



Views from

the hermitage

Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Baptism

The season leading up to Easter was, in the early history of the Christian Church, the time for preparing new believers for their initiation into the faith. The tradition was to set aside the forty days before Easter for specific scriptural and doctrinal (especially the Nicene Creed) study and testing. Those who passed the test were baptized at the Easter vigil by the presiding bishop. We now call this season Lent (an Anglo-Saxon word for *spring*) and it serves as a season of self-examination and confessional preparation for Holy Week and Resurrection Sunday.

The act of baptism is the rite of initiation of a believer in Christ into the mysteries of the faith and into the Body of Christ. It means rather more, though, than church membership and rather less than salvation. Because baptism is central to the practice of Christianity, it is good for Christians to remember these meanings each year. Let us look a little more closely as our Lenten meditation.

Less than Salvation

Salvation is the destination of conversion. Turning from one way and adopting a new way (conversion) implies the movement, or journey, of the individual toward God. God is both savior and salvation—the one who saves and the object or goal of the journey.

Paul reminds us in the First Letter to the Corinthians that, “Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel.” (17) He goes on to define that gospel as “Christ crucified... righteousness, and sanctification and redemption...the power of God...” and he comes around

again to his first assertion that the “foundation is Jesus Christ.” (Cf., chapters 1-3) All of a believer’s energy is to be directed toward God. Not toward right actions, right doctrine, or even right thinking, but to God alone. God will give the believer righteousness as a gift. It is so hard to live in the truth of this statement that there are vows we take and ritual or symbolic actions that we engage in that remind us constantly that who we are in Christ is the gift of God.

One of the vows/rituals/symbolic actions is baptism. Our baptism pictures for us what we mean when we say “yes” to God’s invitation to follow Christ. We die to our old way of life and live into a new. Thus, being immersed or somehow “going under” water, pictures our death and coming up from under the water pictures our resurrection or new life.

Different people enter into baptism with different expectations of the outcome of the ritual, some for the significance of identifying with Christ in a public way, some for the actual experience of “dying and rising with Christ,” but each one receives the same assurance, namely, that baptism leaves its “mark” on the believer. The Holy Spirit is present to the one being baptized just as the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River.

This discussion of baptism assumes believer’s baptism. However, without arguing the merits of one system over another, the process of Confirmation in churches which practice infant baptism acts as the connection between the baptismal action and one’s own faith journey. Remember, it is not baptism that saves but baptism

is a sign of salvation *already manifest* in a person's life. Just so, confirmation allows a person to publicly declare their conversion and link it, by way of a vow, with their previous baptism.

More than Church Membership

The act of being baptized connects a believer with Christ and by extension, with the Christian Church. Baptism brings a believer from an individual journey of salvation into the community of believers who have also said "yes" to God.

But baptism is not membership in the local church only. Baptism confers membership in the historical church—I am baptized into fellowship with the communion of saints, those who have gone before me and those who will come after me. Baptism also confers membership in the worldwide church—I am baptized into fellowship with believers in other countries and in other denominations. My responsibility does not lie merely in serving on a committee in my local church or giving to support the programs of my chosen denomination. My connection is to the whole, partially hidden, messy, disagreeable, mysterious Body of Christ.

Baptism creates new possibilities for each believer. In the second and third chapters of the letter to the Colossians, Paul writes that baptism raises the believer above the petty arguments about right diet, right ritual, or right treatment of the body. Rather, the believer is freed to act above "right" and to behave with "compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience," reaching out with forgiveness and love. Baptism opens the way for the believer to live under the rule of the "peace of Christ" in "perfect harmony" with others.

How is this possible? Take hope in this: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal. 3:27) You are resplendent in your baptismal robe: it is Christ himself, the glory of God. You are not alone. Shine!

-Naomi R. Wenger

Quiet Day Retreats

This year our *Quiet Day* retreat for Lent will be held on **Wednesday, February 13 and Saturday, March 8**. We begin the day with Morning Prayer at 8:00 and conclude by 3:00.

Using the dialog between Nicodemus and Jesus (John 3) as our text, we will be remembering our baptism and reflecting on what it means to be "born from above." Cost for the day is \$45 and includes lunch. To register, contact us: 269-244-8696 or hermitagecommunity.org/contact/

St. Francis Icon Retreat: 4/14-18

Allow yourself to be a hand for God, meet your growing edge, and commune with St. Francis of Assisi as you write an icon of this "fool for Christ." Each participant will complete an acrylic gouache and gold leaf image of the saint on gessoed wood. No experience is needed. Participants will keep silence in an attitude of attentiveness to God and join together in regular periods of prayer based on the life and teachings of St. Francis. Ample time will be given to explore the Hermitage grounds. Private rooms will be provided for each overnight guest. Commuters should note that some evening work will be required. The retreat will be taught by Donna Rathert who has studied under Peter Pearson since 2000, and taken classes from the Iconographic Arts Institute and the Prosopeon School of Iconography. A certified spiritual director, she brings a contemplative approach to this ancient practice of painting your prayers.

The retreat will begin with the 7:00 p.m. Taizé Evensong in the Chapel on April 13. (A 5:30 p.m. soup supper will be available for early arrivals.) The last meal will be provided on Friday, April 18 at midday, with departure by 5:00.

The fee for overnight guests, including meals and materials is \$400. The fee for commuters, including meals and materials is \$320. A deposit of \$50 is due by March 24, 2008. Participation is limited to 12.

What I See

The snow comes and goes but mostly comes this winter. Each morning on my walk, I disturb a Blue jay on its nest in the spruce tree. It flutters and fusses and then goes back to sleep as the sun has not yet risen. Sliding down the hill to where the “trail” begins, I slow my descent on a wintering woodchuck’s entry mound and climb through the fence. I see the tracks of a raccoon from the tree to the shed so close together it looks as if it is barely able to move. It’s probably sleepwalking. Most of the tall meadow grasses and weeds have been beaten down by the snow’s weight or the wind’s harsh shove and only the shrubs and berry canes stand in the open field. Rabbit tracks are plentiful but I’ve only seen one tearing through the purple canes. The skunks in their tree nest have emerged only twice this winter by my nose. The coyotes are running in a pack and sing joyously in the early light. Though I can’t see them there seem to be a dozen voices. Pond and swamp are frozen. Water birds are gone but the Pileated woodpecker leaves sawdust scattered on the snow at the base of several nearby trees. Owls call in the soft light and pellets give evidence that they, at least, are eating well. Mice and voles leave their miniscule trails on the snow and when the sun warms I see them scurrying to and fro. Deer are plentiful in all sizes. They steal all the birdseed I put out and have almost broken the feeder past usefulness. I’m not sure if that means they are eating well or are just really hungry. The squirrels still look fat and they sure are sassy, scolding me as I walk home. -NRW

Volunteer Needs

- Cutting and splitting wood for The Hut: bring your own saw/axe or use ours. Contact David Wenger.
- Bookkeeper: we need someone to commit to two days per month to write checks, process deposits and enter financial data into the computer. Apply to David Wenger.

- Phoenix Gallery coordinator: do you have an interest in art as opening a window to the soul and to God? Time commitment can vary. Apply to Naomi Wenger
- Weekend Cooks: individuals who are willing to cook simple, wholesome food for weekend guests. Contact David Wenger.

The Hermitage Calendar

- Feb 10 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
Feb 13 Lent Quiet Day,
Born of Water and Spirit,
Naomi Wenger 8:00—3:00
- Mar 8 Lent Quiet Day,
Born of Water and Spirit,
Naomi Wenger 8:00—3:00
Mar 9 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
- Apr 13 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
Apr 13-18 Icon Writing Retreat with
Donna Rathert
- May 11 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
- Jun 8 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
- Jul 13 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm
- Aug 8 Hermitage Jam, 8:00—4:00
Aug 9 Feast of the Transfiguration -
8:00—4:00
Aug 10 Taizé Evensong, 7:00 pm

Electronic News

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11321 Dutch Settlement

Three Rivers, MI 49093

269-244-8696 ° Fax 269-244-5856

thehermitage@juno.com

www.hermitagecommunity.org

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Taizé Services: Second Sundays at Seven, Chapel of the Transfiguration

The Word Alone

Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:5-8

the hermitage **Mission**

As Jesus was revitalized for being about his Father's business by periodic withdrawal to retreat and prayer, so The Hermitage seeks in its mission:

- *To be a prayer community, available as a place of spiritual formation where scripture, silence, nature, group experiences, and personal companioning are cultivated elements of retreat.*
- *To provide a guesthouse away from daily tasks where pastors and other pilgrims can deepen their call and relationship with God, be refreshed in their whole person and be revitalized by the presence and promise of Christ.*

(from The Hermitage Rule)

Resident Community: David & Naomi Wenger, co-directors, Anthony Franchina

Board of Directors: Mary Asmonga-Knapp, Allan Martling (chair), Natala Mohl, Biff Weidman, David Wenger, Naomi Wenger