sad, sleeping when we're tired, and laughing when we're happy. So today, as we prepare for baptism, let's offer a resounding "thank you" to Amy & Dave and Sam Ginter, to Kate and Ted Schultz, Abby's godparents, and especially to Abigail Rose Ginter, for helping us remember that, when you strip away all of our superficial differences, we're all a people filled with the joy of the Good News of Jesus Christ, a people who rejoice in the power that the Holy Spirit has to continually transform our lives. For that's just what baptism is, a sacrament to be avoided by the faint of heart, because it's an invitation to open our selves to having our lives completely turned around by God.

Many centuries ago, during the birth of Christianity, we did baptisms very differently. Early Christians vividly remembered –either because they'd heard stories about it or actually seen it with their own eyes – they remembered Jesus entering the river Jordan with sinners all around and being baptized by John the Baptist.

His early followers hoped and prayed that this same Jesus would return at any moment. And because theirs was a church under persecution, those who chose to be baptized knew that this choice would likely lead to incredible challenges and risks.

Candidates for baptism would enter into a three-year process of instruction, in which they not only *learned* the Word, but also *lived* it. And only then, in a dramatic ritual at Easter Vigil, after fasting and praying all night, would they be baptized, and admitted into the privilege of coming to the table for Eucharist. And every year, instead of celebrating their birthdays, early Christians would celebrate their *baptism* day. For them, Baptism was a *very big* deal.

Today, things look quite different, don't they? For many, Christianity has become a social *convention* rather than a deep *conviction* that influences every aspect of our lives. We now baptize infants, since, when Jesus didn't return as quickly as these early Christians hoped, we wanted to raise our children in the faith, so that they could add their wonderful gifts to our community. Baptismal instruction happens in a single session for parents and godparents. But in spite of all these changes, I want to remind us that, at the deepest level, nothing has changed at all.

Just as the birth of a child dramatically changes the physical and emotional life of the entire family, in the same way, baptism represents a sea change in the spiritual life of a family and also in the life of our community here at Trinity. For in this simple sacrament, we make the incredible claim that as the water is poured over Abby's head, God's abundant grace is actually present. And as we seal Abby's forehead with the oil of chrism, we dare to believe that the Holy Spirit is actually descending upon her and upon this community, renewing within each of us the deep commitment embodied in our baptismal promises.

This is the whole point of today's gospel – and of the baptisms we'll celebrate in just a few moments – that what is really important has been “*hidden from the wise and the intelligent, and revealed to infants.*”

Baptism reminds us to access this amazing wisdom of infants – to be present in every moment – not to dwell in the past or in the future, but in every moment, listening for the miracle that is life, the miracle that is God's presence within us and among us.

Being present to ourselves – living each present moment, eating when we're hungry, crying when we're sad, sleeping when we're tired, and laughing when we're happy.

Being present to each other – listening to what's in each others' hearts, responding to the needs of others.

And being present to God – remembering that God's love and God's grace are always present, always available. All we need to do is consent to their presence.

This morning, we're a family that's just had another baby! Let us rejoice in the fact that we, and our newest member Abby, are bound together with the rest of God's beloved children – the well ones and the hurt ones, the brave ones and the weak ones, the successful ones and the ones who cannot seem to get anything right – united in our common baptism, connected through the abundant grace of God, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. And for that, thanks be to God!