

# A Mission Church

## Why Baptize Babies?

The Catholic Church and many other Christian Churches (Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Orthodox, in particular) as the norm, baptize infants. Most other Christian expressions (Baptist and the many fundamentalist branches of Christian Churches, such as The First Church of Christ Reformed) most often, but not always, reserve baptism as a choice to be made by a person, usually not before he or she has reached the age of 12. Many wonder aloud, "Why?"

## Old Testament Covenant with Abraham then Moses

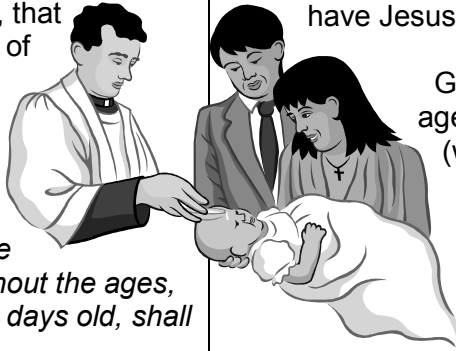
Let's first look at the ancient past, that enormous expanse of time from the time of Abraham right thru to, and beyond, the time of Jesus. In the Book of Genesis (Chpt. 17, verses 1-14) God establishes his covenant with Abraham.

*"...Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me. Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised..."*

This is a strong covenant in which God is to give much, and become their God. Those entering this covenant have before them a hefty responsibility. Yet, newborn males are to be circumcised as a sign that they too are entering into this covenant. Can these newborns understand what they are entering into? No. That is why the obligation and responsibility of the child's learning fell squarely on the shoulders of the parents, particularly the father.

Circumcision was to be an outward sign, a ritual action to remind this chosen people that the stripping away of hardheartedness and obstinacy was imperative for the covenant to be fulfilled — and for the male who was circumcised to truly be part of the chosen people, favored by God. (see Deut 10:12-22)

The point of all of this is straightforward. Children were circumcised before they ever knew of such things as "hardheartedness." They were unaware of sin. They would come to know that their circumcision was connected to a covenantal relationship with God; the many rich blessings God was offering; and their own choosing to accept the Law as a way of life.



## Jesus and the Children

*"People were bringing even infants to him that he (Jesus) might touch them...Jesus, however, called the children to himself and said, 'Let the children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" (see Lk 18:15-17, and also Mt. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-16)*

Without getting heavy, two words in Greek are used by the gospel writers. One means a young child of uncertain age. The other, used specifically in Luke, refers to an infant, a child needing carried, without power to go it alone. These children needing carried must be brought to Jesus by the parent who wishes to have Jesus touch them. For us this is important.

God's grace comes to us no matter the age, no matter the circumstance. The (we'll assume) mothers of these children wanted the touch of Jesus for their child. They wanted the healing, the strengthening. It was the faith of the mothers that was recognized by Jesus and acted upon by Jesus.

It was the faith of the parents and the gift of life of God. It was God's covenant being fulfilled, God's action happening. The same can be true of the men who lowered the paraplegic man through the roof for Jesus to touch and heal him, or the many who sought the healing touch of Jesus for their children. As a strong reminder for us, Jesus, nor his gifts, have any barriers other than the lack of faith of people.

## The Early Church in Acts

Just as we learned in the gospel accounts that whole families were being brought to faith, so too do we learn in the Acts of the Apostles of whole families coming to receive the new life of baptismal grace. Being baptized during the early years of the Church was a demand. Christians believers were not the rich relatives received with open arms. Christian families were living among hostile Jews and pagans.

Despite the difficulties, parents wanted the entire family baptized. WHY?

Converts to Christianity were realizing that the grace of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was

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to be for all people. If it enabled the adults to grow in their faith, it should be equally good for their children who would be taught, not in CCD or Catholic School, at home, under the guidance of the parents. The developing theology and teaching of the Church opened greater reason for children to be baptized as newborns.

## Today

Nothing has changed.

The Church believes — without the slightest hesitation — that God's actions work greater than our human efforts.

The Church believes that God's grace — the power of the Holy Spirit — is working well before we even think of God. Children, therefore, would have an innate desire for God.

The Church believes the Spirit of God leads children to God, just as those Jewish mothers believed .

The Church believes that this grace is given, and the Spirit made known through the sacrament of Baptism. In baptism these children, as we'll see next week when discussing the fullness of baptism, enter into the eternal covenant established through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*So, everything favors the child's receiving the life of God, of entering into this covenant, this oneness with God in and through Baptism.*

That is, until we consider the lived out reality of faith of the parents, the ones responsible for bringing faith alive to their children.

## Infant Baptism Realities Today

It is a blessing when parents and godparents present a child for baptism and they really understand the gift sought and the gift given by our God.

Unfortunately, many adults have not grasped the fullness of life shared with their child at baptism.

Baptism too often is sought only to please the grandparents and great-grandparents of the newborn.

Baptism is too often sought only so the child will not go to hell, which is not what the Church teaches.

Too often parents forget their promises to

God, the Church, each other, and most importantly to their child — that they will raise their child in the practice of the faith so the child can grow in understanding and love of God.

So the covenant is not fulfilled. The life that is given to the child — the very life of Jesus Christ — is never taught.



*The mission of the Church is to bring all people to oneness with God through Jesus Christ. "Go, therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit..."*

## Letting the Child Make the Decision

So often it is heard today from parents, "We're not going to baptize the baby. He can make a choice of religion, and whether he wants to believe in God, when he gets older."

The interpretation of this is clear: "We're too busy for God, for teaching the faith, or going to church. We don't know God anymore now than we did when in eighth grade.

We're happy doing our own thing, controlling our own lives." But who's really in control of life? Rarely are we as individuals truly in control of our own lives. Too many other false securities, in which we place our faith and trust, draw us down a dead end path. The road to eternity is living that covenant, that life of Jesus Christ.

Ironically, by not providing a basis for which a child can anchor her study, the parents provide no ability for the child to know God in any way. Usually these unfortunate individuals, children, remain out of the loop well into their adult lives, which by that point of time, they have found the struggle of life (without God) something they think is good and something they can live with, just like their parents.

## Jesus Says

*"Let the children come to me, and do no hinder them..."*

## Next Week

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD  
BAPTISM AS A SACRAMENT