

*CRIBB<S>NOTE – January 13, 2008*

We make a lot of decisions in our lives. Some are crucial; many are trivial. One decision can set us on a course that brings us nearer to God. It inspires us to seek, thirst, and hunger for righteousness. When we decide to accept the gift of new life in relationship with Christ, we enter a mysterious realm of unexpected revelations. There is no particular formula or exact, predictable outcome anyone can guarantee the person who chooses to follow Jesus. But, the sincere commitment of discipleship leads to places we may never have considered. Events can occur we never imagined. The joy of discipleship is the realization we are never alone.

An outward sign of our decision to walk with Christ is the Sacrament of Baptism. It is an ancient ritual that symbolizes the death of a former life and the birth of an existence free of past mistakes and sins. Water is used as a sign of cleansing. We leave behind claims that trapped us in the past and we are opened to new vistas of unforeseen opportunities. Baptism connects us to legions of spiritual ancestors who offered themselves as living testaments of hope. The decision to be baptized is an act of faith that excites every aspect of life. One can only imagine the overwhelming celestial choral celebration when a person chooses God over material goods.

Have you thought about Baptism?

It has been many years since I took that step from the pew to the altar. Although I was very young, the memory remains vivid and fresh. Our pastor had preached one of his powerful exhortations on God's love. In our faith tradition, he "opened the doors of the church" and invited anyone to come forward.

My small frame was pulled by an indescribable Spirit. Time seemed to have stopped. My soul started spinning with a single desire to answer the invitation and accept the gift of grace, love, and Christ. Our pastor's hand reached out and touched my shoulder as he received me.

For a moment, I was mentally suspended between everything familiar and a strange sensation of newness. A complete change came over me that was comfortable and made me feel happy. It descended on me and has never receded. Our pastor's voice was a smooth, flowing vibration of assurance. After he asked me a few questions and explained what it meant to accept Christ, he told me I would be baptized.

It took a couple of weeks before the Big Day. My parents shared my enthusiasm. The Baptism service took place at a nearby church that had the facilities to perform the Sacrament. A white covering was placed over my body in a room just off the sanctuary. The congregation sang "Wade in the Water" as the pastor reached toward me from the baptismal pool. My feet moved slowly into the warm water. Guided by my pastor, I followed him and placed my life in his hands. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," he pronounced, pressing his weight against my chest and dunking me under water. In, under, and out of the water before I could think about what was happening, I was baptized.

Dripping wet, everything felt different. I rejoiced. My mother cried. There were no doves descending from heaven. No voice proclaimed, "This is beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Instead, it was the beginning of a spiritual journey that continues to this moment.

Have you been baptized? Do you remember that moment of decision-making? What are you doing with the life God has given to you? Are you ready for the surprise of God's joy? Do you want to be baptized?