

WHY IS JESUS CHRIST OUR HOPE?

A great poet once wrote, *“Midway through this way of life we’re bound upon, I woke to find myself in a dark wood, where the right road was wholly lost and gone.”*

As a word, “Gospel” simply means, “good news”. This word is used in the Bible to speak of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament believed that in the life and ministry of Jesus we find “Good News”. But what is this good news? Well, as summarized by the poet quoted above, and as echoed many times throughout the Bible and the history of the church, it is simply this: we were lost, and Christ has found us.

The Bible tells us that “all have sinned, and have fallen short of the glory of God.” This sin is the cause of our being lost. However, the same Bible says, “But God shows forth his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Our sin, and the love of God are pitted against each other in battle. By the death of Jesus our sins, which make us lost, have been defeated, and we can be free from all things that cause us shame, grief, and despair. We can be free to love God and love each other as we know, deep down, that we ought.

Though the church can be an elaborate diversity of thought and ritual, at the end of the day the church has always taught that one thing, and one thing only is required for us to be found and brought into the care and protection of our heavenly Father. God wakes us from our spiritual slumber, we realize that we are lost. We must repent and ask God for help. He will help us.

He has given us the Bible, and the Church to help us. It will come individually for each of us, that moment when we know, deep down, that we are not living the life we ought to live. At that moment, our thoughts, our desires, must be turned toward the love and mercy of God. His Spirit will guide us, as we follow him, back to the Father heart of God.

The Rev. Lars Nowen



Baptism Preparation

by

The Rev. Dr. David Smith

For a Birthday

O LORD our heavenly Father, mercifully hear our prayers, and grant a long and happy life to your servant *N.*, whose birthday we remember this day. May *he/she* grow in grace as *his/her* years increase, and ever live so as to please you; in the power of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

A Mother's Prayer:

Lord God, heavenly Father, I thank you for the life of my child which I have been given, and for my own life which you have so graciously preserved. Grant with this fresh gift of life an increase of our love to you and to one another. Daily renew my strength, and assist me in caring for my little one. Make my child your own; and help me, that I may, by word and example, bring up my baby to lead a life pleasing to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A Father's Prayer:

O Lord, heavenly Father, from whom all fatherhood is named, bless our new baby. Give to me the spirit of wisdom and love, so that our home may be an image of your kingdom, and our care an image of your love. Use me to lead our child to grow in the likeness of Jesus, loving you, obedient to your will, and happy in your care; through your Son Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Some Other Bible References to Baptism (see also page 1)

Old Testament: Isaiah 44:1-8; Ezek 39:27-29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech 12:10; (types of Baptism - Gen. 6 - 9; Exod 14:10-31)

New Testament: Mt 28:19-20; Acts 2:37-39; 16:27-34; 22:12-16; Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 10:1-4; 12:12-13; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:4-7; Col 2:11-15; Titus 3:4-8a; Heb 10:19-25; 1 Pet 3:18-22

For the Family

MERCIFUL Saviour, who did love Martha and Mary and Lazarus, hallowing their home with your sacred presence: Bless our home, that your love may rest upon us, and that your presence may be with us. May we all grow in grace and in the knowledge of you, our Lord and Saviour. Teach us to love one another as you have given commandment. Help us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil your law, O blessed Jesus, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for evermore. *Amen.*

For Relatives and Friends

O LOVING Father, we commend to your gracious keeping all who are near and dear to us. Have mercy upon any who are sick, and comfort those who are in pain, anxiety, or sorrow. Awaken all who are careless about eternal things. Bless those who are young and in health, that they may give the days of their strength unto you. Comfort the aged and infirm, that your peace may rest upon them. Hallow the ties of kindred, that we may help, and not hinder, one another in all such good works as you have prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Children.

O LORD Jesus Christ, who did take little children into your arms, and bless them: Bless, we beseech you, the children of this family; grant that they may grow up in your fear and love; give unto them day by day your strength and guidance, that so they may continue in your love and service unto their lives' end. Grant this, O blessed Saviour, for your own Name's sake. *Amen.*

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I. What is Christian Baptism?

a) Baptism is a sacrament

"an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace"

Why do we need an outward sign? Because we have bodies. Everything we do has an outward and sensible part to it. When we marry we have a wedding, when we have a birthday we have a party with presents. We need an outward sign to let us see what is happening within.

In Baptism water is the outward sign. In our daily lives we use water for washing and to drink to sustain our physical life. In Baptism the child is inwardly cleansed and given new life in the Spirit from above.

(see John 3:1-7 and John 4:7-15)

"How can water do such great things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water...With the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit." (Luther's Catechism - see Titus 3:4-8a)

b) Baptism is commanded by Christ (see Mt 28:19-20: Mk 16:15-16)

We baptize out of loving obedience to Jesus Christ.

c) Baptism is a response to original sin

What are the needs of a baby?

A baby's natural needs are for love, stability, food, warmth. At some point a baby starts to show the need for moral support and training. Even babies start to show the human desire to be the boss of their world and resist any attempt to rule over them.

What about the needs of small children?

Unlike animals, humans can desire more than is naturally necessary for them. Also, unlike animals, humans do not grow by instinct alone - their conscience & their minds need training by parents & others.

Small children learn language from others, not instinctively. This is because they are created in the image of God and they have more than just natural selves - they have an in-born sense of justice and love and meaning.

VI. Family Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Grace at Meals

FOR what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

or

FOR these and all his many mercies, God's holy Name be blessed and praised; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

or

BLESS, O Lord, this food to our use, and consecrate us to thy service, and make us ever mindful of the needs of others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

or

PRAISE God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

V. Introducing Our Church

a) It is Anglican

We are a church based on the Bible.

We are a “catholic” church - "according to the whole" – we hold to what was believed at all times and places in the church

Anglicans don't think they are the only true Christians but part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

We are a church of the Reformation that made less radical reforms to the church of Rome than some others.

It is a church with Bishops, Priests and Deacons

The teaching of our Church is found in the Prayer Book (in the prayers, in the services of Baptism, Holy Communion, Marriage and Ordination, and in the 39 Articles).

b) Service times at our church:

c) How our church is governed:

d) How our church is paid for:

e) Ministries for children and youth in our church:

f) Ministries for adults and parents at our church:

How is this trained? It is trained by the consistency of their parents' standards of right and wrong. This in-born human rational nature does not naturally have a real relationship with God, even though human beings were created to have a relationship with God (see the story of the Garden of Eden - Genesis 3). In fact there is the opposite tendency in children. They want to want to be their own bosses.

We need to teach children to live beyond self-gratification. They will see that in our example of self-giving. We also have to teach them to grow up and learn a relationship with God.

Children can't have this relationship naturally. It is only possible if God helps both them and us.

d) Baptism is a "means of grace" that Jesus gives to the child making possible a life reconciled with God

“Grace” is undeserved favour. God gives himself as a gift. This gift is the Holy Spirit, making what Christ has done real for the child's life.

e) Baptism is a profession of faith

Baptism makes us members of Christ's church - not just members of a community but members of His body.

f) Why are children baptized?

God's grace is an undeserved gift in the first place. If the parents have faith, we can count on the child growing into it as he or she develops - if we ask him God will give it.

A personal decision will be necessary later in the child's life but that doesn't keep the new life of faith from being present right from the earliest days.

As parents we decide what form the child's faith will take just the way we decide what kind of education they are going to get and what moral standards they will follow. It doesn't make any sense to "wait until the child is old enough to decide".

II. The Baptism Service

Let us see how this teaching presented above is there in the baptism service:

p. 523 *"God willeth all men to be saved from the fault and corruption of the nature which they inherit"*

We do not naturally come to a good relationship with God.

p. 523 *"Receive him, O Lord, as thou hast promised by thy well-beloved Son, saying, Ask and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"*

God is generous when we ask him for his gifts.

p. 524 The Baptism Gospel *"Be ye, therefore, assured that he will likewise favourably receive this present child; that he will embrace him with the arms of his mercy; that he will give unto him the blessing of eternal life, and will make him partaker of his everlasting kingdom."*

Jesus shows how he is willing to receive the child as his own.

p. 525 *"We give thee humble thanks that thou hast called us to the knowledge of thy grace, and faith in thee..."*

The faith that we have in the name of the child is faith in what God has done for us in Christ.

The Promises of Sponsors

We make these promises because we intend to raise the child this way.

p. 525 *"Do you, in the name of this child, renounce the devil and all his works..."*

This part of the promise refers to renouncing all deliberate evil

p. 525 *"...the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same..."*

This is about too great a desire for popularity, money, possessions, success

These are good things but they are also common reasons why people go wrong

IV. Choosing Godparents

Normally it is expected that there will be three godparents chosen by the parents - two women and one man if the child is a girl; two men and one woman if the child is a boy.

Godparents are spiritual parents for the child. They are to help to bring the child to a living faith in Jesus Christ.

Choose people who will:

- help teach the child the Christian faith (including the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed);
- pray for the child as he or she grows;
- be a model of Christian love in their lives; and
- regularly attend Church.

Godparents must be baptized and they must be able to say the promises and truly believe them. Normally this means that they are also confirmed.

All these influences are like the trellis which trains the child to do the things which are part of knowing and loving God.

When the church says this, it sounds like it is just trying to boost its own membership. But what spiritual life do we imagine our children are going to have if they have no Bible stories, if they never worship or pray, if their parents never make spiritual life a priority? They will still have the capacity but they will be like vines growing along the ground – the fruit of their lives will more easily be spoiled by the spiritual and physical dangers present in this world.

Adolescence

Parents are almost "standing in for God" during childhood. The practices and beliefs of parents are given directly to the child by their words, their teaching and their example.

Adolescence is a time when youth begin to assert their independence. Teenagers need to start making their lives their own. For faith this means that the teenager has to establish his or her own relationship with God.

To use the vine and trellis picture, the vine is now growing to a new height. Now the teenager has to *own* the structures and supports given by others for his or her spiritual life. *Confirmation* is designed to give the adolescent the chance to do this and also the opportunity to be strengthened by grace. Youth groups and other fellowship with Christians also helps this to happen.

It may be that the religious life of the teenager takes a different form than what the parents are comfortable with. Remember when Jesus was a young teen brought to Jerusalem, he stayed behind to teach in the Temple and his parents were frantic (Luke 2:41-51). While this may seem like disobedience, it was Jesus being perfectly obedient to his heavenly Father.

Adolescence is a risky time of life and this is true religiously as well but it is important that there be growth at this stage.

p. 526 *"...the sinful desires of the flesh..."*

This is too much indulgence of the appetites - for food, alcohol, sex, comfort, uncontrolled anger.

p. 526 The Apostle's Creed

This is the basic statement of Christian belief

It is divided into three parts – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit brings.

We briefly consider each statement in the creed.

Parents/godparents will be asked if they believe these things.

p. 527 *"Will you pray for this child..."*

To raise children as Christians takes prayer.

(section from Video on prayer)

p. 527 *"Grant that whosoever is here dedicated to thee by our office and ministry may also be endued with heavenly virtues..."*

Just as we prayed for deliverance from all the ways the child could go wrong we pray for the good qualities of a Christian - "faith, hope, love, humility, wisdom".

p. 528 The Baptism *"Grant that this child...may receive the fulness of thy grace..."*

Baptism is firstly about the grace of God towards the child.

"...he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil..."

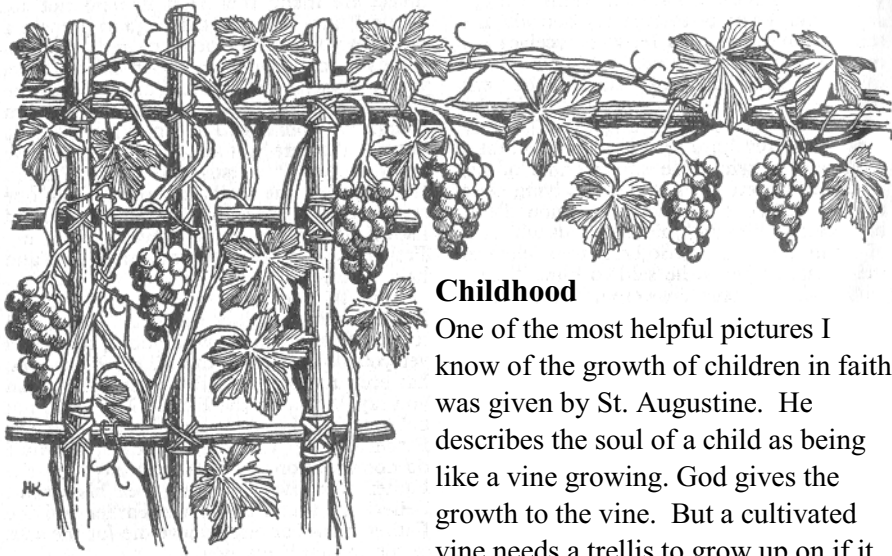
Baptism is also about what allegiance we plan for the child – an allegiance to Christ.

The Duties of Parents and Sponsors

- P. 530 - to teach the child what it means to be a Christian
- to bring the child up to lead the Christian life
- to bring the child to Christian worship
- to bring the child to be confirmed - to make his or her own decision
- to bring the child to Holy Communion after confirmation or other preparation

III. Bringing Up Children in the Faith

The Vine and the Trellis - Understanding Spiritual Growth



Childhood

One of the most helpful pictures I know of the growth of children in faith was given by St. Augustine. He describes the soul of a child as being like a vine growing. God gives the growth to the vine. But a cultivated vine needs a trellis to grow up on if it

is not to grow wild along the ground. For a child, the trellis is the structures and supports of family and community life.

Both the growth of the child and the structures that are provided help the heart and mind to grow. Early in childhood the baby shows evidence of a will that is not just for what is naturally needed – it also shows a need for control. This self will is not just good but is also potentially bad.

The "trellis" parents provide includes all the things we surround the child with to train their mind and will in the right direction. For example, the child has the capacity to learn language, but children raised by animals don't learn language. The child's mind needs to be presented with words for its language skills to grow. The child's mind is like the vine and the words are like the trellis.

Language is the key to entering a world where there are many desires that are not possible in the natural world such as ambition or the love of money. It is a world of the mind but often it is not a reasonable world.

Augustine remembered how the adults in his early years were not always the

best examples to him. He saw that his own teachers were sometimes just as competitive and jealous of each other as children in the schoolyard. He was given excessive discipline for playing games when he was supposed to be studying. He remembers how his parents would laugh when he told them. But they wouldn't have laughed if a punishment as serious relative to their age had been given to them.

When parents and educators are unfair or childish, children are not trained up but a stumbling block is put in front of them.

The way people treated Augustine was often unreasonable. Nevertheless some sort of discipline was necessary. Children naturally want to escape the world of responsibility for the sake of childish fun. Fun is a good and necessary part of the life of children. But children also need to be led to take on more and more of the responsibilities of the adult world as they grow. They need to know healthy limits to their freedom so they can flourish. This is the purpose of education - the "trellis" of training for the developing mind and will.

In religious education the picture of the vine and trellis still applies. We think that it is something mysterious because God is involved but it is still a matter of putting the structures and supports there so the child can learn about God. Some of the key things are:

- Prayer – before meals take time to give thanks, before bedtime and at other times pray with your children. When children learn to fold their hands and bow their heads when they pray, they learn to look for God humbly and within. Get your child into the habit;
- Bible stories - make use of children's Bibles that are in a language that the child can learn best about God for their age, read to your child;
- Taking part in worship - What an advantage it is for children in attending church if they have the habit.
- The priorities of the parents - These are the major influence when children set their own priorities. How much weight is put on money, family, acts of charity? Is church attendance a priority for the parents?