
Water

**an article for the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Canon Ashley Carr, Canon for Parish Life**

A few weeks ago, our son, Shepherd, was baptized. Yes, he's three. When he was born, we gave him two middle names: Philip (I didn't work here yet!) and Abbott. Abbott is the name of an English professor from Sewanee, TN for whom a beautiful garden and trail system is named—Abbo's Alley. We knew that Shep had to be baptized there.

For decades, this place has been a playground and sanctuary in Sewanee, especially for me as a child. It has a trail that probably wasn't intended for 10-year-old mountain biking, though it was perfect for us. There's a little cave, so many bridges to play on and under, a koi pond, rocks, trees, perfectly placed benches, and a creek running throughout. As a kid, and even as an adult, it is the best container for safe curiosity and the feeling of being out in the wild while still just down the road from, well, everyone I know.

The baptism in that sacred place was beautiful, and as we all splashed in the creek afterward, I got thinking about water. This place is special to me and my family, but does the actual water of baptism matter? Does it matter where the water came from? Of course, the prayers make it holy, but what about the water itself?

When my Godson and nephew was baptized, I brought water from the Zygaktis River in Greece where tradition holds that Lydia was baptized. It was an unassuming river, but it felt holy when I was there, so I swiped some water (don't tell Greece). His siblings were baptized with city water, and our daughter, Mary Stuart, got that good old Dekalb County tap water. I have no idea where the water they sprinkled on me came from.

I can assure you that my 15-year-old nephew has no clue that his baptismal water came from Greece. It might also be true that the roughly eight billion children baptized here at the Cathedral have not considered their water's origin. Between you and me, it comes from a sink right here in this building meticulously balanced to be warm—but not too warm.

All the water we know, drink, wash with, play in, and sprinkle on heads, has been around for thousands, millions, and maybe even billions of years (mostly...don't get all technical on me, scientists). The water of your baptism may once have flowed through the River Jordan, it might have been in a glass of water that Gandhi sipped while fasting in protest, it might be spraying up in the splash pad at Truist Park right this second, you might have left it in the ocean at St. Simons. Our water might have been Jesus' water—it certainly existed when he did.

In water, we have a constant reminder of what God has made that sustains, cleanses, delights, and refreshes. It links us across time and culture, from the atmosphere to the ground soil, from 10-year-old Ashley to her 3-year-old son, from us to them. We say wonderful prayers to make the water of baptism holy, and those prayers definitely matter. But the water matters too. It carries millennia of memories, joy, miracles, and even devastating sadness. It's an integral piece of our faith and a lasting gift from our Maker.

As we continue to splash around in all kinds of water this summer, as we prepare to baptize babies, as we look with horror at flooding, and as we watch summer storms roll in, maybe we begin to notice the water and give thanks to God for blessing us with such a powerful gift, from Genesis to Revelation, from Jesus in the Jordan to babies in Buckhead.

God could have chosen anything to carry the promise of salvation and love in baptism, but God chose water—ordinary, powerful, mysterious water. Maybe it does matter.

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