

# **BAPTISM: TRADITION AND HOPE**

St Columba, 14 November 2010

Isaiah 65:17, 19, 21-22, 25

2 Thessalonians 3:6-9, 13

## **1. Christian Tradition**

Baptism has been part of the Christian church's tradition from the very early days. It picks up from other older traditions that used water as a symbol of washing away the past and looking forward to a new life.

That water symbol of 'newness' is deep in our tradition, not only as Christians but as human communities.

Over time, what has become even more significant is that baptism is about becoming part of the Christian community, the church. It's an initiation ceremony.

The child brought for baptism doesn't know that yet, of course, so embedded in the baptism tradition is the responsibility that parents and godparents, and all of us, take on in the promises we make, that we will help this child understand that he has become part of this community.

So we have a responsibility to ensure that he or she grows up aware of the values of love, and peace, and justice for all people that are at the heart of the Christian message, the Christian tradition.

I'm convinced that forgetting the values and insights of the past is one of the big dangers for each generation. What is handed on (the meaning of the word 'tradition') is valuable, and we are poorer as persons and as communities if we "drop" what has been handed to us.

Holding and passing on the tradition is part of what we see taking place with baptism, and – as we heard in that old letter – central to

Christianity and to culture is living “in accordance with the tradition” we have received.

## 2. **Gospel Hope and Newness**

That’s all a bit heavy! For many of us, keeping being told we’ve got to hold on to the tradition – because that’s what’s done or believed – is precisely what makes unsure about groups like the church!

One thing to remember about the Christian tradition, however, is that it’s also about change, newness, hope for a better future.

That’s what Isaiah was about: “new heavens and a new earth”, where the wolf and the lamb feed together. He holds out the hope of something new, of a more secure, prosperous, and safe future.

Baptism also carries that message. The water symbol refers also to the rainbow after the flood that promises God’s ongoing care, and to the opening up of the Reed Sea so God’s people could escape oppression – and we are called to remember these symbols as well.

Paul even says that in baptism there is a new creation – a very strong statement, suggesting that baptism symbolises social, political, and environmental change, and not just something new for *this child*.

Alongside baptism as a call to remember and enact traditional values and insights, this event this morning calls us also to live in ways that effect change and help to create a new world – socially, politically, and environmentally, as well as personally.