

A Family Affair ~ 11:00 Service
The Sacrament of Baptism for Lisa, Logan, Adam Levine
Acts 2:36-41, Matthew 3:13-17

Today, at the early service, we were privileged to witness something very special and unique in my time here. Today, we baptized a whole family – the Levine’s: David and Lisa, Logan and Adam, and we received them into *our* family. They came as a family to say publicly that they believe in Jesus: They believe He died so that their sins could be forgiven and so they want to live to follow Him.

The decision to proceed with baptism for them has been a family affair. David and Lisa have come to this decision for their family together. Their baptisms are a family affair, not only for them, but also for us. Because for us, baptism always takes place in the context of the family – the family of faith, that is – the community of Christ-followers we call ‘church.’

Baptism is a sacrament of identity. For good or not, our families are a large part of our identity, who we are. I look like my mother. Paul says when I hang around with my mother and my sister, I start to sound like them. We often do things the way our mom did them. Sometimes we work in the family business started by our father or grandfather. Who we are is often influenced – for good or for bad – by the family we grow up in. Whether you like it or not, your family is part of your identity.

When Jesus was baptized, He identified Himself with us. He identified Himself with sinners. He didn’t need to be baptized so that His sins would be forgiven. But He chose to identify with us in baptism. When we are baptized, we identify ourselves with Jesus. We identify our children with Jesus when we present them for baptism. When Jesus was baptized, He was identified as the Son of the Father. He was identified as one loved by God, as one with whom God was well pleased. When we are baptized, we are identified as a child of God, marked as a son or daughter of the Most High God. When we are baptized, God says to *us*, “This is my son, this is my daughter, whom I love. With her – with him – I am well pleased.”

In baptism, your name is placed in the company of *the* Name. When I baptized him this morning, I said this: “David Joel Levine, child of the covenant, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And the sign of the cross is made on your forehead. When you are baptized, God says, “This one’s mine.” God loves you. God knows everything about you – everything you have ever done or ever will do that is wrong or bad, everything good and right you have failed to do – and God still loves you.

And more than that – God approves of you. **Baptism is God’s seal of approval.** In baptism, God says *to you* – as He said to Jesus – that He is ‘well pleased’ with you. Now, that doesn’t mean He approves of everything you will ever do. But He approves of *you* – He approves of who you are, for you are His – His precious, beloved child.

1 John 3:1. We call God ‘Father.’ The Christian faith is a family affair. If God is our Father, that makes us His children, and therefore, we are brothers and sisters. We belong to the same family. **Baptism is a sign of belonging:** Belonging to God and belonging to the family of God.

Remember: *There are no lone ranger Christians.* The life of following Jesus is not something we can live by ourselves. **A Christian without a church family is an orphan.** David, Lisa, Logan, and Adam were not baptized today so that they can go home and figure out by themselves what it means to believe in Jesus, what it means to trust in Jesus and pray to Him and follow Him. **Baptism is a family affair** – they are part of our family now. They have publicly chosen to identify themselves not only with Jesus but also with Church of the Covenant. They are members of our family now.

But it's not just about what the Levine's promised and professed today. *We* made promises to them and to God, as well. "Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture David, Lisa, Logan, and Adam, by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Christ and to be faithful members of His church?" And speaking for all of us at PCOC, we said, "We do." When we baptize, we take on the responsibility of guiding and nurturing the faith that is professed today. *All* of us. We take on the responsibility of teaching and loving and praying and encouraging these new members of our family, and helping them to keep the promises they make today.

But you know, in the end, this is not so much about what David and Lisa do or say today, or about what we say *we're* going to do to guide, nurture, and love them. Baptism is really mostly about what God has already done and will continue to do in their lives. When we baptize, there are professions of faith and promises made, both by those being baptized and by the family into which they are adopted – that's us, church. But the best part of baptism is what God says and promises in baptism.

In baptism, God says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."

In baptism, God promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

In baptism, God promises, "I will remember your sins no more."

In baptism, God says, "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation – the old is gone, a new life has begun."

In baptism, God says, "The promise is for you and your children."

In baptism, God promises, "Nothing is impossible with God."

In baptism, God promises, "I will be with you always."

In baptism, God says, "I will bless you and you will be a blessing."

In baptism God says, "I have called you by name, you are mine."