**Holy Baptism at Freindship Church**

Holy Baptism, along with Holy Communion, is a Sacrament, or a means of grace. For a discussion of those terms, please refer to the link Holy Communion on the **What’s a Lutheran, Anyway?** page.

So, like communion, baptism is a ritual by which God gives grace to us. It’s not the water that does it, as Luther says in the Small Catechism, but rather the Word of God mixed with the water, that makes baptism special. Now, we Lutherans have a wonderful little resource called the Small Catechism that talks about the reasons why we do this, and where in the bible they talk about it. Again, you can find a link to the Small Catechism on the **What’s a Lutheran, Anyway?** page. I’m not going to re-invent the wheel here, but I would like to consider something some folks might ask about how Lutherans understand baptism.

That thing someone might ask a Lutheran about baptism is this: Do you really baptize infants? Isn’t that a special kind of crazy? After all, how can an infant have faith? Confess it’s little sins? It seems weird.

Well, I used to think that way, too, so don’t feel bad. I grew up in a church that believed children should be baptized when they reach an ‘age of accountability,’ where they can make their own decisions about God and faith and following Jesus. I was baptized when I was thirteen years old. In retrospect I think maybe thirteen years old for me being ‘accountable’ was a bit optimistic, but who knew.

So YES, we baptize infants, and feel perfectly comfortable saying so. And here’s why. First of all, it’s biblical. Secondly, it’s gracious. Third, it’s logical, and fourth, it’s traditional. So let’s take this one step at a time.

Probably the best **biblical** argument for infant baptism comes from St Paul’s letter to the Colossians, in chapter two, where St Paul writes:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumsized with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. Colossians 2.8-13

So, first of all, don’t be deceived by ….stuff…that’s not according to Christ. I would state here that ‘age of accountability’ is an idea more at home ‘in philosophy, according to human tradition,’ than in the bible.

Secondly I would say that St Paul links baptism to circumcision here in a solid way: ‘**you were circumcized** with a spiritual circumcision by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him **in baptism**…

Now, what is circumcision? Well, it’s minor surgery, of course. But more importantly, it is THE **Sign of the Covenant** God made with Abraham way back in Genesis, the covenant in which all Children of Israel took part. (Genesis 17.9-10) Jews, including Jesus and St Paul took this very, very seriously. The sign of the Old Covenant is circumcision.

Okay, so what’s the sign of the New Covenant? Is there a sign, an entrance rite into the New Community, the Church of Jesus Christ? Of course there is, and it’s Holy Baptism, just like St Paul says, where we are ‘spiritually’ circumsized “when we were buried with him in baptism…”

So I conclude the Sign of the New Covenant is Holy Baptism. Now, is the New Covenant better or worse than the Old Covenant? The write of the Book of Hebrews says this:

But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degreee he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, ther would have been no need to look for a second one. (Hebrews 8.6-7)

So if the New Covenant is superior to the Old, should not the Sign of the New Covenant be superior to the Old as well? Of course it should. So were infants circumsized in the Old Covenant? You better believe it, and lucky for them – it’s best to get that kind of pain out of the way early, believe me. The Sign of the New Covenant is better than the Old because every believer carries the sign – both men and women are baptized, not just the men! But how can you say the Sign of the New Covenant is better than the Old when infants cannot be baptized? So children of believers are what, exactly? Are they partakers of the New Covenant, or not? Yes or No! Yes, the children of believers ARE children of the New Covenant, and baptism should NOT be held back from them. The same God in whose name we baptize will see these children in the Kingdom. That’s as logical as I can be about it.

So, infant baptism is biblical and it’s logical. It is gracious as well: Baptism in the gospels is something that was happening before John the Baptist got there, and he never bothered to explain how it worked, he just DID it. Likewise Jesus and the apostles. He explained it was for the forgiveness of sins, but that’s all. He didn’t say WHO could be baptized, nor what this ‘age of accountability’ might be. But the obscure New Testament book of First Peter, we read this little verse:

*And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. 1st Peter 3.21

So ‘baptism now saves you’ – most of us would agree that it is God who saves, but if baptism is the means by which this saving is done, then that makes sense. After all, for a drowning man, the person who throws him a life preserver is saving him, but so too is the life preserver itself. It’s not one **OR** the other, it’s the agent (God, the lifeguard) **AND** the means (baptism, the life preserver) that together save the drowning person’s life. That’s a bit of grace right there!

Now, in the book of Acts, when the Philippine Jailor is saved, the bible says he and all his household were baptized without delay (Acts 16. 30-33). All his household meant all his family and their servants. That presumably meant children as well. Apparently the jailor’s decision to believe was good enough for everyone in his family. What’s gracious for the master of the house should be gracious for the least in his house as well, don’t you think?

And consider this: When we gather for a baptism, we generally gather the family around the font, and the congregation gathers around them. We pray for the family, we pray for the child, we ask God’s blessing upon them all. Is there faith here? You better believe it. Just as the child cannot stand on its own two feet, it needs parents to hold it. In the same way, the parent’s faith, the faith of the whole assembly, weighs in and supports that child. Does that child bear fruits of the Spirit? Does it love or hope? Who knows? But there is an abundance of love and hope, as well as faith, in the assembly gathered around baptism. And that love is sufficient. That hope is enough. Because God’s grace comes down, and that grace is abundant, amazing, powerful, and changes everything. Baptism is a means of grace, even for an infant – maybe especially for an infant! Grace is good!

So infant baptism is biblical, it’s logical, it’s gracious, and finally, it’s traditional. Yes that’s right, this is the way we’ve always done it. The Roman Church did it for centuries before Luther came along, and Luther didn’t change any part of it. The changers, the innovators, the radicals and liberals who changed it all came along later. So if you’re against infant baptism, then YOU’RE the liberal, the radical, the innovator, NOT US. WE do it the old fashioned way. The logical, gracious way. The biblical way.

And this is most certainly true.