

Explanation of infant baptism

What you've all just witnessed this morning was a baptism.

It wasn't a 'christening' - I don't mean to upset or cause a fuss for people who've been calling it that; it's just that 'christening' is not something that Jesus commanded His followers to do - baptism is.

To 'christen' just means to give someone a name. And Finlay's parents did that well over a year ago.

To 'baptise' means to publicly receive God's gift of belonging to His family, which is made possible only by trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus to make that adoption by God possible.

So we baptise the infant children not of all people, but of those whose parents have been adopted by God through their faith in Jesus for two reasons: Because God works not just with individuals, but with families. And because Jesus told us to baptise everyone who is His disciple.

In the Old Testament, God called people to belong to Him, and He gave a sign for that (circumcision) which was to be given to the children of those families who knew and followed Him.

In the New Testament, we're told that circumcision is out, and baptism is in as what God commands for those who belong to Him. Some Christians believe that there's no clear evidence that the children of those people should receive that new sign, so they say that baptism should only happen when a person decides for themselves that they want to turn around and follow Jesus. And they might be right.

But in the Church of Scotland, we baptise the infant children of believing parents, because we believe there's no evidence in the New Testament that God's changed His mind about adopting whole families to belong to Him. In fact, since God is consistent in His character towards us, we believe that God wants us to baptise children like Finlay because they are in a household that says, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' And we might be right.

Here were Jesus' parting words in Matthew's gospel to His first disciples before He ascended alive to Heaven and the Holy Spirit was sent to birth and nurture the infant church that has grown to this day:

'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Finlay's not growing up in a house where nobody's going to tell him anything about Jesus. He's growing up in a home where his parents, who are themselves disciples of Jesus, are going to teach Finlay to obey everything that God has commanded them.

'These are the promises, Finlay. Promises of life, forgiveness, welcome, identity, and eternity. Believe them and live. These are the commands, Finlay. Commands of integrity, wholeness, wisdom, and honour to our God. Obey them and thrive.'

So Finlay is a little disciple. His parents are disciples who are making disciples - of their three children, amongst others. And so the very blessed and wonderful position that Finlay is in is this: they belong to God unless and until they turn their backs on the faith in Jesus that they are disciplined in.

Unlike many children growing around them - they're in God's family already, unless and until they choose to be out. That's a much more blessed starting point than being outside God's family until someone starts discipling you in later down the road.

So we baptised Finlay, because God has adopted his parents and their whole household, and because they are disciples making a disciple of their wee boy.