

Trinity 1 2021 6th June – Should You Be Christened?

6 th June Trinity 1	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Genesis 3 vv 8-15 p5 II Corinthians 4 v13 -5v1 p1160 Mark 3 vv 20-35 p1005
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O GOD, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I had an interesting telephone conversation the other evening. A mother was considering whether or not to have her little girl christened. On the one hand, it is obviously a good thing to be baptised and all parents want the best for their children. On the other hand, she admitted, she and the child's father, though christened themselves, never go to Church except for christenings, weddings and funerals and don't generally do much about their faith the rest of the time.

This put me on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, everybody is welcome. Jesus came into the world for all of us. I cannot imagine Him turning anyone away, especially not a child. He Himself said, *Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.* Baptism is a Sacrament. It effects what it signifies. In Baptism we receive God's grace. Our original sin is forgiven. We are born again. Our faith is confirmed. We receive the Holy Spirit. We are affirmed as children of God and heirs of eternal life. We are members of God's Church, with all the blessings and obligations which follow from our Christian status. One would hardly want to deny those blessings to a child, especially if I were to deny those blessings simply because her mother was more honest than some about the frailty of their connection with the Church.

I don't know about you, but I am concerned about the growing number of people in England who are not baptised. Without the knowledge of God, people are ignorant of our purpose in life. No wonder we are in the state we are in. As the proportion of unbaptised people grows, we become more and more a secular country and our Christian heritage and our Christian values fade. Without faith, we are doomed.

On the other hand, Baptism is a very serious matter. The 27th Article of Religion which details what the Church of England believes about Baptism sets out in more formal language everything I said about Baptism two paragraphs back, but it also says this: *but it is also a sign of Regeneration or new Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church. They that receive Baptism rightly.* God does all these things for us. He gives us grace to have faith. He washes us clean of our sin. He adopts us as His children. He fills us with His Holy Spirit. He blesses us with eternal life in Him. Freely, we have received. All this is God's gift to us. But we have to do our part. We have to choose to follow Jesus. *Take up your cross daily, He says, and follow me (Luke 9²³). Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5⁴⁸). But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy for I am holy. (I Peter 1^{15&16}). Be ye holy, for I am holy.* You are either a Christian or you aren't, and, if you are a Christian, a Christian is what you are in everything you think and speak and do. There is no room for half-heartedness in following Jesus. You

shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbour as yourself.

So what could I say to this young mother to encourage her to have her baby christened and included within God's Church, but to do so without implying that following Jesus was anything less than a total commitment? I've got, say, ten minutes and I'm talking to a person who, like the vast majority of young people today, knows very little about the Church or the Christian faith. It's not their fault. We live in a society which treats religion as not especially important. By and large, we tend to think that Christianity is a good thing. It brings people together and builds community. It inspires them to be charitable and provides a moral code. Religion offers some hope to the bereaved. Prayer tends to make us feel better. Communities don't much like it when their local Church closes. But, it's a background thing. It's nice to know that it's there, but it's seldom a priority. This woman's parents didn't go to Church. Neither did her parents' parents (I know the family well). Her great grandparents didn't go to Church much in her lifetime. None of them rejected Christianity. It is just that formal religion played a diminishing part in their lives as generation succeeded generation. Because they didn't go to Sunday School and because religious education in the sort of schools they did go to Mondays to Fridays (even Church Schools) don't teach Christianity as something we ought to believe in, people her age don't know much about the Bible or prayer. None of their friends or their contemporaries go to Church regularly. Why would you think of going to Church if hardly anyone you know goes to Church? They might think you odd if you did. Society is no longer organised to make it seem natural to go to Church. It's difficult to say that it is wicked to shop or play sport or visit stately homes on Sundays or to go to the beach, but you'll miss out on doing those things with your non-churchgoing friends if you don't. If both parents work in the week, Sunday might well be the only day when the whole family can engage in leisure activities together or visit granny. And because of all that, if you decide to give Church a try, you'll be entering a strange space where you don't know the people, you don't know the prayers & music and you don't know how you are expected to behave.

So what did I say to this young woman? I began by pointing out that, when you are christened, you become a member of God's Church. The Church, I said, is the people not the building. The local Church in any particular place is the people who meet together for worship in that place. The whole Church is all Christian people everywhere in the world plus all Christian people already in Heaven. I said that it is necessary to turn to God and to trust Him for our lives, both in this world and for the next. I remarked that most people pray – even non-believers when they are desperate, and prayer should be a regular part of our lives. I said that it helps is in our lives to be familiar with the Bible. I explained that sin is our failure to love God and to love other people. If we love, we keep all God's commandments. When we fail to love we must repent (turn away from evil, turn to God) and tell God we are sorry. I said that the people in a Church support one another and that therefore we should go to Church. Doing so helps us to be better people. Being there, we help other people in their Christian journey. If we trust in God, we have hope for our loved ones who die in the Lord. I hope it helped. We are arranging a Baptism. But, of course, her and her family being Christians is not just a matter of what I can explain in a telephone call; it is a life lived in the company of Jesus Christ – in this world & the next. Let it be so.