

All Saints', Littleton, NH  
Easter Vigil—April 16, 2022  
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Whenever possible, I travel to the coast. I like to stand in the sand and watch the waves. Each one brings forth some small ocean treasure, a shell, a small fish, some plants and maybe a rock. Each prize however, small is a gift to us from a generous God, our God, who placed all these things in the sea, "in the beginning." I have long since given up swimming in the ocean due to age and fear, but I have been known to daringly wade in up to my knees. My own little baptism rite.

This evening's service began at Genesis 1:1 and carried us through a story in scripture arriving at the Sacraments. After my little offering of a homily, we are invited to reaffirm our Baptismal vows and retell the story of the beginning of our Christian lives. Baptism is an invitation to a new freedom to follow the way of Christ. It is the initiation rite for membership in the body of Christ and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

According to the Book of Common Prayer, the outward and visible sign of Baptism is water, enriched with the Word of God, in which the person is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The inward, spiritual grace is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family, forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit.

Infant and Adult baptism together express the full meaning better than one of those would alone. Adult baptism is a free will response to God's call to live according to Christian principles. Infant baptism

declares that even when humans are helpless, they are loved and affirmed by God.

Matthew's Gospel describes the baptism of John the Baptist's followers. They came to the edge of the river to be immersed in the water. Symbolically, baptism represented the repentance of their sin-filled lives and the emergence of a new faith-filled life dedicated to adherence to the Law. Their sins were washed in the waters of the Jordan River and the current carried them away.

Jesus' baptism is an obedient response to God's call. For Jesus, who is sinless, the water itself is the blessing of his Father. Emerging from its depths, God proclaims Jesus his beloved and just like Genesis, the story begins that concludes with the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.

Our Baptismal service is brimming with praise and worship of the Trinity. The water in the font, though appearing calm, is alive and as in Genesis, God's Spirit is hovering over the face of the water. The ceremony asks us to renounce evil and injustice and walk with Jesus in grace and truth. The liturgy builds until it crests with the pouring of the water and the anointing of the candidate. The Holy Spirit bursts forth and comes to rest upon all of us.

Last October, I witnessed a baptism rite of sorts. I was staying on the coast of Maine in an oceanfront hotel room. When I arrived at my room, I rushed over, threw open the sliding glass doors and stepped outside on the balcony. It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, the sky was a deep blue, and the air was filled with the sounds of seagulls and crashing waves and that slightly fishy smell that you get whenever you go to the coast. There was a stiff wind coming off the water directly at me and I know we don't use the term "wind chill factor" in October, but it was about 25 degrees on that balcony.

To my right down on the beach was a family, a mother, father and a boy about 4. They were dressed appropriately for the weather. The child was playing at the water's edge. When a wave came in, he would run away from it laughing and giggling. When the water receded, the child would chase it back into the sea, shouting with delight. This back and forth went on for quite a while. I looked away and when I looked back, the child must have become warm running around because he had removed his jacket and I imagine his feet were soaked from the wet sand because his shoes and socks were discarded on the beach as were his pants, his shirt and his underwear. There was now nothing between him, his happiness and the water.

He was delighted at the freedom he experienced in the waves but even his untamed and untethered joy, as well as the day, had to come to an end. Just as God calls to us, his parents called and when he came out of the water, he was wrapped in a warm towel, dried off and carried home, their beloved. He will have many more adventures and we will continue our faith journey toward God's promised renewal of all things, the fulfillment of God's purposes and the coming of God's justice and peace.