

Like Newly Baptized Infants, Keep us Growing into Salvation

1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

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Second of Easter a

Pastor Douglas Punke

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We didn't chant today's introit. Because — praise God — we celebrated a baptism today, we sang our entrance hymn. But had we heard today's introit, we would have heard the antiphon from 1 Peter 2: *“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good”* (1 Pet. 2:2-3).

What an object lesson little Juniper Anne should be for us! She was brought today to the font of rebirth into the kingdom of God, and we pray that she may always *“long for the pure spiritual milk,”* so that she may grow, not only in stature and wisdom, but especially *“into salvation.”* She is a reminder of what Jesus says about us: *“unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 18:3). Indeed, we pray that we, like newborn infants, will always long for the pure spiritual milk that will sustain us into this salvation.

What a blessed grace this is from our God. In chapter 1, part of our Epistle, we hear Peter speak about the blessedness of God, the *“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* And he points us, not very obliquely, to the same grace which He has bestowed on us through Holy Baptism.

*“According to his great mercy,”* Peter says. Our God, the *“LORD is merciful and gracious,”* David sings, *“slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”* (Ps. 103:8), and that mercy and grace and love means forgiveness of sins. David continues, *“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. ... as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us”* (Ps. 103:10, 12). Or as Peter and the apostles preached, *“The God of our fathers raised Jesus ... God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 5:30-31).

Indeed, little Juniper Anne needed this great mercy. As with all people born *“of the will of man”* (John 1:13), she was born in sin (Rom. 5:12), even *“dead in [her] trespasses and sins”* (Eph. 2:1). David confesses it this way, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me”* (Ps. 51:5). And so, steeped in sin, Juniper was given a rebirth into the kingdom, something Jesus had told Nicodemus was required—born again today by water and the Spirit that washed away her sins (Acts 22:16).

St. Peter says more. He says that the *“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* rebirths us *“to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* The grace of baptism is connected up to Jesus' resurrection. In chapter 3 also, Peter points to God bestowing our salvation through Holy Baptism *“as an appeal to God*

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*for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21).*

Again Baptism is connected not only to Jesus’ death but to His resurrection, as St. Paul says, *“all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death[.] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”* (Rom. 6:3-4). This is who we are; this is how we live as Christians, because we have been raised up with Christ and have an inheritance in heaven awaiting us *“that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.”*

It was the evening of Jesus’ resurrection when He appeared to the disciples in their locked room and spoke words of peace to them: *“Peace be with you.”* These are words associated with forgiveness of sins, as Jesus explains, sending out His disciples to proclaim and bestow forgiveness — the forgiveness He earned by the wounds He showed them. Rightly, they’re the words that we left Juniper with as she had been born from above and had her sins washed away: *“Peace be with you!”*

Thomas wasn’t with them on that evening, but he was on the eighth day. Jesus came among the disciples again with the same words, *“Peace be with you.”* Remember, Jesus didn’t just earn your forgiveness, but His resurrection means He wants to give it.

The eighth day makes one think resurrection again, for Jesus rose not just on the first day of the week, but for early Christians, He also rose on the day after the Sabbath, on the eighth day. Moreover, they connected that up with baptism. That’s why our font is eight sided, but even if the font isn’t, you’ll often see some sort of eight-sided structure associated with it, like at the seminary. Their font is round, but if you look up, you’ll see the octagon representing the eternal eighth day of life in Christ that comes by Holy Baptism.

Because of this eighth day understanding, and the Old Testament type of circumcision, which also happened on the eighth day, early Christians were often baptized on the eighth day, just as Juniper was today. Baptism fulfills what circumcision prefigured. St. Paul wrote, *“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him”* (Col. 2:11-13). Today on her eighth day, Juniper was raised up with Christ in His resurrection through her baptism, through her circumcision without hands. She was baptized into life with Christ. That’s what God does in baptism.

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As you heard also, Thomas was dead in trespasses and sins and unbelief on that eighth day following Jesus' resurrection, but God raised him up in his own "baptism" (and here I'm using the word metaphorically) into Jesus' death. I won't believe unless "*I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side.*" I won't believe unless I myself can participate in Jesus' resurrection — as we do in baptism. Of course, Jesus invited Thomas to do just that, and, in this way, he was "sundered from the number of the unbelieving" and placed "dry and secure in the holy ark of Christendom."

Brothers and sisters, we don't get to participate in Jesus' resurrection as Thomas did and believed. Our participation is mediated by the means of grace — today especially thinking about Holy Baptism, but the result is the same. Through these we are sundered from the number of the unbelieving and placed in the holy ark of Christendom. In fact, Jesus calls us blessed, for we are numbered among those who have not seen and yet have believed. We believe in the resurrection. We believe that "*God raised [Jesus] from the dead*" and we confess Him as our Lord (Rom. 10:9). And we confess the resurrection of our bodies and the life everlasting. This is our salvation as we remain steadfast in Christ unto the end.

Therefore, we pray, Lord keep us as newborn infants, longing for the pure spiritual milk of Your Word and Sacraments, for we know that these were given us that we "*may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name.*" Yes, Lord, we along with Juniper Anne have tasted that You are good. Keep us ever growing into this salvation.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!