

A Church Baby/Child Dedication
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Today is Mother's Day.¹ On this day we give thanks for mothers. We all have them. Many have been blessed to be mothers. Some would like to be mothers but at this point in their lives they are unmarried, or possibly due to infertility are unable. Some have experienced the loss of a child, so this day is a painful reminder of that loss. Some have a missing child due to abortion. We recognize you are all here.

This is one of those days that our tendency would be to downplay or diminish the gift and blessing of motherhood, because of others in our midst for whom this day is difficult. And yet, knowing this is difficult for some does not take away the blessing it is for others. This is a reminder we live in both the now and the not-yet of the kingdom. This is the Christian life. So today, we rejoice with those who rejoice. We rejoice and give thanks with and for mothers. And we also weep with those who weep, those who long to be mothers (Rom. 12:15).²

Not only is today Mother's Day, it is also a day we are celebrating the dedication of a new baby. We give thanks for this new baby born into this family. We give thanks for the joy and privilege we have of celebrating this today and publicly praying for and entrusting this child to the Lord, the mother and father to the Lord, and our corporate prayer and commitment as a church to come alongside the parents to do all we can to help them train up this child in the way he should go (Prov. 22:6).

As we do so, let's remember in the beginning God created male and female, he blessed the husband and wife, and he gave them a mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:26-28). This biological family was

¹ Mother's Day was celebrated in 1907. It was done at Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia, at the prompting of Anna Jarvis. Mother's Day became a national holiday, to be celebrated on the second Sunday in May, in 1914 when Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation designating it as such. Mother's Day is a secular holiday that is celebrated in the church. (There are others as well: Father's Day, Independence Day, Memorial Day, etc.) It is not recognized in the Church/Christian calendar. Those celebrations mostly focus on the birth, life, death, ascension and return of the Lord Jesus. It does not mean celebrating Mother's Day, or any of the other secular calendar celebrations is wrong. It can be a good reminder to remember and honor certain times, events, or people. But it has not been and is not part of the church's liturgy. Having said that, Christians honor mothers always!

² Here are a few additional thoughts on this. We have become sensitized to so many of these issues. On the one hand, I give thanks we have. But on the other hand, because of the one or two, or however many, we have backed away from saying much of anything at all. For example, when we celebrate the sanctity of unborn life, because there are those in our midst who have had a miscarriage, or who are infertile, or even more seriously have had an abortion, we shy away from saying anything. We certainly want to weep with those who weep. But we have leaned in that direction so strongly, we do not rejoice with those who rejoice. The same thing rings true here in this instance of dedication. Certainly, there are many issues that could be addressed, and possibly even should be addressed. Even if we cannot address every one of those issues, that does not mean we cannot or should not address any of those issues. And it is incumbent upon believers to address those major pressure points that seek to undermine or deny the faith once for all entrusted to the saints. There are some *status confessionis* issues that must be addressed, and I believe in this day this is one of them. In fact, I put this in the category of neo-Gnosticism, meaning the body may be instrumentally good, but not intrinsically good. It is malleable to be formed and shaped into what I want it to become, so that what is can be sloughed off, or recreated into the image of my desires. Up until recently, one's identity was based on one's biological sex, and one's desires were conformed to that identity. Today, with the prevailing view of individual expressivism, one's desire is paramount, and one's identity is conformed to one's desire.

intended to be a part of a larger family, the church of Jesus Christ. This was to reflect Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33; cf. Eph. 6:1-9; Col. 3:18-4:1).

Today, all three of these entities are under attack. The enemy perpetually seeks to steal, kill, and destroy (Jn. 10:10a) and he focuses on these three entities: male and female created in the image of God, marriage and the family, and the church of Jesus Christ. Today we are making a statement against the lies and destruction of the enemy, and we are making a statement both in words and in what you see that we are standing on God's Word and affirming the truth that it is only in this way that we may have life and have it abundantly (Jn. 10:10b). We will never flourish apart from God's divine design.

We give thanks for these parents, husband and wife. We give thanks for this child. We give thanks for a church family to proclaim and live the truth, to reflect and manifest the gospel as an outpost of heaven.

At this dedication, it is critical for us to pray for this child and to entrust this child into our heavenly Father's care. Prayer matters, not only as something we do, but a means God uses to accomplish his purposeful providence in the life of this child. And so we pray not only for God's blessing, we also pray for him/her to be protected from sin and evil ("deliver us from evil"), for wisdom to discern the lies, and for strength to turn away from temptation ("lead us not into temptation").³ One of the greatest temptations to young people today is dissatisfaction of being created a male/boy or female/girl and thinking full and abundant life would be found in the opposite sex.⁴

We recognize we live in a fallen world (Gen. 3), God's "very good" (Gen. 1:31) design for male and female has been distorted. Some struggle with things other than God's "very good" design for male and female. We recognize that and seek to minister with and to those who live with these struggles and families who are impacted. Our convictions, commitments, and hope rest in God and the gospel, in the midst of the struggle. If you are one of those, please speak with me after the service or sometime this week.⁵

³ Might this be similar to the warning given by God to the people of Israel not to sacrifice their children to Molech (Lev. 20:2-5)? It began with Solomon who married foreign wives and allowed them to worship foreign gods, including Molech (1 Kgs. 11:7). King Ahaz burned his son in the fire (2 Kgs. 16:3). Manasseh built an alter to Molech in the very temple (2 Kgs. 21:5). It was a practice widespread throughout Judah (Jer. 32:35). The idolatrous practice was finally ended when King Josiah terminated the practice of "burning their sons and daughters as an offering to Molech" (2 Kgs. 23:10; cf. Stephen's reference to Molech in his rebuke in Acts 7). Child sacrifice is a part of our culture, even in the church, becoming somewhat of a sacrament. And the sacrifice today is not burning them to Molech for the benefit of the parent, it is giving them over to themselves, the god of self, as they are allowed to pursue their own desires and parents serve the god who is their child.

⁴ This dedication service is a unique time to affirm the biologically-sexed gender of children from birth (conception), which is very good. This is one of the major ways the enemy is doggedly seeking to "steal and kill and destroy" (Jn. 10:10), and we as a church need to affirm God's design in creation, that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27), that he blessed the man and the woman and then gave the mandate, which reminds us that God's grace always initiates and we are always responders in joyful obedience, that one of the blessings resulting in mandate was marriage between the man and the woman, and the other blessing of the marriage was to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28), that is with a family. All of this was and remains "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

⁵ When mentioning and praying about this in a dedication service, which is good and right to do, since it is God's "very good" design, remember that we also live in a fallen world. We all live after the fall with its implications (Gen. 3). When celebrating and praying to uphold God's good design, there may be those present who live with gender dysphoria, or those who live with those who struggle with gender dysphoria. When including this in a dedication service, be prepared to receive questions and to minister to those who might be struggling, which is something we ought to welcome as pastors.

This is also why we begin at the beginning to pray for God's will to be done in the life of this child ("your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"), as we entrust him/her to God and commit to praying for him/her and his/her parents. This dedication service is a unique time to affirm God's very good creation as male and female and to recognize and give thanks for the biological sex of this child, that he/she will be grow and mature and affirm God's "very good" design for him/her.⁶

Before we engage in the dedication, here is a prayer I would encourage all of us to pray for this young boy (and the same for a young girl): "We pray daily he will be joyfully satisfied in being a biologically-sexed male, not a female, and become a man after God's heart."⁷

Dedication of Child by Believing Parents

Explanation

We, as a family, give thanks to Jesus Christ, the Author of life, for entrusting to these parents the child they bring here today. Since that same Lord Jesus took children up in His own strong arms and blessed them, we, too, come today to seek His blessing. What follows is neither an ordinance or a sacrament of the church, nor a mark of the child's salvation, but simply a time of public dedication:

- *of the parents* to the task of parenting as God enables,
- *of the child* to the grace of God and His watchful care, and
- *of the church family* to love both parents and child by prayer, example, sharing and serving.

Parental Promises

⁶ As stated years ago by Elizabeth Rundle Charles, *The Chronicles of the Schoenberg Cotta Family* (Thomas Nelson, 1864), "If I profess Christ with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point."

⁷ As spoken of David in 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22. When my wife and I were at the beginning stages of our family, once we learned we had conceived, we began praying for our child in utero. We used a guide that charted the development and growth of our baby in utero until birth. We prayed specifically for the growth and maturation of the biological and physiological development of our baby that particular week, along with many other things, including spiritual matters. We did that for all three of our children.

For our third child, who was six years after our second child, and nine years after our first child, when we prayed for our baby in utero, our six- and nine-year-olds joined us in praying for this baby (we did not know the biological sex). The former prayed the heart would "beep" (beat) strongly, and the latter prayed the umbilical cord would go deep into mommy's tummy (meaning the womb). When we all went to the ultrasound to "see" our baby, as the physician read the pictures she said, "this baby has a good healthy heartbeat, and a good strong umbilical cord." When she said that, I mentioned to my children that the physician mentioned the very things for which we were praying. We thanked God then and there. What an affirmation to my children and a testimony to the physician.

Here we were five years ago. We learned that our son and his wife were expecting their first child, a biologically sexed male. We began praying the same way we did with our children. But in light of the day, we also began praying that this young boy in utero would be joyfully satisfied in being a biologically-sexed male, and not a female, and he would become a man after God's heart. And when we learned their second child was a young girl, we began praying that this young girl in utero would be joyfully satisfied in being a biologically-sexed female, not a male, and she would become a woman after God's heart. We now have five grandchildren, three boys and two girls, and it remains a daily prayer we pray for them.

1. We recognize this child as a gift from God and give heartfelt thanks for God's blessing.
2. We now dedicate our child to the Lord, surrendering all worldly claims upon his/her life in the hope that s/he will belong wholly to God, and through both teaching and modelling impart to our child the truth that full and abundant life is found in cross-bearing death to self.
3. We pledge as parents that, with God's fatherly help, we will bring up our child "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," making every reasonable effort, with patience and love, to build the Word of God, the character of Christ, and the joy of the Lord into his/her life.
4. We promise that, in obedience to God's Word, we will regularly avail ourselves of the means of grace that God gives, and we will lead our child to participate in those means.
5. We promise to provide, through God's blessing, for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and the spiritual needs of our child, looking to our own heavenly Father for the wisdom, love and strength to serve him/her and not use him/her.
6. We pray against the deceit of the enemy who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy by claiming true and abundant life is found outside of Christ and in self, and we pray for protection from some of the chief temptations experienced in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the boastful pride of life and their contemporary expressions.
7. We promise, God helping us, to make it our regular prayer that by God's grace, our child will come to trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of his/her sins and for the fulfillment of all His promises to him/her, even eternal life; and in this faith follow Jesus as Lord and obey His teachings.

The Parent's Pledge

We, the parents, commit _____ into the loving hands of our Eternal Father. To Him be all praise and thanks for the privilege of parenthood, however short or long, however joyous or trying. We desire, by the grace of God to bring up our little one in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. May s/he grow in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God, and men, that by faith in Christ alone s/he might daily be more like Him.

Presentation of the Child

United Prayer

Lord of Glory, giver of every good and perfect gift, your grace alone can make _____ what you created him/her to be. In the name of Jesus, we stand against any and all unclean spirits who would tempt or deceive him/her. We pray he/she will be joyfully satisfied in being a biologically-sexed male/female, not a female/male, and become a man/woman after God's heart. We claim for him/her the protection and love our Savior promised. Our trust is in you. Strengthen our wills to do your will so that by love and patience, discipline and service, prayerful silence and well-chosen words, we may all play our parts and see your will fulfilled in his/her life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Pastoral Response

Since I have been asked, here are a few additional thoughts regarding an infant/child dedication service.

One might ask, “why address the gender matter and not other issues?” I understand the question and the concern. Why “pick on” this temptation? My response: although this is not the only temptation, this is one of the greatest temptations our young are facing today. And where are young people, parents, and the church being taught about a theology of the body and human sexuality? Sadly, mostly they are not. However, this does not mean they are not being catechized. They most certainly are! But it is not God’s good design for human flourishing, even in a fallen world.

This, for me, becomes one of the ways we begin to lay the foundation of teaching, of affirming, of catechizing the goodness of God’s having created male and female.

As I thought further about this, I ponder a couple of things. On the one hand, we want to address all sin, and we do not want to categorize and classify sin and make too much of any one sin. And it is important to ask why this temptation and not other temptations, as I did above.

On the other hand, what greater temptation is there for our young people than this one? If you were to identify 2-3, what would they be? How many of them are related to the body, a theology of the body? That is what this is attempting to address in the dedication service. We affirm God’s design for the body. We do not assume it. We do not take it for granted. And in fact, over against the cultural narrative and the lies of the enemy, we stand against it. In what ways are we catechizing and using liturgy to affirm God’s very good design for the body and sexuality?

As I mentioned, I would not address the matter this thoroughly at every dedication service. It needs to be said at one time, but not every time. Once it has been said, that gives a reference point that can be mentioned at future times.

If interested, here are a few other thoughts reflecting on the actual meaning and significance of the Infant/Child Dedication service.

Infant/Child Dedication

Introduction

When used in the Scriptures, to “dedicate” conveys “the idea of being set apart for sacred use. Something or someone withheld from ordinary use and give to God for His exclusive use . . . what is referred to is transferred into God’s possession for His exclusive use. Practically anything can be dedicated to God: house (Lev. 27:14), field (v. 16), temple (2 Ch. 2:4), articles of silver, gold, and bronze (2 S. 8:10f.), vessels (1 K. 7:5), spoil won in battle (1 Ch. 26:27).” (*ISBE*, “dedicate” J. C. Moyer). In this sense, it is fitting and appropriate for parents to “dedicate” a child to God.

Practice and Purpose

Most churches who affirm and practice credo baptism, viz., believer baptism, and do not affirm or practice paedo baptism, viz., infant baptism, also practice infant/child dedication. Parents and church give thanks to the Lord for the infant/child and to recognize the child is a blessing from God and parents and church agree to do all they can to trust the promises of God and to train the child in the way he should go (Prov. 22:6), and all of this is done publicly.

The EFCA is no exception, in that most also practice infant/child dedication. This practice is understood as communicating three important truths: 1) a consecration or giving back to God what is already His, this child; 2) the parents acknowledge this child as belonging to God and they covenant before God and others to teach, train and model the Christian life to the child; 3) the church family covenant to come alongside both parents and child to help them to embrace and grow in the Christian faith.

Though it is not an explicit command, like the ordinances, an example of an infant dedication is Hannah's dedication of Samuel to God in the house of the Lord (1 Sam. 1-2).

In the EFCA, both infant and believer baptism are practiced. But it is also important to know that we believe that in either act – infant or believer baptism – it does not bring forgiveness of sins or salvation. Infant/Child dedication is not an ordinance, included along with the baptism and the Lord's Supper (our understanding of the biblical teaching of the ordinances is stated in article 7 of our Statement of Faith: "We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church during the present age. They are, however, not to be regarded as a means of salvation."), and engaging in this act of infant/child dedication does not confer the forgiveness of sins or salvation. But it could be said that when we engage in this dedication in and by faith, praying and entrusting the infant/child and the parents to God, and trusting the promises of God, when done in and by faith, one's faith is strengthened.⁸

Infant/Child Dedication Not Explicit in the Scriptures, But That Does Not Make It Inappropriate

Some have taken issue with the church practice of infant/child dedication, Andrew Wilson writes [The Problem With Baby Dedications](#), "So if baby dedications are exegetically, theologically, liturgically and pastorally problematic, but you still want to have a context to give thanks for new life, honour parents and pray for wisdom, what's the alternative? Simple: baby celebrations. (Or baby thanksgivings, or whatever you'd rather call them)." Matthew Hosier follows this up with an explanation of the principles followed at the church where he serves as pastor: [The Joy of Baby Thanksgivings](#).

I agree with their general sentiment. We have made dedication a church rite, akin to the ordinances. We will take issue with Confirmation, i.e., confirming one's faith at some point later in life of those who were baptized as infants, since that is nowhere found in the Bible. For those who practice paedobaptism, they need to be intentional and purposeful about addressing faith in the lives of those individuals. This is one way they attempt to confirm the faith of the individual who had been baptized and at that time faith for that person had been confessed vicariously. At some point in time that vicarious faith must become personal. This was their attempt to do that.

Similarly, we who do not practice paedobaptism still find it important to address some church practice with infants/children. For those who practice credobaptism, a dedication service is an attempt to do this. We acknowledge it is not biblically prescribed and does not have a biblical mandate to follow. It is not a third ordinance. In this sense, dedication and confirmation are to be understood similarly. Both are an attempt to address an implication or entailment of our respective views of baptism. This does not

⁸ Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of the church. They are in a unique category from the other commands given by the Lord Jesus because they most clearly and explicitly proclaim the gospel through the eye. Most of the time we hear the gospel proclaimed through the ear. In the ordinances we both hear and see the gospel of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Means of grace are those means given by God that when believers participate in by faith, that faith is strengthened. For example, prayer, singing, worship, etc., are all means of grace. They do not provide spiritual nurture and nourishment apart from the individual's faith and neither do they infuse faith to the individual merely participating in that act. But when engaged in by faith, they are a means of grace God provides to believers for their pilgrimage in the Christian life.

necessarily make the views unbiblical. As we move from the Bible to theology to practice, there are connections and applications that we must do. That is to say, as we read the Bible, we always ask what it means and how it applies. In practice this may mean that although we can cite a chapter and verse for our application, it can appear to be less than clear, which means one needs to explain backwards from the application the various steps one arrived to the practice, ultimately going back to the biblical text as an explanation for our view and practice.

This is why discussions focused on practice often generate more heat than light. As Bible people, we need to go back to the text to discuss and debate the meaning of the text so that we can understand the foundation behind the practice. Please know this does not make practice indifferent, such that each to his own. But it does drive us back to Scripture so that we acknowledge it as our final and absolute authority for belief and practice.

In sum, what they refer to as a thanksgiving service we refer to a dedication service. At one level, it is true, as noted above, there is no biblical mandate for such a service. But then again, there is no biblical mandate for a thanksgiving service as believed and practiced by them. It does not make it wrong, but to deny the former and affirm the latter, with the same components included in the practice, is a bit sleight of hand. And when you think about it, although the Bible is replete with commands, exhortations and examples of giving thanks (cf. Ps. 100; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18), is there an exegetical or theological foundation for making this a rite or corporate practice in the church for the birth of a child? It seems you are back at the concern with a rite that carries more weight than exegetically or theologically warranted. Following the same rite about which they take issue, viz. infant/child dedication, they follow the same rite by referring to it as a thanksgiving service. A rose by any other name is still a rose. They have a limited definition of dedication.

A Few Additional Questions

How do you respond to these situations and why?

1. How should we approach this with a single parent?
2. How should we respond to the mother of a child conceived while unmarried?
3. How should we think about parents through IFV or surrogacy?
4. What should we respond to a same-sex couple requesting their child to be dedicated?