

Celebrating Baptism

Episode I: Community

Meet the Gregory family and join them as they are invited into a celebration of God's grace through their daughter Anna's baptism.

Opening Prayer

Collect for Proper 28

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Reflection

After welcoming everyone to the group, begin by reflecting on the Scripture below (Acts 8:26-40). If there are more than 10 people, consider splitting into smaller groups of three to five for this reflection time.

1. Ask for one volunteer to read the passage below slowly. Ask the rest of the group to listen to the passage, following along in their Bible, if desired. Ask them to listen for one word or phrase that catches their attention.
2. After the reading, have each person in the group share the word or phrase that stood out to him or her. This part of the exercise should not include group discussion. (3-5 minutes)
3. Have another person reread the passage, from a different translation, if possible. As the passage is read, ask participants to identify where and how this passage touches their life today.
4. Once the passage has been read, have each person again share. This part of the exercise should not include group discussion. (3-5 minutes)
5. Have a third person read the passage, from a third translation, if possible.
6. After the reading, ask each person to write a response to this question: From what I've heard and shared, what do I believe God wants me to do or be? Is God inviting me to change in any way? (5 minutes)
7. Have each person share his or her answer. This part of the exercise should not include group discussion. (5-10 minutes)
8. Go around the group, asking each participant to pray aloud for the person to his or her right, taking special care to name what that person shared previously in this reflection. (5 minutes)
9. Close with the Lord's Prayer and a moment of silent reflection.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁶Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

³³In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁸He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Video

Watch Celebrating Baptism, Episode I: Preparation.

Preface the video by sharing that, while this baptism is focused on an infant, baptism is for all ages.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group.

1. Where do you see intersections between the video and the scriptural passage? What attitudes, emotions, or words seem to pop up in both?
2. In the video, Fr. Jim Hamilton describes one facet of baptism as a chance to express and celebrate spiritually the presence of God's love and grace in a life. Think of a celebration you have witnessed or been part of – a celebration in which someone was truly welcomed and celebrated for who they were, perhaps a wedding, an adoption, an award ceremony, or a birthday. How did that celebration honor the person's identity? What made the celebration so memorable?
3. When we are welcomed into the Church through baptism, God and the Church (which is the Body of Christ) welcome our whole selves – not just the well-behaved or expected parts. The love of God and the wideness of the Church welcome us as we are now and as we will be tomorrow as we grow and change. How does this impact your understanding of baptism?

Four Reasons We Practice Baptism

1. We believe that, in our baptism, we receive forgiveness for all our sins – those wrong choices that we have made that hurt others, hurt God's heart, and hurt ourselves.
2. We believe that being baptized helps us become closer to Jesus because we share a common experience with him, an experience that reminds us of his life, death, and resurrection.
3. We believe that being baptized connects us with the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit came upon Jesus during his baptism, so too, does the Holy Spirit come to us and remind us that we are loved and delighted-in by God, and that God is with us at all times.
4. We believe that baptism is the entry to the Church, into the community of those who have committed themselves to follow Jesus. But it is more than a membership requirement; in baptism, we are adopted into God's family.

Homework

This week, read the following portions of the baptism service in the Book of Common Prayer:

- Presentation and Examination of the Candidates, pages 301-303
- The Baptismal Covenant, pages 304-305

Think about what each of those questions and promises means for you and your life. Come back next week ready to discuss and share how these passages challenge or encourage you.

Closing Meditation

A meditation from St. Augustine of Hippo that reflects what it means to live a baptized life.

Remember Christian soul that today and every day you have God to glorify.

Jesus to imitate.

Salvation to work out with fear and trembling.

A body to use rightly.

Sins to repent.

Virtues to acquire.

Hell to avoid.

Heaven to gain.

Eternity to hold in mind.

Time to profit by.

Neighbors to serve.

The world to enjoy.

Creation to use rightly.

Sights to endure patiently.

Kindnesses to offer willingly.

Justice to strive for.

Temptations to overcome.

Death perhaps to suffer.

In all things, God's love to sustain you.

Amen.