

The Baptism of Evelyn

I want you to think for a minute about the things parents choose to do for their children because they think it's important.

Now I want to acknowledge right away that for some folks thinking back isn't easy and doesn't hold great memories. Absent parents or parents who were self-absorbed: not everyone looks back and has happy memories – but for the majority we are able to consider what our parents thought was the right thing to do.

I do know some folks were sent to boarding school at age 7. Whether that was for convenience or your well-being is a moot point – but it reminds me of Samuel in the OT who was promised to God's service and his mother gave him to be adopted by the priest Eli aged 3 or 4.

So maybe schooling was high on the priority list of parental behaviour??

My family were very religious and Sunday was wall to wall services. At one time I attended 5 different events on a Sunday. Faith was high on their agenda.

My wife Katherine has been dragged to every historical site known to man. First a car journey and then getting out to look at some mound or lump or rock or field and being lectured that this was where something or other happened in 873AD.

I'm quite excited that my walking pilgrimage this Summer starts Near Hexham where King Oswald (Saint Oswald) raised a large cross before the battle of Heavenfield in 635AD. Of course the cross that's there now is new and the church that's there now is new but this is where it happened. I'm excited!! But you can imagine a 13 year old Katherine being bored senseless by

frequent visits such as this – but that's what was thought important.

My father washed the car every Saturday so that it was clean and shiny ready for Sunday. Having a clean car was thought important – I used to help. The pendulum has swung the other way for me – I never wash the car.

It might be that you are vegetarian and so are your children.

It might be to support Liverpool – which I personally regard as a safeguarding issue. Jake is going to make sure Evelyn supports Reading – so there's going to be suffering in her life.

It might be Christmas, I know some families for whom Christmas is massive.

Different faith groups also have different ideas about what is important, and even within Christianity there is focus on different things, so for those in the Catholic church confirmation and first communion is a focus.

It might be pets, or playing a musical instrument, or travel, or playing games. Like it or not as parents our choices influence our children and what we think is important is what takes place.

In our Gospel today a Jewish couple from Nazareth have come from Bethlehem where they had been required to register (thanks to a Roman edict) to the temple to do what custom required of them.

They are doing the right thing from a religious and spiritual point of view. Jewish religious law was that the first-born male was consecrated (that means set aside – dedicated) to God and an offering was made of two doves or two young pigeons.

Nobody knew them in Jerusalem. No one would recognise them in the temple. There would be a system in place to manage these things which would happen on an almost daily basis.

We know from our Christmas story that both Mary and Joseph were sincere and obedient to God's word...they come to the temple to consecrate Jesus.

In 2004 Jake and his siblings were christened here in Holy Trinity. His parents (here today) thought this was something they wanted to do, it was important and the right thing. Here we are 20 years later and Jake and Weronika are bringing their daughter for her Christening.

Why? What do they think will happen? What's it for and will anything unusual happen now they are here?

What happened to Mary and Joseph was unusual. They met Simeon. Simeon is a deeply Godly man and God has given him an extraordinary promise.

The Jewish nation had been waiting for centuries for the Messiah to come. It had been 400 hundred years since the last prophecies about him. In ways we can't imagine, Simeon knew that God had promised him he would see the Messiah before he died.

The phrase used to speak about this is that Simeon would see the *consolation of Israel*. Gilly and I were speaking about this and in another translation, Gilly found it says Simeon was waiting for the Refreshing of Israel. Renewal. Restoration.

Simeon now knows he can go to his rest having seen the fulfilment of the promises.

(The Nunc Dimittis is the Latin version of the song of Simeon).

It says Mary and Joseph marvelled at his words and what happened. They already knew theirs was an unusual situation but they weren't expecting anything odd just at that moment.

When we draw close to God we need to be aware that we are opening ourselves to the completely unexpected. Are you sure that's what you want? Life already has things that are unexpected.

When she was 8 Weronika's parents moved from Poland to the UK. Weronika went into school where no-one spoke Polish and she couldn't speak English. That's a challenge.

Evelyn however is being brought up bilingual and she won't know any different. Jake and Weronika want her to be as aware of her Polish Heritage and her English Heritage. Those of us who struggled to learn a second language at school (and failed) marvel at the thought that Evelyn will speak both, fluently simply because Mum and Dad use two languages with her. They think that's important.

They think too that this occasion is important, beginning the journey for Evelyn in her getting to know her Heavenly Father.

I spoke earlier of parents doing things they think are important with the children.

As Gilly and I were chatting she spoke of singing in the choir and playing mixed hockey with Dad. Of cinema and shopping trips with Mum. Of watching TV all together. What mattered was building and keeping relationship and relationship is at the heart of Christian Faith. God isn't a distant Father occasionally chucking a blessing our way, but a good father who wants what is best for us and consequently leads us at times through difficulties and problems.

Being Christened isn't a magic blessing to give Evelyn health happiness and wealth, it's the beginning of her journey of discovery and promise. I will be with you.

This is what we want for Evelyn and the children of the church and every one of us, a growing deep relationship with God our Heavenly Father.

I would hope that Evelyn learns the deep truth of the words from Psalm 37 we heard – I'll just pick out this verse.

⁴Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

It can be a struggle but when we put God first above all things, he gives us our hearts desire. Of course our hearts desire is for the right things because we've put God first.

The service continued here with the anointing of Evelyn with Oil.

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 28 January 2024