

As Bishop Sean Rowe of the Diocese of Northwestern PA would say, “It’s a great day in the kingdom!” What a joy it is to be celebrating the baptisms of Lucy and Ellary, and to be reminded of our own baptisms and the journey that we have been on since that day.

Let’s begin with a story about a young girl named Jo. Jo lived with her mom, dad, and younger sister, Dianne in a house that was down the street from St. Luke’s Church. Being new to the neighborhood, Jo and her sister found their way to the church and were given the job of cleaning the pews on Saturdays for one British pound a day. Jo was just nine years old. Over the next two years, the girls spent their Saturdays inside the church, and eventually Jo began attending worship on Sundays. Curious about the Christian faith and the community that took her in, she went to services on her own. The rest of her family had no interest in religion.

After a while, Jo approached the priest and asks to be baptized. Of course, he said yes! Her parents supported her desire to take part in this sacrament. On her eleventh birthday, Jo was baptized at St. Luke’s. Imagine, being

eleven and making that kind of decision on your own. I find it quite remarkable.

So, I'd venture a guess that many of you actually know the Jo from this story, though I doubt you would ever think of her by just that name. Perhaps if I said Joanne Rolling, or as she is most famously known by her pen name, J.K. Rolling, the author of the wildly popular Harry Potter series.

What is cool about this story of Jo's life is that twenty-one years after her baptism the first book of the series, the Sorcerer's Stone, would be published. From then on both children and adults would be captivated by the story of a young boy who finds out that he is a wizard.

So who can tell me at what age Harry discovers that he is a wizard?

**ELEVEN! YES!**

At age eleven Harry receives a letter from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, as all magical

children do on their eleventh birthday. It is a letter that will transform his life fully and completely. Now, it cannot be a coincidence that Joanne Rowling chose that particular age for young witches and wizards to learn of their acceptance into Hogwarts, the same age that she was at the time of her baptism - eleven.

But, as The Rev. Dr. Patricia Lyons says in her book, *Teaching Faith with Harry Potter*, “The letter does not make one magical, nor does baptism make a person the image of God. Our sacraments do not create our identity, but they name and feed our identity and direct us toward our destiny to be one with God as Christ is one with God. The letter begins the journey to learn how to develop one’s identity.”

It is the same with baptism. It is the same with Jesus.

In today’s gospel reading from Luke, we hear the story of Jesus’ baptism. As he comes up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven says, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

We don't know much about Jesus' life between birth and baptism, but we can be certain that Jesus was still God's Son during that time. Baptism did not create Jesus identity as God's Son, but it named him as God's Beloved and began a public ministry that would ultimately lead him to the cross. In the scripture stories from baptism to his death, we are taught by Jesus' example about how we should live our own lives as God's Beloved.

Baptism is a beginning. It is a public initiation into a life with Christ, typically done in front of a faith community. The individual or the parents, speaking on behalf of infants and young children, respond to a series of questions, naming and acknowledging this journey of faith that they are about to embark on. For infants, such as Lucy and Ellary, and young children, the hope is that along their faith journey when they are of a certain age and ready to accept responsibility for their own spirituality and faith, they will take part in the sacramental rite of Confirmation where they can publicly affirm the promises made on their behalf during baptism.

But it does not end there. Baptism is for life. After the water, we are each anointed with oil and marked as Christ's own forever. FOREVER. As one little boy in my friend's congregation said, it's your invisible God tattoo because it will never go away. Nothing we do can change the fact that we have been baptized and are beloved by God.

We may not see a dove descend over our heads or hear a voice boom from the heavens, but what is most remarkable about the moment of baptism is that we are welcomed into a community of others who are beloved by God. Our journey of faith is not meant to be done on our own. In a few minutes, each of us present today - yes, all of us. It's not just the parents and godparents (or the ministers) who are responsible for the journey of the baptized - although they do play a rather significant role. All of us will agree to support Lucy and Ellary in their life in Christ. I have to say it is my favorite part of the liturgy, because it is such a good reminder that we, as beloved members of God's kingdom are meant to be supporting each others along this journey in faith. And that may mean just being a friendly face in the crowd or taking the

time to develop relationships with one another or volunteering in one of the many ministries offered here at St. Stephens.

Jesus did not journey alone. Joanne Rowling did not journey alone. Harry Potter certainly did not journey alone. We do not journey alone.

Let's celebrate this day with joy, remembering that moment when we were called to part of the community of God's beloved and watch with wonder as it transforms our lives and the lives around us fully and completely. Amen.