



CHILD DEDICATION OR BAPTISM?

When it's time to present your child to the Lord out of thanksgiving, why do we do this before the church? It is biblical tradition to bring your child for dedication to the Lord; even Jesus Himself was brought to the temple by his parents. We do this before the body of Christ because we are welcoming our child into the family of faith.

In this moment, we are also dedicating ourselves as parents to raising our child in the family of faith; to teach him or her what it means to believe in, and trust, Jesus for salvation. By presenting our child in this setting, we are asking the body of Christ to support us as parents in prayer and to dedicate themselves to helping shape our child's spiritual life.

When Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me...for of such is the Kingdom of heaven," he was telling us that only through childlike trust and faith are we able to come into relationship with God. He was also demonstrating his love for children and his desire that they understand how much he loves them.

In the rich Wesleyan and Reformed traditions, parents often choose infant baptism instead of dedication. To baptize one's child is different than dedication in the ceremonial act—but similar to it—in that both emphasize the commitment to raising the child in the Lord and in the community of faith.

Baptism and dedication do not secure salvation, but rather make a statement of commitment on the part of the parents to create an environment where Christ's offer of salvation is clearly presented to the child as he or she grows in his or her understanding of God. Both acts demonstrate a parent's commitment to raising their child in the awareness of Jesus' love, as well as in the fellowship and instruction of the church. The church is the representative of Christ in the world, and a necessary relationship for all of us who follow Christ. We need each other in this walk with Christ.

When we bring a child before the Father in dedication or baptism, we do not consider it a religious right of passage that secures salvation, but rather an initiation into the community of faith that will enable the child to learn how to follow Jesus. Through the child's interaction in a Christian family and church, he or she will eventually know how to interpret the Holy Spirit's voice within, who draws each toward a decision to trust his or her life to Jesus.

Though Jesus was presented to the Lord by Joseph and Mary in the temple on the eighth day, he also chose to undergo water baptism as an outward sign of an inward commitment on his part to do the will of God. Infant dedication and baptism are different in that the child may choose to

undergo baptism again later in life as a way of telling the community of faith he or she has decided to wholeheartedly follow Christ. We do not believe that baptism or dedication secures a person for heaven. Every one of us must decide as to whether we will follow Jesus or not. Once we have, baptism is a way to affirm our commitment and witness our intentions to the faith community.

As you present your child, you are telling the faith community of your own relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and that you have made a commitment to put God first in your life and your family. At dedication or baptism, you are entering into a partnership with the Holy Spirit to work together in providing the best opportunity for your child to eventually become aware of his or her own need to accept Christ as Savior. The family that will surround you at the ceremony will also be asked to commit to supporting your desire to raise your children in the Lord and in the community of faith.

Pastor Jim