

One of the greatest events in my life has been watching each of our children come into the world. It truly is an amazing experience. Although I have always been grateful to God that I have been doing the watching not being where Alice has been in those births!!!!

When a child comes into the world that child automatically enters into that family unit, as a general rule. That family is shaped by name, by the people in it and by the extended family, and by implication of that, the history of the family.

Being in the family of God is no different. There are rituals of coming into the family of God, one of which we will do today for young Jennifer.

For the Jews their great rite of passage which gave them their great identity was the Passover. Here were a people who were in slavery, and they have this great opportunity to be freed. It comes at a great cost. The first born in Egypt die, only those who participate in a special meal, the Passover are safe.

They have to kill a lamb, a one year old lamb without spot or blemish and the blood of the lamb they paint on the door posts and lintels of their houses. When the angel of the lord sees the blood on the door posts the angel passes over that house, hence the name of the feast, Passover.

The nation were to keep this feast every year as a reminder to them of their time in Egypt. However, the feast also served as a means to reinforce the reality that they are the people of God. By participating in that Passover meal they became the Exodus people. It was as if they were at that first Passover meal in Egypt the night of the Passover of the angel of the Lord.

This meal then became the national identity for the Jews. It shaped their understanding of who they are before God and what their standing is before God, a redeemed people who depend on God for their existence.

When the early church were looking for what identified them as God's people, it became obvious very rapidly what was the answer. The Passover meal which Jesus shared with his disciples was the answer. The disciples came to understand that the Passover meal Jesus shared with men was filled not with new meaning, but with the meaning that was intended from the beginning. Jesus himself becomes the Lamb of God and his shedding of his blood on the cross is the protective blood that was for the Jews painted on the door posts.

Just as the Jews needed a meal to give shape and focus to their understanding of who they are, so the Christians found in the bread and the wine a meal focus. The bread, as understood by Jesus being his body, the wine as understood by Jesus as his blood.

So that as the community of faith received and ate bread and drank wine it gave to them something tangible to understand that Jesus was still with them.

Just as for the Jews when they ate the Passover meal they became Exodus people, they became a people of the Passover as if they were in Egypt. So it was for the Christians that they understood that the meal they participated in somehow brought them into the reality of the Last Supper. They became a people of the last supper.

And so it is for us today. When we gather at the Altar we reach our hands to receive not just bread and wine but the real presence of Christ. The Jews in the desert after the Exodus had the daily reminder that God was with them by the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. We as Christians have the bread and wine as a tangible reality that Jesus, while he is not here, he is still with us.

The other main Christian initiation into the community is of course Baptism, which we do today. However, the two are still linked. We understand that Baptism is a baptism into the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and so Jennifer, even though she does not participate in the communion in that she does not receive the sacrament of holy communion, she does receive the sacrament of Baptism which is the baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Just as with the Eucharist having tangible signs, so there are tangible signs for us that Jennifer has indeed been incorporated into Christ. The water poured over her, the anointing and the sign of the cross, the invocation of the Triune God, and the lighting of a candle, are all outward visible tangible signs of what has happened for her, and has indeed happened for us all.

The Eucharist and baptism give us a sense of who we are. That we are the people of God and we have been bought by the price of Jesus' death on a cross. These two events shape us. We are called to live out our Baptismal and Eucharistic calling in a sacrificial way. That is we are called to put ourselves second, and God first. We are called to operate as the people of God.

The shadow of the cross is always over a Christian. It has shaped who we are. Lent is a time of drawing nearer to God. To learn how to place our faith and trust in him, and to live out our lives as his beloved children, calling others into that life giving relationship.

We who are baptised are all called to this task, and we are empowered on this journey by the Eucharist. It is our food and our stay, but most importantly it links us directly to Jesus, it unites us to him, and it brings us into his presence as surely as he was in the presence of his disciples at that last Supper 2000 years ago.

So let us approach the throne of grace this morning with humility, repentance, and thankfulness and a new determination to go from this place in the power of the spirit with Christ united with us into the world as agents of transformation.