

...Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
(2 Timothy 1:2)

“Reborn”

Introduction: Planting Faith

It's spring time! Even though our weather has been a little fickle, it is still time to think about things like getting the yard cleaned up. The garden stores are advertising to encourage us to buy planters, bulbs and lawn supplies. I've been thinking about moving my snow blower to the back of the garage and putting my lawn mower in the front. After last Wednesday, I'm not sure that's a good idea but hopefully spring will be here soon.

Our epistle lesson today is about another kind of planting and gardening. In this case it is planting faith and tending faith once it is planted. Faith doesn't appear out of nowhere, just like intelligent life doesn't appear out of nothing. Faith is planted by the Gardener of all life, God our Heavenly Father.

Baptized Means Born Again

Our epistle lesson starts out talking about being “born of God.” This is an unusual phrase. We might be more familiar with the phrase “born again.” Pentecostals are fond of asking people, “Have you been born again?” Sometimes Lutherans, who tend to be a little shy about their faith, don't know how to respond. If you don't respond, “Yes I have!” with some degree of confidence, they might think you need to be converted.

So let me assure you today that if you have been baptized, you have been born again. If someone asks you if you are a born again Christian, you should say, “Yes, I am” because you know that you were baptized.

You may be wondering why I am making a link between baptism and being born again. I am doing so because Jesus linked these two things. John, who wrote our epistle, likes to emphasize this link. He does the same thing in his gospel. In the Gospel of John chapter three, he records this account of Jesus linking being born again and baptism:

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Being "born of water and the Spirit" is a reference to Baptism. When a child is born, he is born sinful. But when the child is baptized, he is reborn because the Holy Spirit gives his spirit life. From that point on the child is born again.

So don't hesitate to answer that Pentecostal if he asks you if you have been born again. Say "Yes!" like you mean it and trust in your baptism.

Are Infant Baptisms Valid?

That same person may question you on whether your infant baptism is valid. Again you should not hesitate to answer, "Yes it is!"

Here is why. In Matthew 28, Jesus invites all nations to be baptized.

NIV Matthew 28:19 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,

Because every nation includes children, Jesus is inviting children to be baptized. In Acts we are told that baptism is a promise of God's forgiveness to the Church and that this promise includes children.

NIV Acts 2:38 ... "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-- for all whom the Lord our God will call."

In the Old Testament, male infants were made part of God's family on the eighth day at their circumcision. They were commanded to be circumcised on the eighth day. In the New Testament, Paul tells us that baptism is the new circumcision. Colossians 2:9-12 say:

NIV Colossians 2:9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

So we see that baptizing infants is Biblical.

Watering the Seed of Faith

When people object to this idea, it usually goes something like this, "Oh, so you think that a kid can be baptized and then no matter what they do they are going to heaven even if they never go to church again."

To answer that, you need to think about baptism being like planting a seed. The seed that is planted is the seed of faith. At baptism, a real, living seed of faith is planted. The Holy Spirit enters that child and creates saving faith. It is the faith that saves. Baptism is just the means by which it is planted.

Once the seed is planted, it needs to be nurtured. You wouldn't plant a seed in a greenhouse and then never water it. You wouldn't plant a seed

in a planter so small that it could never get adequate nutrition from the soil.

The same thing is true after a baptism. You need to continue to water the seed by bringing the child to God's house, teaching him to read so that he can read God's word and eventually instructing him to receive the Lord's Supper. These things are just like caring for a plant, they need to be done regularly or the plant could die.

That is why we make the parents and sponsors promise to do those things. Picking your sponsors should not be done based on friendship or family membership. It should be done based on who would do the best job of nurturing your child's faith if you would die.

I once experienced a little tension in a congregation when someone wanted to have a Jewish sponsor. I had to say, "No." I didn't enjoy saying, "No" but I had to do it because a Jew that doesn't have faith in Christ can't be expected to teach faith in Christ. (By the way, the Jewish guy was very personable but we will have to agree to disagree on matters of faith.)

Conclusion

So who is born of God? The answer is everyone who has faith in Christ. Faith in Christ comes to us by hearing his word, being baptized in water and being nurtured by his blood in the Lord's Supper. John tells us, "This is he who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ." Jesus not only came by water and blood, he still comes by water and blood through baptism and the Lord's Supper. We who celebrate the Lord's Supper today are truly those who are born of God.

Now may that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.