

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Oh, the joy at the birth of a child ... for parents and siblings, for grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, for friends, and yes, for a child born to Christian parents, for us fellow church members. Like last Sunday, this Sunday we get to “oo and ah” over little Bishop Reid Muehl.

It’s not true for all Christian parents, but for us Lutherans, it goes without saying that we begin to plan for the date when the newborn child will be baptized, brought through water and the word into the kingdom of God — or as Dr. Voelz likes to say, “Brought under the rule and reign of God.” Through these baptismal waters, Bishop has today been reborn into Christ, a birth “*not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God,*” made thereby a child of God (John 1:13).

There’s planning that has to take place — what Sunday (Laikyn and Zach had that one planned, barring any unforeseen delays, before Bishop emerged into the light from his comfortable home in Laikyn’s womb), who will serve as baptismal sponsors, whom shall we invite, etc.

But is there much thought about what his rebirth means in the days ahead? According to Jesus’ command, baptism makes disciples. “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matt. 28:19). Bishop is now a disciple of Christ by virtue of his baptism.

But discipleship is hard, Jesus teaches us today. Disciples of Christ have enemies: “the devil, the world, and our sinful nature,” Luther teaches, enemies “which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come” (*Small Catechism*, Lord’s Prayer, 3rd Petition). Talking about baptism, Luther especially focuses in on the devil, saying: “it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy” (*Luther’s Works*, 51:102, “The Order of Baptism”).

Jesus doesn’t really talk about the devil today, but rather focuses on the world and our sinful nature. “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*” I say, He focuses on our sinful nature, because this hard teaching attacks some of our idolatries with respect to family.

Now, Jesus had already taught similarly, as we heard several weeks ago. “*Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ... father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-*

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*in-law against mother-in-law*” (Luke 12:51, 53), but that was descriptive of Jesus’ coming. Today Jesus is prescriptive.

This is a hard saying (John 6:60). Christians rightly put such a high premium on family, that Jesus’ words shock us. Some might take offense (John 6:61). After all, doesn’t the commandment say: “Honor your father and your mother”? And doesn’t Luther explain it that “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, **love and cherish** them” (SC, Fourth Commandment)? How then can Jesus here say that we are to “*hate*” father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters?

I submit that Jesus is using an Old Testament understanding of the word “hate” here. Moses reports that “[w]hen the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb,” but in the preceding verse, he reported “[Jacob] loved Rachel more than Leah” (Gen. 29:31, 30). Likewise here. Thus, Jesus is addressing our idolatries. His point is not that a disciple should have feelings of hatred toward his family, or himself, but that a disciple’s priority is to be with the Lord. “You shall have no other gods”; “What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above **all things**” (SC, First Commandment), including your father, mother, wife, children, etc.

It is the family of God that should have primacy with Christians, as Jesus Himself said, “*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it*” (Luke 8:21), and as Paul demonstrated in his letter to Philemon. Notice the familial language Paul uses: Timothy is his brother; Apphia is a sister in Christ; Paul had become Onesimus’ spiritual father; and Philemon, too, was Paul’s brother, whom Paul exhorted to treat Onesimus also as a brother in Christ. With such an attitude, disciples can keep the first commandment while honoring their human family.

Jesus also taught today: “*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*” It’s another hard saying. Many people can hardly bear to hear of Jesus’ cross and death, even though it’s by that cross and death that they have set before them life and salvation. Even less do they like to hear of crosses they will have to bear. But Jesus tells us that bearing crosses — daily crosses — is part of being a disciple.

Thanks be to God that in the United States, our crosses are not what they are around the world. I was reading of the suffering church in a journal the other day, reading of the young boy beaten to death for being a Christian, reading of a church bulldozed down simply for being a church. Our crosses may not be like these but they’re still crosses of ridicule, reviling, or rejection. They can be crosses of

isolation — the loss of relationships, or of active persecution — the loss of a job, loss of freedom, loss of life.

But Jesus doesn't call upon disciples to lose heart amidst crosses; rather, to "*count the cost*" of discipleship, lest you experience these crosses, and with shallow roots, "*believe [only] for a while, and in time of testing fall away*" (Luke 8:13), lest the desire for "*the cares and riches and pleasures of life*" turn you aside from your first love (Luke 8:14). Therefore, Jesus concludes His parable on counting the cost, saying, "*any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*"

Actually, when the good news of pregnancy comes, Christian mothers and fathers do count the cost. They have to make plans for the new addition to the family — more than just baptismal plans. Do we have room or do we need a new home? The first child often means purchasing a lot of new things: crib, bassinet, high chair, clothes, diapers, etc.; subsequent children might do with hand-me-downs, at least for a while. How will child-care chores get distributed? Etc.

Even more significant should be the baptismal plans, as the LORD said through Moses: "*I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days ....*"

I know that this verse, "*choose life,*" is a favorite among pro-lifers and Right to Life advocacy groups. Our own Right to Life of Northeast Indiana's website address is [ichooselife.org](http://ichooselife.org). But the Lord here is not talking about making a decision to keep a baby or abort it. He's talking about the life that comes through faith in Him, that comes from discipleship, that comes from fearing and loving the Lord, that comes from holding fast to His word. That comes first from being brought into the kingdom of God through Holy Baptism, being united with Jesus in a death like His ... on a cross. But it continues through "*teaching [your children] to observe all that [Jesus has] commanded [them]*" (Matt. 28:20), at home, Sunday School, and catechesis. It includes teaching the reality of cross-bearing for disciples.

Today, Jesus helps disciples prepare themselves for the high cost of discipleship in family relationships, in trials and tribulations, and even in financial costs. But counting the cost, Christians don't take offense; they don't walk away. They look to Jesus and boast in His cross. They look to the eternal life He has won and gives. Then Christ's disciples can rejoice in their family in Christ, in their crosses, and in their poverty, all for the sake of reaching this "*goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 3:14). To that end, today we welcome our little brother into God's family and to his life of discipleship under the cross of Jesus.

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