

Sunday, June 19, 2011: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20

## **At my baptism, I giggled.**

by [Nanette Sawyer](#) in the [June 14, 2011](#) issue

My church was celebrating a reaffirmation of baptism, and the pastor encouraged us to ask people who were present at our baptism to tell us about it. I called my mom and asked what she remembered. "I don't think you were baptized," she said. "Really?" I responded. "Could you check with Dad? It's kind of important." She did, and they decided that I hadn't been baptized. I was 37.

I decided that I wanted to be baptized on the evening before Easter. My church had never celebrated the Easter vigil, but I had read that this was an old tradition. My preparations began. I spent Lent studying baptism traditions and brought a proposed liturgy to my pastor. I asked that I be baptized by having a pitcher of water poured over my head. I could have suggested full immersion, but this was a Presbyterian church after all. Besides, even pouring a pitcher of water was going to prove logistically challenging.

My pastor honored my request. He carried his children's one-foot-deep kiddie pool into the sanctuary. I had purchased a velvety blanket in the same shade of burgundy as the carpet, and I brought it to church and draped it over the pool. When it was time for the baptism, I came to the pool and knelt down. I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with a liturgy that wrapped around the words and expanded our representation of God. Jesus called God "Father." God the Creator called Jesus "Son." The Holy Spirit is God who nourishes and sustains us.

Then came one splash for the Creator. The water poured around my ears and trickled down my face. Then came a splash for the beloved Son. The water's warmth began to seep into my clothing. There was still a lot of water left in the pitcher, and the one splash for the Holy Spirit became a long pouring of water. It kept coming and coming, gushing over my face, into my mouth, flattening my hair and running over my shoulders and down my body.

I had not anticipated this moment. The Spirit became overwhelming and seemingly out of control, and I was surprised to the point of hilarity: I giggled. I heard the congregation titter in response. But giggling meant more water filling my mouth and nose. For a moment I wondered if I would inhale it accidentally. Would I drown here? A wave of fear passed through me, but I willed myself to calm down. Suddenly the water stopped, and I was helped up and wrapped in a big white towel. Everything stopped while we had a moment for liturgical recovery—my hair was swabbed, my face dabbed, my clothes patted, my shoulders rubbed.

Then it was my turn to sing, as was the tradition in our church. Everyone who was old enough to sing at his or her baptism sang "I have decided to follow Jesus." I began to sing. As I looked out at the faces of those who had welcomed and loved me to this moment, I knew that I was being embraced into community—not only into this community, but also into a larger community of faith, one that stretched back into history and into the future.

As I sang, I looked up toward the vaulted ceiling of the church and thought of the openness and immensity of God. I was overcome by the magnitude of what was happening. My voice began to tremble and crack as I sang, "I have decided . . ."

The congregation was right there. The people began to hum when my voice grew weak. They came in under me, lifting me up and supporting me. I felt as if they had physically grabbed my elbows and put pillows around me to keep me from falling. I began to cry and my voice broke. Again the community was there to put words to the humming and to my crying. "We have decided to follow Jesus, we have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back."

They sang for me when I couldn't sing. They sang when I felt overwhelmed by my own smallness and the vastness of God. They sang when I felt daunted by the task of following Jesus. They sang when my sense of aloneness was broken in the midst of their communal presence. They sang while I healed, and after a while I could sing again. That is what we do for each other. That is what it means to be the body of Christ and baptized into it by the Holy Spirit of a Creator God. We sing for each other.