

Easter 2A, 2011

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-9
Title: Your Baptism

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Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

Easter is a time for baptisms. The church has always celebrated baptisms at Easter. In the early church, most baptisms were done at the Easter Vigil. They would gather by candlelight on Saturday night, and as the sun rose on Easter morning, the catechumens would rise from the water, reborn.

Here at Faith, we have the joy of celebrating three baptisms in less than two weeks this Easter season. Today we rejoice as Brooklyn and Briella are reborn, and on May 14, Caiden Michael Dodson will be born again.

So as we celebrate these baptisms, 1 Peter is a great text to hear this Easter. Throughout the season of Easter, our epistle lessons will all be from 1 Peter.

The book of 1 Peter was, most likely, a baptismal sermon, preached to those who had been baptized at Easter.

Most of us were probably too young to remember our baptisms. I doubt that Brooklyn or Briella will have any memory of this day. Their parents and godparents will remind them of their baptism, and show them plenty of pictures, but they won't have any memories.

But the fact you can't remember your baptism doesn't make it any less important. In fact, the day you were baptized was the most important day of your life. More important than the day you were born, more important than your confirmation day, more important than your wedding day, more important than anything else you can imagine, because when you were baptized, you were saved. St. Peter writes, "Baptism now saves you."

St. Peter tells you exactly what happened when you were baptized, and what this means for you today. He says, "According to God's great mercy, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Baptism is a new birth, a new start. When you were born the first time, it was an exciting time for your parents, and for all those who knew you.

But you were born in sin. You were born dying. We are all conceived and born sinful. No matter how cute and cuddly those little babies are, every last one of them is sinful, inheriting sin from Adam.

It may not seem right. It may not seem fair, but that's the way it is. You were born sinful. You were born to die.

But thankfully, God did not leave you to die. God did not leave you without hope. He caused you to be born again, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You were born into a new hope. You were born to live forever with Jesus Christ, joined to His resurrection.

In Holy Baptism, all the sin that you inherited from Adam was drowned and put to death. Just as Jesus Christ died on Good Friday, the sin that was in you died at the font.

And just as Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, and was seen by the women, by Peter and the disciples, and even by Thomas, so you received new life, new birth in Holy Baptism. You were born again into the living hope of Jesus' resurrection.

You were born into a new family, with God as your Father.

Maybe you've had a wonderful family experience. Maybe you've been let down or disappointed by your parents. Maybe you've even been hurt or abused by them. Maybe you've felt abandoned and alone. Maybe your parents have died, and you miss them deeply.

Your earthly family will fall short at times. They will say and do things that hurt you and let you down.

God the Father will never hurt you. He will never abandon you. He will always be with you. Like any caring Father He might rebuke you or correct you at times. There are rules for living in His family, and they are for your good, because He loves you.

God the Father chose you and made you a part of His family, through the new birth of Holy Baptism.

And because of this new family, you have an eternal inheritance that will never spoil or fade.

An inheritance is a great picture of our salvation. You don't do anything to earn an inheritance. You are simply born into it.

Your eternal inheritance in heaven is something you could never earn or buy. Jesus Christ bought it with His own precious blood.

You cannot buy it. You are simply born into it. You are born into this wealth, this treasure, and it is freely given to you.

Have you ever inherited anything? Maybe some money, some property, some jewelry or other family heirloom? Whatever it was, those things don't last. Money gets spent, houses crumble, jewelry is broken or lost or stolen. But your heavenly inheritance is guaranteed to last. God Himself is keeping watch over it. It's something you can be sure of.

This is what gives you hope in the midst of a dark, depressing world. As we hear of wars and tornados, rising unemployment and gas prices, violence and despair, a world where fewer and fewer people believe in God or have hope, your eternal inheritance gives you hope.

In St. Peter's day the people were facing real danger of persecution. Being a Christian meant you may loose your life, or at least your livelihood. In the first reading we hear how Peter himself and the rest of the apostles were beaten for speaking about Jesus. This was their testing. There are countries in the world right now where that danger still exists. There are countries in the middle East and in places like China where Christians are persecuted.

Thankfully that is not the case for you. You don't have to worry about being arrested as you leave church this morning.

But the danger you face is just as real, and even more insidious. You face testing, too.

You are tempted to live as though you aren't baptized, as though you are not a part of the body of Christ, that you are completely independent and autonomous, that you belong to yourself.

You are tempted to live as you please. If you want to live together before you're married or just fool around, go ahead. If you'd rather spend your time and money serving yourself rather than serving others- go ahead. Instead of living for the praise of God, you are tempted to live for yourself.

God says, "No, I've got something better for you, something much better than being a slave to yourself and your passions and desires. I've come to set you free to live outside of yourself, to live for something more."

To the world, this is utter foolishness. But then most of what we do here looks silly and foolish to the rest of the world.

Consider what we did this morning. We splashed a little water on two infants, said a few words, and we expect that to result in salvation.

Consider what we will do next. We will take a little bread and wine, speak a few words, and expect that it will be the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

There's no way we can say that, except by faith. There's no way to have Faith without God working through His Holy Spirit. And you receive the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith at your baptism.

On the last day, you won't get any praise or glory or honor for your faith. St. Peter says that on the last day, your faith will result in Jesus Christ getting all the praise and the glory and the honor.

It's only through Him that we have faith.

“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

And all of this through Holy Baptism.

In Holy Baptism, you are born again into a living hope for an eternal inheritance in Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead. When He returns, He will get all the glory for what He has done in and through you.

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