

Easter Sunday 2023; Benefice Holy Communion with Baptism, Ampleforth

What a joy and privilege for us today to have at our service for Easter Sunday a baptism! There is something amazing having a baptism at any time but to do it today carries extra meaning and significance - I should know I was baptized on an Easter Sunday and look what happened to me!

For all involved, particularly the candidates but also parents, godparents, and sponsors, it is a joyful moment when we rejoice in what God has done for us in Christ, making serious promises and declaring the faith. The wider community of the local church welcomes the new Christian, promising support, and prayer for the future. A baptism is not a one-off event; it is the beginning of a journey. Hearing and doing these things provides an opportunity to recall our own baptism and reflect on the progress made on our own journey, which is now to be shared with this new member of the Church.

Whenever we enter a church building, we are reminded immediately that baptism is the foundation of the Christian life, its starting point because the first thing we encounter is the font and we progress to the altar.

Fonts were originally square in shape to symbolise a sepulchre, then from the fifth century some were circular to imitate the shape of the womb. Then later they became octagonal to symbolize the seven days of creation and the eighth day, the day of Resurrection. Here in the font, we see the integral meaning of baptism - birth and rebirth, death, and resurrection. It is a symbolic and literal journey and for those baptized as babies God offers the opportunity to reappropriate the sign at every stage of life. Some of us took the opportunity to do that yesterday evening at Stonegrave when our baptism vows were renewed at the Service of Light. Those opportunities remind us what baptism means as we enter into a more fuller and deeper commitment to God and our calling as His disciples. It is a source of strengthening of our continuing Christian development shared with the many with whom we are joined in Christ.

This involves the symbolic and faithful *separation* from this world (all that is separate from God) and reception into a universal community, the Church.

Through baptism we are freed from the control of sin and death and incorporated into the Church and become workers for God in

the world in mission. This marks the beginning of a journey of growth and spiritual development into the pattern of Christ. With both adult and infant baptism, it is the *action of God* which comes first, it is a grace and gift of God that does not require or presuppose human effort. Baptism is much more than a momentary event, a beginning, or a key to the other sacraments; it is a process or journey a voyage of discovery. It is the sign that points Christians to their true identity, character and calling. During the baptism we invoke the Trinity and claim for the person God's promises and achievements as shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a vocation we all share as Christians; it is the essential foundation on which all Christian life is built.

So today as we celebrate with joy Easter Sunday, we can ask ourselves a question too. How important is our baptism? Consider it as your personal identification with the greatest act of human history—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Leo today and for us all, baptism is your personal testimony to, and the inward assurance of, your passage from the old life to the new life...

Thanks be to God. Amen.