

APPENDIX

Birth and Growth in Christ

The Baptism of Jesus

At his baptism Jesus heard the voice from heaven which identified him as the 'beloved Son' of God, the Christ. He experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit and, led by the Spirit, he devoted his life to the salvation of the world. He saw his death as the atoning sacrifice for sin and the completion of his baptism (Luke 12:50).

Identification with Christ

'Do you not know that 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, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life' (Romans 6:3-4).

The two main sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, together with Confirmation, all relate to identification with Jesus Christ in his Paschal Mystery: that is, his birth, death, resurrection and ascension, and the giving of the Holy Spirit, all understood in the light of the Passover. God saved Israel by the Passover Lamb and Jesus is the Lamb of God by whose death and resurrection his people are brought out of bondage to sin, into new life in him.

Baptism

'Baptism is to be understood not merely as the rite of a moment but as the principle of a lifetime' (Lambeth Conference, 1968). Just as ordinary life involves, birth and growth, so our birth and growth as Christians is an on-going development towards maturity. On the other hand, the administration of baptism is once for all, like birth and death. Christ died once and Christians are baptized once, either as infants or as adults.

The Apostles first proclaimed the gospel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) and three thousand converts were baptized. Most of these must have been adults. Today there are also many, not baptized in infancy, who come to faith as adults and then seek baptism. It is likely that from the earliest times Christian parents brought their children to baptism,

and in time this became the general practice. For them, as for the Jews before them, infants were regarded as committed with their parents to God's Covenant. When Gentile converts, or proselytes, were received into Israel their children were received with them and shared in proselyte baptism. It is likely that St Paul followed this practice when he baptized households (1 Corinthians 1:16; Acts 16:15, 33). The practice of infant baptism witnesses to the truth that God must first give his grace to his people before they can respond to it.

Whilst the response of faith has to be made by each individual, human life is always lived in community. Children are born into a human family and those who are baptized are brought into the family of God, the Church. St Paul says, 'By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (1 Corinthians 12:13). Those who are baptized into the Body of Christ share in his anointing by the Spirit. United in him, they are to serve God in the world in a ministry of caring and compassion.

(An Anglican Prayer Book 1989, p. 361-2)