Baptism - the Gift of God

Matthew 28:16-20

One of the most joyful experiences for a family is when a child is born. And one of the most exciting moments for a congregation is when that child is brought to church for baptism. This morning we are filled with enthusiasm as we will baptize a child and witness the beginning of a new relationship with God. This new relationship will last as long as the parents remain committed to it and when we (the church family) support and remind them to do so.

Before we proceed, I would like to recap the Biblical teaching about baptism and briefly explain why we baptize infants. In Matthew 28 Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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."

The command here is about making disciples of all nations, but as we read, it begins with baptism - baptism of all nations. There is no reference here to race nor there is limitation by age. All are included, infants too, even though some denominations consider infant baptism unnecessary. They argue a child is not mature enough to understand the true purpose of baptism.

The Armenian Evangelical Church follows Jesus' command and accordingly baptizes both children and adults, still acknowledging that there is nothing magical in baptism. That the application of water (including immersion) will not wash away original sin and give the baptized free access to heaven. That baptism is not a religious ritual for salvation in case of infants, nor it is confirmation of salvation in case of adults. Still baptism is a sacrament that leads to salvation. In Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "whoever believes and is baptized (present tense) will be saved (future tense)." Salvation therefore follows baptism, but in between there is a process of teaching and learning. The baptized (child or adult) is continuously instructed to mature in faith, is encouraged to obey God's commands and to always follow Jesus. The sooner this process begins, the better. Proverbs 22:6 is a good guidance in this regard. It instructs to start from very young age. "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

We should also note that, baptism is not something we do, it is something that God actually does for us through His Holy Spirit. Colossians 2:12 makes this very clear. Apostle Paul said: **"**having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Baptism therefore, is the working of God. It is His gift which we receive through faith. A child might not yet realize or understand the true value of the gift of baptism, but still the child receives the gift. It is the parents responsibility to make sure that this gift remains with the child and the child matures in faith.

With this understanding, we therefore ask the parents to come forward and present their child to Christ through baptism and make commitment that, in raising their child, they will always follow the teaching of the Bible.