

With You I Am Well Pleased

When we are baptized, in essence the heavens open up for us and the Holy Spirit descends upon us through the light of the Risen Christ (symbolized in the Pascal Candle). We, too, are told, "You are my child, my beloved, on you my favor rests." And yes, God is well pleased with us - not because our actions are good, but because we are made in the image and likeness of God.

It is through the waters of baptism in this sacred and holy rite that our tarnished image is made clean and we reclaim the fresh, pure image that is our birthright. We find that it can be good because it belongs to God. And that is good and that is pleasing in God's sight.

And we, too, can be well pleased to be called a child of God. With the light of Christ within us we can walk as a child of the light, no longer stumbling in darkness with tarnished and dimmed self images searching for the true image that is ours all along.

Baptism is like coming home. It may take a lifetime to fully realize that we are in fact there, and that it was indeed a "homecoming" gift freely bestowed upon us as infants. This knowledge or memory of home is one that is engraved upon our hearts by our maker as clearly as if we were stamped "Made in the Image of God." If you want to read its message look squarely into the face of a child.

It may not always be "pleasing" as such for as in all of nature you will see a paradox of both sorrow and joy, hunger and health, injustice and peace.

We talk a lot about our ministry to children. Think for a moment of how a child ministers to us, shows us God's presence or something of the nature of God, of the Christ within, that engraved message called "home."

Even before birth the child is hidden as a quiet presence within; not seen but silently there manifesting itself in signs and wonders. It brings with it feelings of joy, expectancy and hope, anticipation of new life. It is a life that comes in weakness, yet bears great strength; one small cry is a beckon and a call not to be resisted.

A child comes into your life and changes it forever. It has the potential for being a focal point around which all other activities rotate. It is a gift to be cherished, honored and nurtured. Its love is constant, pure and unconditional. Its touch has the power to sooth, console and even heal.

Yet it calls us into pain, into suffering, into sacrifice and into service. Is it any wonder that God chose this natural partner, a child, through which to express the divine nature of Christ Jesus? Is it any wonder that at Christ's baptism God proclaims to the world this fulfillment of Messianic hope - not as king, ruler, prophet or priest - all of which he was, but as "My son, my child, my beloved." Therein lay the power.

Perhaps that's why we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. In so doing we are like the divine nature itself. Children come to us bearing the likeness of God, but are not God themselves, save the Child Jesus alone. And even that Holy Child, once worshipped at the

manger, as Epiphany dawns will begin His public ministry of preaching, teaching and healing. He is very quick to point to the God who sent Him as the One to be worshipped.

Through our baptism, we are called into public ministry. As the Christ Child leads us, so can the children among us and within us. In this Epiphany season, let us wear our baptism proudly, understanding the God claims us "With you I am well pleased."

How do you continue to help others claim their birthright as a child of God by virtue of their baptism?

Genelda Woggon has been ministered to and by children for over 40 years in her professional work as a Christian Formation Leader, most especially through the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for the past 20 years. She coordinates the work of the Catechesis at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Asheville, NC and also serves as Consultant for the Catechesis in the Diocese of Western North Carolina.