

A Baptism Story: Holy Laughter

Oliver, nearly two, had shown a number of signs that he had some kind of intuitive understanding of baptism and was eager for his awaited day, so naturally I was watchful of his actions during the All Saint's Day Baptismal Liturgy. As a congregation, we dutifully participated in the various parts of the Liturgy - all three and a half pages worth in our Sunday bulletin. These were very important questions and responses, including an invitation for those present to join the candidate in renewing our own baptismal covenant.

While the parents, godparents and two older brothers joined the priest around the baptismal font, young Oliver was balanced somewhat precariously in his mother's arms. In spite of his eagerness for this event – all of those words seemed to these young ears to go on and on. The longer it went on, the more squirmy he became, almost spilling out of his mother's arms – more than one time. Not surprising for an active two year old.

But never underestimate the power of sacrament, sign, and symbol to reach the heart of the child in a way that words just can't make it. As soon as the abundant clear water was slowly poured from a large glass pitcher into the font, and the priest with both hands touching the water blessed it, and breathed the breathe of New Life into it; Oliver began to lean toward the font and carefully followed the invitation to put his head closer to the water. To everyone's amazement, as soon as the water was poured from the priest's cupped hands over Oliver's head three times, with the words, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – this newly baptized child of God – burst into a continuous, beautifully joyful laughter. Surely, a "holy laughter" that reverberated throughout the congregation leaving smiles on everyone's face – and almost more than a smile on the face of the priest as he struggled to contain his own laughter.

Oliver's laughter continued through the Signing of the Oil, the Giving of the Light and most especially during the prayer immediately following Baptism. Competing with this holy laughter, the priest managed to release his own delight through the words of the prayer, as he proclaimed in an elevated voice, beseeching that this child would be given "the gift of **JOY and WONDER**" in all God's works! Without a doubt, this child brought much joy and wonder to all who witnessed, and welcomed this newest member into the household of God.

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