



HANDING ON THE FAITH

Your Child's Baptism

CAROL LUEBERING

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Nihil Obstat
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+Most Rev. Carl K. Moeddel
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Contents

Introduction | 7

Called by Name | 9

Circle of Community | 13

A Decision against Evil | 20

Alive in Jesus Christ | 26

The Language of Celebration | 30



Called by Name

A child is born a stranger. Thrust from comfortable warmth and darkness, your baby travels a long and perilous route to your welcoming arms. A confusing world lies at the journey's end. Eyes and ears and skin are assailed by new sensations; cold air fills lungs and is expelled with a cry.

Then your arms and voices speak tender welcome and the stranger is home. But birth is only the first journey, the beginning of a lifelong search for people who will recognize and welcome. "No one knows my name" is an expression of unbearable loneliness. No one, young or old, can be left in that emptiness and survive. In the nursery the lonely die; in nursing homes they decay. People need to be known, to be welcomed, to be called by name.

What name do you give your child? What do you ask of God's Church for (name)?

(Rev. of Saravim 76)

A name has no real meaning apart from a person. It is only a word until it is attached to a real person. Then it becomes inseparably a part of a person's identity, the first answer to the question, "Who are you?"

A name cannot easily be put aside or changed. An immigrant may assume a name that flows more easily in a new tongue; a woman may take her bridegroom's name as her own. That action proclaims a profound change of identity and announces the beginning of a new life. Even the adolescent's rejection of an earlier nickname announces a new person.

So significant a gift cannot be lightly given. You discussed your baby's name for many months. And that struggle expressed your hopes and dreams for your child. You probably rejected many names in your search for just the right name, one which means for you strength or beauty, wisdom, tenderness, or certain success in life. Your choice tells what you want your child to be.

Naming Your Child

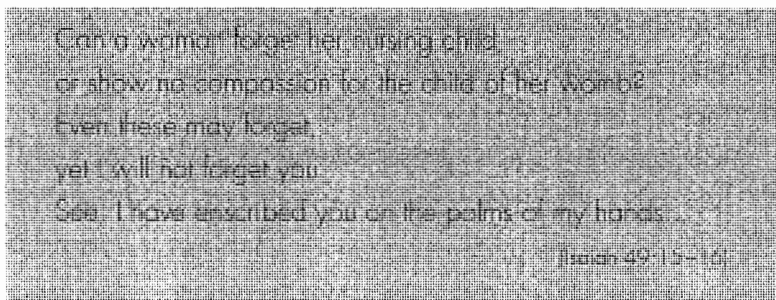
Catholics traditionally pick a saint's name for baptism. You choose this "patron saint" as a model you hope your youngster will imitate and as a heavenly advocate for the child. Canonized saints are the Church's greats, but the heavenly population includes many smaller lights—less famous folks who have touched your own life with their goodness.

Ultimately, of course, no one decides what another person will be. Each individual makes personal choices. But in the beginning, someone else must claim responsibility and authority and care for a budding life. You are that someone for this child, so you have the right to choose a name. Friends and family may suggest, but only *you* can choose.

YOUR CHILD'S BAPTISM

Giving identity and claiming responsibility are profoundly human deeds. But most of all, the gift of a name signifies the holiest human experience: entering into a relationship.

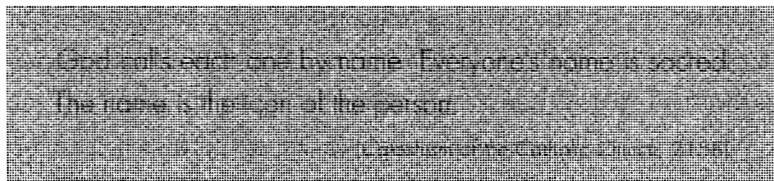
When you speak your baby's name, you approach this small person intimately. Within a few months of birth, your baby's head will turn to the sound of the name you have chosen, the first word to acquire meaning. With a lopsided grin, your child will share the secret: Each of you knows your baby is someone very special.



A few months later your child will speak your name. In any tongue, the equivalents of *mommy* and *daddy* are usually the first words a child masters. *Mommy* and *Daddy*, not Peg and Mark or Maria and Tony. This tiny person will lay aside your old name for a new one—a single word that will always evoke your smile, your voice, your touch. All through life, your child will call you by the name that says what a special part you play in his or her life.

And you are changed. You carry a new identity, whether this is your first child or one of many. You will be Alice's father, Paul's mother for the rest of your life, bound in a relationship sometimes rewarding, sometimes frustrating, but always different from your relationship with anyone else.

YOUR CHILD'S BAPTISM



From the beginning of history humans have sensed a greater being, someone who called the world into existence. The Jews called him Yahweh, “I Am Who Am.” He is known as God and as Lord.

In time, a child was born and given the name Jesus, “God saves.” When that child spoke God’s name for us, he spoke in terms of relationship. “Father,” he called him, “*Abba*”—a Jewish child’s “daddy.”

Baptism, too, is a birth, a long journey through darkness toward the light where the strong and gentle arms of Jesus’s Father wait in welcome.

For Reflection and Discussion

- What name have you chosen for this child?
- What names have you considered and rejected?
- What kind of person do you most hope your child will be? How does the name you have chosen reveal something of that wish?
- What difference does this baby make in your sense of who you are?
- When you pray, by what name do you call God? What relationship is reflected in that name?