

A Prologue to Baptism

There is deep and powerful truth in these words from the prologue of John's Gospel that speak directly to the Sacrament of Baptism, which we happily celebrate today.

When a child is born, any child, and that child draws its first breath, and utters its first cry, we know that life, with all its wonder, joy, and mystery has come into the world. And about that life, John's gospel says this: "All things came into being through him (that is, through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh), and without him not one thing came into being." Therefore, we must acknowledge, when we baptize such a child, that we are in no way making this child sacred, nor in any way are we introducing this child for the first time to our Lord. There is, all good Reformed Theology notwithstanding, already something sacred in the child by virtue of the life brimming within him, which we are only acknowledging by bringing the child into the church for baptism. And there is already in existence an abiding, indeed, a life-giving, life-sustaining relationship between the child and Jesus Christ our Lord, which we also acknowledge when we baptize the child.

So in some way that is much too deep and mysterious for us to put into words, the newborn child is already a child of God. For certainly, it is not the water of baptism that makes the child a child of God, it is only faith, and primarily a child-like faith, so called because such vulnerable, dependent, trusting, loving and receiving ones as an infant inherently live by faith, and this living-by-faith is what it takes, and all it takes to be a child of God – which is yet another thing we are simply acknowledging by baptism.

And finally, in the very act of bringing the child to the church for baptism, in the praying and in the administration of the water of baptism, and in the context of the vows made by parents and by the entire congregation, we are also acknowledging the complete and utter adequacy of the grace and truth of Jesus Christ to care for and nurture and lead and guide, to save and redeem and transform the child as he grows from day to day, from year to year, from decade to decade, certainly, by the end, no stranger to the darkness of this world that would define this life, nevertheless, always a child of the light that shines in the darkness, a light which ultimately and wonderfully will define the life of this child, and not only so, but the life of you and I as well.

With great thanksgiving then, we proceed to this joyful Sacrament, sealing here on this earth, what God has already accomplished through Jesus Christ.