

The Baptism of Madalyn & Landen Rohre

July 11, 2010

Rev. Craig M. Sturm Trinity Lutheran Church, Sherman, Texas

I must admit: every time I walk into this church and see the baptismal font front and center, I have to smile. For I know what that means. God is about to do a powerful thing among us. Memories will be made; lives will be forever changed. In a few minutes, God is going to make a bold announcement.

I'm sure you remember back in the late 1990s when those bold black and white billboards started appearing through the United States with messages from God. One read, "We Need To Talk. – God." Another read, "What Part of 'Thou Shalt Not ...' Didn't You Understand? – God.' 'Have You Read My #1 Best Seller? There Will Be a Test. – God.' It was a clever campaign. Whenever I saw one of those billboards, I remember thinking, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if God *did* talk to us that way? Just plastered his personal message to us up on a billboard for us to read as we go from here to there?"

Not surprising, God decides to go another route, and of course it's even more marvelous. Instead of just words, instead of just rules written on tablets of stone or billboards, God says, "I'd like to introduce you to someone special."

We hear God make this introduction in the gospel today. It's the story of Jesus' baptism. As Jesus comes up out of the waters, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit comes down and rests upon Jesus. "This is the one," God says, "who I promised would come and save you. This is the one who will teach you about my love. This is the one," God says, "who will show you the way to your heavenly home. This is the one in whom you can place your hope and trust and never be disappointed. This is my Son," God says, "whom I dearly love. He brings me great joy."

Through the eyes of faith, we will see the same thing happen here today. As the baptismal waters are splashed on Madie and Landen, the heavens will open, the Holy Spirit will come down and God's voice will once again be heard: "These are my children, whom I dearly love. And they bring me great joy."

In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther taught that baptism consists of two things: water and the Word of God. Anytime you join the Word of God with water, powerful things happen. Ordinary tap water becomes water capable of giving life. It becomes water powerful enough to forgive sin and to secure a place for us in God's heavenly kingdom.

As I pour water into the baptismal font and recount the story of how God saves the world through water, we begin to feel the very presence of God come among us. As God's Word is spoken over the water, just as God's Spirit came down from heaven

the day Jesus was baptized, so too the Spirit of the Living God comes down once again, upon us in this very room. God comes among us and brings with him the gifts of love, forgiveness, and salvation.

The waters of baptism will wash away the sin of Madie and Landen. The sign of the cross will be marked on their foreheads – a reminder of how Jesus died on the cross for them, thereby restoring their relationship with God.

Today Madie and Landen begin a new life – a life unconditionally loved and forgiven by Jesus Christ. Today God welcomes these two precious children into this family of faith, into the communion of saints. Greg and Alicia will bring their children to the baptismal font because they know that there is no better place for their children to be than cradled in the arms of God’s love.

As parents, your job is to make sure that your children grow up knowing how much God loves them. You should find ways each day to remind them of God’s incredible love for us. Model God’s love through your own words and deeds. Each year on July 11, I encourage you to relight the baptismal candle they will receive today that they might be reminded of the significance of this day.

As Christian parents, you will promise this day to teach your children the basics of the Christian faith. The best way for your kids to learn about things like prayer, forgiveness and serving others is for them to see you living those Christian values out in your daily lives. Walk the talk, as they say. If these children are to live in the light of the Lord, then we must shine it brightly upon them.

Now I know those are tall marching orders. As parents, we often let those things which are most important fall by the wayside. We aren’t always the best models of faithfulness for our children. I am reminded of the story about the day Martin Luther was baptized. Luther’s parents, Hans and Margarete, were terrified that they could not be the righteous parents God demanded they should be. When they expressed their concern to their priest, he told them, “Just do your best, and let God do the rest.”

Those powerful, grace-filled words remind us that this day is not ultimately about Madie and Landen. This day is about God and what God has done for Madie and Landen through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a day about grace, of God choosing to love and forgive us even when we don’t deserve it. This is a day of celebration, of God declaring that the powers of sin and death will no longer have the last word in our lives.

When we think of our own baptism, we should never think in terms of “I *was* baptized,” as if baptism were only a past event. Rather, we should say, “I **am** baptized” knowing that baptism affects each and every day of our lives. Baptism is always a present reality. Martin Luther said, “Baptism is the daily garment which the Christian is to wear all the time.”

The promises God makes to us in baptism are something that we can count on every day of our lives. No matter what uncertainties we face, no matter what troubles us, we know that it's going to be OK. Why? Because God has claimed us as one of his own children and promised to watch over us and to provide for our every need.

To say, "I **am** baptized" is to come to the realization that we are dependent upon God's grace each and every day of our lives. To say, "I **am** baptized" means that we see baptism not as a 10-minute ceremony but as the beginning of a lifetime journey with Jesus. Every day of our lives we should remember our baptism. We should daily return to God to remember the new start God offers us through the waters of baptism.

In a few moments, as we gather around the baptismal font, God's unmistakable presence will be made known to us. If we listen carefully, we will hear the very voice of God declare: "Madalyn, Landen, I created you in love and now I will redeem you in love. I will watch over you every moment of your lives. Nothing will ever be able to separate us. The light of Jesus will shine in your life forever, guiding you where you need to go. I will write your name in the Book of Life, reserving a special place for you in heaven."

And as we hear God speak those incredible words, let us remember that God spoke those same powerful words to us the day of our baptism. Let us recall that we, too, are a child of God. God loves us so much that he has welcomed us into this community of love and faith. Although we are sinners, because we are baptized, we can trust that we are forgiven, redeemed, freed to love and serve our neighbor just as Christ has loved and served us.

As baptized believers, God commissions us to live our lives in such a way that glorifies him. We are to shine the beautiful light of Christ in our daily lives so that all people might come to know God's love.

"Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." That is our calling.

As you come forward for communion today, I invite you to dip your finger in the baptismal water and to draw the sign of the cross upon your forehead. Let the wetness on your brow remind you of your standing with God – you are a cherished "child of God." To God, you were worth dying for. God sent Jesus into this world just for you to redeem you from the powers of sin and death.

Let the wetness of your brow remind you that Jesus walks with you every step of the way. Even though we have failed to live as God has called us to live, God continues to keep his Word on every single promise he has made to us. God is faithful. God's Word can be trusted. Remember all of the promises that God has kept and give

thanks. And be bold in telling others about the goodness of God, for it is indeed a story worth sharing.

“Go and make disciples of all nations,” Jesus says, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all of the commands I have given you. And be sure of this. I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Let all God’s people say, “Thanks be to God!” Amen.