

A Sermon by the Rev. Roger Wm. Smith on the Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 22, 2011 at the Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

About Baptism

This morning we baptized Reef Anthony Fermin. So let's take a few minutes to consider what that means—what it means to Anthony, to his family, to all of us, and to God.

In the course of the Baptismal service we prayed that that this child would be brought “to the fullness of God's peace and glory”. (Prayer Book, pg. 306)

Peace and glory. When the Virgin Mary was told that she would be the mother of Christ, she was also told that her cousin Elizabeth was expecting a child. So Mary saddled up her donkey and hurried into the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin. When she entered Elizabeth's house, she called out a greeting of some sort—maybe she said *Shalom*. When Elizabeth heard the greeting, she experienced something that expectant mothers often feel; the baby leapt in her womb.

St. Luke tells us that Elizabeth was then filled with the Spirit of God, and she exclaimed to Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Luke 1:42)

Of course we would not deny the very special blessedness of the child that Mary was carrying, but I wonder if Elizabeth's exclamation could not be addressed to every expectant mother. For what could be more blessed than that most remarkable of all blessings, the gift of a child?

I'm sure everyone here would agree that children can be a mixed blessing. A 5 year old girl was asked by her rector how many children there were in her family. She told her that there were 7. The minister observed that so many children must cost a lot. “Oh no,” said the child, “we don't buy them, we raise them.” When news reached the women of the church that this same mother was about to have her 8th child, they raised a little money and sent her a playpen. Some weeks later she wrote them a note saying, “Thank you very much for the pen. I sit in it every afternoon and read.”

Despite all the demands they place on us, we must never lose sight of the fact that children are the blessed fruit—the crowning gift of all God's creation.

And as we gather here to welcome 4-month-old Reef Fermin into the family, let it be our prayer that he will grow up to know that he is a crowning gift of God's creation.

The sort of persons you and I are, and how we perceive ourselves has been largely determined and shaped by the people in our lives. This, of course includes our parents, our brothers and sisters, our grandparents, out aunts and uncles, our partners in marriage, our children and their marriage partners. It also includes our friends, teachers, associates, and the others we have met along the way of our lives.

As I think of my own life, and the people who have been the determiners of what I am, I am reminded of my great grandmother. I mention her today, because the child we are baptizing this morning is the Milton and Frances Parkers' great grandchild. My great grandmother, Clara Cary, was born when Lincoln was president. She was brought up in the Baptist Church. She was baptized in a Michigan lake in the early spring. They had to break the ice to do it. She loved to tell that story—that along with other stories about her faith

journey. I learned more about what it means to be a Christian from Grandmother Cary than I did from all the priests and preachers I have known.

As I recall this ancestor and all of the others who have determined what I am, I am startled to realize that well over half of them are dead...As I ponder that, I am reminded once again of how short and precious our lives really are. Life was once described by a medieval poet, whose name has long been forgotten. He said that human life is like a bird. It flies out of the cold, dark night into the castle tower, circles around the tower a few times, and then flies out never to be seen again...

As You and I scurry about on our daily routines we don't take time to think about the shortness or the blessedness of life. Perhaps we secretly fear that if we don't do our work well, we might vanish like that bird in the night, leaving no evidence of our ever having been here. Fear of oblivion can be a very sobering thing.

We find ourselves wondering how much our lives have influenced the lives of others. We realize that whether we live or die is of no concern to most of the world. It is so easy to get lost in the shuffle of this enormous galaxy in which we live. Your life and mine may seem like a twinkle of a star in the vast stretches of time into which they have been set.

That's the way things might seem until we factor God into our lives. When we consider that our lives are lived in the presence of God, all of that changes. The Apostle Peter once said, "I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who loves him and does what is right is acceptable to God" (Acts 10:34-5)

Acceptable to God?...Can it possibly be that I really am acceptable to him? If so, then that cold dark night outside the tower is suddenly filled with warmth and light and the flight of the bird begins and ends in God's arms. We have been brought, in the words of the baptism service, to *the fullness of God's peace and glory*.

The brief moments of our lives are transformed into eternity. Those loved ones who have died have not left us. They are singing and dancing in that fellowship we call the Communion of the Saints, looking forward to the day when we shall join them in their ecstasy.

This morning when we baptized Reef, even though he doesn't know it, he now lives in the arms of God. We have factored that which is heavenly into his life. He will never be lost in the great shuffle of time and space. Indeed, God has numbered the very hairs of his head. He counts every beat of his heart and every tear that he sheds.

I pray that all who witness this baptism will not simply be spectators sitting in the bleachers. On such an occasion we are called to join hands with Reef and all other baptized children in the brief flight of life. For it is *together* that we look toward the light and the warmth that lies beyond the windows of this tower.

On the night before he died, Jesus said to the disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3)

That is the destiny of Reef Fermin...And all others who are baptized. May God bring them to the fullness of his peace and glory. Amen