

**“Baptism. It’s a Family Thing”**

**Matthew 3:13-17**

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**Grace Church**

**Columbiana, Ohio**

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**Baptism of the Lord Sunday**

Baptisms are wonderful to watch. It’s not just a silly ritual where we splash water on a baby’s head. It is much more serious than that. Like the Lord’s Supper, baptism is a visible sign of God’s grace put into action in the world. What do we see at baptism? We see water being put over or on the head of the one baptized. We hear some words about grace and new life, of us participating with Jesus in his death and resurrection, as we go under the water and come out again. We see there is a spectrum of emotions on display. I have had babies cry and adults cry. I’ve had laughter as well. Smiles, and scowls, it all happens at baptism.

There is more you can’t see happening at baptism, than what you can see happening. We come asking for grace, the free gift of God no one can earn and attain, only received with a grateful heart. The sincere and contrite, at baptism, receives grace in amazing ways. We receive forgiveness for any sins. We get a clean slate, as it were. We are restored to close fellowship with God and each other. We get a new life at baptism. Almost like a video game, when an avatar makes it to a certain point, or jumps on a star, and a new life is given, except this is real. It’s no video game. You can’t see that perhaps, can you even necessarily sense it, but it happens.

When we are baptized we die to our old selves, and take on a new life in Christ, much as one puts on a robe or coat. The Holy Spirit comes to us and lives in us in a new way. We are sealed as belonging to God, marked as God’s property, and that seal? No one can take away or destroy that seal on your life. Not the world. Not the devil. No one.

When we are baptized we join a larger family. We don’t use last names, because in a real sense, we all take the name “Christian” just as millions before us have done. We walk the same pilgrim path countless Christians have walked before us in life. But we do it with Jesus Christ beside us, guiding us, helping us, giving us strength when we needed it the most, until we reach the end of our days, whenever that is, and then we find we are still with God, who has walked beside us all the time, whether or not we could sense his presence.

There may be some that think baptism unnecessary. But Jesus commanded that his followers be baptized, so there must be something crucially important to that. Also, Jesus, himself, needed to be baptized. That’s why he came to his own cousin, John the Baptist, out in the country, in a stream, to be baptized and receive

God's blessing of the Spirit, which empowered and enabled him to face the difficulties he encountered including his death on the cross, overcoming that when he was raised to life on Easter in the resurrection.

Those who come to baptism receive the same blessing and Spirit as Jesus did, the power to face up to the problems of life, until we live in the next life in the power of the resurrection, just as he did.

Today we have Leia and Evan, who are saying "Yes, I want to be a Christian. I want the blessing of God upon my life. I don't understand all that this means (no one does), but I know I want it and I need it. Wherever I go, whatever I do, no matter what I might experience or endure, I know I do it with Jesus beside me and the Spirit within me."

Leia and Evan, it is my pleasure and privilege to officiate at your baptisms. All I will do is say the words and put the water on. God will put on the Spirit and add on blessings and spiritual gifts on top of that and do all the rest. Your father has raised you to be strong, independent, respectful, helpful to others, and to love family, among many other things he has taught you. I know life has not always nor often been easy. Sometimes, I'm sure it has seemed like it was you two along with your dad, against the world. It can seem that way sometimes. You are certainly not alone in this life's journey wherever it may lead. You can call on family, among the three of you. You can call on your extended family, including me. You can call on your larger Christian family, which includes everyone here and many more. You can call on family (point up). Would you please come forward to receive baptism? We, and God, are all here for you. Amen.