

*“Between Baptism and Burial”*  
*October 21, 2007*

I did a little research on the Light family of VA, WVA, and CO. You have an Episcopal Bishop in the family, and that’s a good thing, even today!

Rev. A. Heath Light is one of the outstanding alumni of Hampden Sydney College. One of the deepest joys of being a pastor is that you get the opportunity to be a part of the great rituals of life, from baptism to burial.

Last summer, I stood in the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church where Jim Light grew up, ate dinner in the house where he lived as a boy, and helped in the memorial service for Casey’s great grandfather. Ministers, when they are lucky, stand at the first and last Christian ceremonies. Baptism and burial.

As Christians, we live our days between these two great sacraments.

I know that in Reform Theology burials are not a sacrament, but when you are involved in one it is like a sacrament, where the temporal becomes eternal.

Baptism is a sacrament. It’s more than a christening, more than a gathering, more than something we do in worship.

Baptism is not something I or we do; it is what God does for and to us. Today, we proclaim that God’s hand has reached out, and in the water, raised up little Casey and put his seal upon him.

I was one of the first persons to see Casey when he was born. I went to see him, not just out of my personal fondness for Andrew and Christine, but also as your representative.

I prayed over Casey in the name of this Chapel, and the God who makes all things possible.

As Casey is born into this wonderful family, as your children and grandchildren were born into the special-ness of your family, he is not guaranteed a life without bumps and bruises, worries and woes.

It would be in fact a great mistake, to over-protect and over-provide for young Casey.

As a tree can only grow strong enough to stand against a great wind by standing against small winds, a child grows strong only by being tested, and winning the test.

Baptism is not a suit of armour, but a seal, not a guarantee, but a promise.

The world, into which Casey will grow, will require that he have both the seal and the promise. Casey, without knowing it, is a war baby.

I, like some of you, was a war baby – the great battle of WWII where the enemy was defined and the direction was clear.

Today, in everything from war to worship, things are not so defined or clear.

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Casey will live in a world far more complex than most of us can imagine, even as our elders could not envision the world we live in today.

Wendell Berry is one of my favorite writers. Wallace Stegner, Marty’s favorite writer, writes about Berry’s novel ***A Place on Earth***;

***“What a pleasure it is to read a book about decent people who love or like or at least tolerate each other.”***

Community, and church community, is where we love or like, or at least tolerate each other.

There are few other places where this happens!

Albert Einstein said the most important question of life; “Is the world a friendly place?” We wonder how Casey will answer, is the world a friendly place?

The ideal always rides ahead of the real.

From the time Adam and Eve moved out of the Garden, we have been searching for that ideal. In this time between baptism and burial, we search not alone, thank God, but in community and in the communion of God.

The Promise of Baptism is that God is always ahead of us, renewing and saving us.

We are made new over and over again, by hope and the passage of time.

We can have hope in that what has not yet failed remains possible. We hope, even in troubled times, because God has not failed us.

The ideal may be out of our reach, but with God we have the Promise of a Kingdom undiminished and perfect.

Today, as we baptize Casey into the Promise of that Kingdom, let each of us recall our baptism. To remember that we did not create our life all on our own, but that God was in us and around us, forming us and reforming us.

In the years ahead, recall for Casey this day, when he was baptized in the Promise of God.

*Edgell Franklin Pyles, Ph.D.*