

**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church**  
**The Baptism of Our Lord, Year C**  
**January 10, 2016**  
**The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson**

When the princess was sixteen years old, she was walking in the woods when she saw an old lady spinning. "What is this? May I try?" she asked. The old lady said, "Of course, my pretty little child!" And the princess sat down to spin. But the moment she touched the spindle, she fell to the floor in a deep slumber. The old lady took her back to the palace and the king and queen laid her on her bed. They were very sad and called the good fairies. The fairies felt sorry for them and cast a spell over the whole kingdom so that when the princess woke up after a hundred years, she would not be alone in the palace. Everyone, including the guards and the servants and the animals were now fast asleep. A hundred years passed. There came a prince from a far off land. He, along with his servants, went deep into the forest and crossed many rivers. Once the prince lost his way and was separated from the rest of the travellers. He came to the sleeping kingdom and was amazed. The guards, the servants, the cats and the cows were all fast asleep and snoring. The prince reached the palace and entered it. No one moved. The prince then found the sleeping princess. She was such a beautiful girl that the prince kissed her. By that time, a hundred years had passed by and everyone was waking up, one by one. The princess yawned and opened her eyes. She saw the prince and smiled.

We all know this story, when sleeping beauty's body and perhaps heart awoke after a long sleep. Let me tell you another story, about a deeper awakening that can happen to each of us, in a flash of a moment, or after a long sleep.

It is a Sunday morning in early December. Large wet snowflakes drift down from a low gray sky. The children, and some of the adults gathered, play the game of catching the snowflakes on their tongues, as they dance and move toward the open church doors. The light from within is bright and beckoning. The lightness of their mood is in contrast to the seriousness of work they know awaits them within, the work for, and with Amy. Amy is the baby. We are all here for her baptism. Her father, Joe, is holding her in a cocoon of pink blankets. Amy's grandparents and Amy's mother were baptized right here in this church, from the font they know awaits them.

The priest suddenly appears, smiling and waving, welcoming, and ushering them into the front pews. The inside of the church is warm and intimate. Our excited voices seem loud for the space, but also seem anticipated, yearned for, and embraced. As we stroll down the aisle, we see people we know, people gathered to share this time with us, people

who knew our parents, and people we've met for the first time. There's a feeling of connectedness that seems to permeate the space. None of us can put words around it, but the phrase of Jesus echoes in my mind: "I am in you, you are in me, and we are all in the Father." We are here together. We need one another to do the important work ahead. The time comes. The priest motions us forward and we gather around the baptismal font. With one question, our hearts stop in their tracks. "Who do you present to receive the sacrament of baptism?"

The question explodes into our heads simultaneously: I know WHO I am presenting, but for what? What is baptism all about? What spiritual treasure is the church about to bestow upon our child? What will be brought to light in her life, when we name her before God, to receive this sacrament of baptism?

This is the moment. This is the beginning of a spiritual path we are claiming for her. To Joe and Helen, her parents, when asked by the priest, "Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life?" Their response "We will" sounds more like "HELP". But then the priest comes to the rescue and says to the entire congregation gathered, "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support this person in her life in Christ?" We all feel saved. We're not in this alone. What a relief. It's not all up to us to shepherd her through life, guiding her to love God with her whole being, encouraging her to respond to God's love by loving her neighbor as herself. What a relief.

But then something happens none of us expects. The priest invites us all to make a sign of the cross on Amy's forehead. We line up, one after the other, tiny wrinkled thumbs, dry cracked thumbs, smooth elegant thumbs, all making the signs of the cross on her pink newborn skin. "Amy, you are marked as Christ's own", we each declare. She has the grace to accept each commitment without comment. And through the smudges of the oil, nearly dripping down her forehead into her eyes, we open her third eye, the one the mystics speak about, the one in the middle of her forehead, and the one that allows humans to see spiritual reality. Her soul has been awakened, ready to join her discerning heart, her ever expanding and inquisitive mind, and her energetic and loving body; awakened to find the courage to will and to persevere, to engage the spirit to know and to love God, and to embrace the gift of joy and wonder in all of God's works. Something is unlocked. The closed is opened. Her soul awakens in this moment. From here on out, she has the capacity to look both ways, to the eternal, infinite, and transcendent, and to the temporal, finite and immanent.

Baptism is about our souls being awakened, when our minds, body, and soul are attuned to the presence of the Spirit within, around, and among us. It can happen when we as a teenager or an adult make that decision for ourselves, when we gather up our life and commit it to a larger purpose in baptism. It can happen when a baby is baptized, when those around her or him, those who will nurture the child, find themselves in a place of mystical indwelling with one another. Baptism is a beginning; each time we witness another's baptism or renew our baptismal vows, the possibility exists that we will become alive. It can happen in that moment or it can happen many moons later. But the beginning of our seeing the spiritual reality in our lives is in our baptism. The potential for being fully alive in Christ is born in our baptism.

And once alive, we realize that what we see is never all there is to life. The water sprinkled on our heads is not just water, but the very water which contained the power of creation in Genesis, the path of liberation in Exodus, and through which we each pass so the chaff can be washed away by Jesus; for Jesus wants to wash all that drags us down and comes between us and God—the shame, guilt, selfishness, self-righteousness, the greed. We know in those three drops of water that these barriers will not be around forever, for in those splashes, God claims us and repurposes our lives for God's realm.

The oil, which marked us as Christ's own, is not just oil, but our invitation to join Christ in the long line of priests, prophets, kings, and queens, whose souls have been awakened by quickening spirit of God.

The candle handed to us, or the paschal candle, which is lit today and at all baptisms, is not an ordinary candle. It is a bright burning which holds a luminous center, a clear seeing into the truth of God and her neighbor.

The bread and wine is not just food and drink as we consume at any other time. It is our invitation to awaken our soul, to live faithfully into our baptism, to allow us to be named and claimed by God.

Extraordinary moments become ordinary moments. We see connections between us and each other and us and creation, which we never saw before. The veil is lifted. Our awakened soul will become our companion, our center, in our frenzied world. We may think, like in the story of Sleeping Beauty, that our world is all about our body and heart being awakened by love, and it is – but that's not all it's about. It is also about our soul being alive in this world. We never know when or how the eye of the soul will be washed open.

Often we rely on others around us to show us the way. Often we allow the church's ritual and liturgy to lure us into an openness to receive. Often God takes charge and grabs our soul and we can find we can hardly refuse. Our response may sound like a cry for help, like that of Joe and Helen when they committed Amy to the grace of Christ. But that's okay. God hears our cries and responds.

However and whenever it happens, we know somehow it's connected to our baptism: when the slumber of our soul is splashed with water and the sleepy eye is wiped away. Jesus' baptism, which we celebrate today, affirmed Jesus' purpose in the world, awakened his soul to his unfolding ministry, and set us in the path to continue the divine presence on earth through our baptism and ministry, for in it, we are invited to share the divine life of God.

The Holy Spirit was set loose at Jesus' baptism. In our baptism, we give our ordinary life to God and God gives it back to us as an extraordinary life, for the life we live now is the very life of God, whose divine life we share as members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the Kingdom. Come, let us allow the Spirit to awaken our soul, this day and forever.