

Baptism from a Parent's Perspective

by Beth Hayward

It was late Saturday afternoon and we were off to an Advent preparation event. There would be crafts, games, storytelling, songs, and a meal. At first glimpse of the church, our two-year-old exclaimed with uncontained excitement: "My church!" In an instant, the trying day that had preceded that moment slipped from mind. Time and again we marvel at how quickly church has become a place where our daughter feels she belongs, a place she can claim as hers.

Each child arrives with a trunk-full of anticipation, hopes and fears. As parents, we wonder about every moment to come: what will our child look like, how will her voice sound, will he be healthy, and perhaps most of all, what role will I play in forming who she becomes? It is a huge responsibility. Much of that first year (and perhaps the next 18), is spent stumbling through each milestone, doing our best to grow with our child and keep up with each new reality.

As we considered the question "Will we have our child baptized?" it seemed like the answer would be simple: Yes. Yes: it is a ritual that everyone in our family does. Yes: we want our child to experience belonging to the church. Yes: we want our child to learn about God's love.

The benefits of baptism caught us a bit by surprise. We didn't know that our daughter would be so curious about God, Jesus, Noah, and Jesus' mommy at such a young age. We didn't fully appreciate what it means for her to be included in church activities beyond the nursery. We didn't know that the benefits of baptism would be made known in her abundant sense of belonging.

With all the hopes, fears, and worries that a new child instills, getting to church on any sort of regular basis is no small chore. Every family with small children understands that. We've made time for swimming lessons and music class and the portrait studio. As with all of these things, the benefits of church are apparent. We are convinced that it has been worth the effort. In baptism, we made known publicly that we desired for our child to grow in faith.

As your child develops relationships with other significant adults, attends daycare, goes to swimming lessons...you will come to see the value of community. The church provides a unique type of community for our children. Church is uniquely different from other lessons and experiences. It's no one thing: not the programs, or the toys in the nursery, or the countless coffee hours, or the Bible stories, or the music, or the crafts. It is the one place in society where we are convinced our child will learn what has been important for people of faith over the long, long haul. The biblical tradition, the faithful, committed, and caring people who form the church community are not unique (those kinds of folks are found in lots of other places), but they stand on a

unique tradition; they are motivated by a unique core belief. Learning from that, with our children, will strengthen our own faith when it needs it and give us hope when days are difficult.

We are increasingly convinced how essential it is to have a community to approach life's ups and downs with courage.

As you stand beside the font, water pouring into it, take notice of the people gathered, feel the presence of the Spirit in that place, hear the words that come from communities long ago...It is the beginning of something most sacred, truly a gift from God.

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