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Baptism of Ella Riley Cumings

Date: Sunday, February 2, 2020 | **Season:** Ordinary Time before Easter | **Year:** A
First Reading: Isaiah 43:1-3
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 | **Response:** Psalm 91:15b
Gospel Acclamation: Mark 9:7
Gospel Reading: Mark 1:7-11
Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa**.**

We gather today to celebrate the baptism of Ella Riley Cumings. As Christians, we belong to the Mystical Church of the Body of Christ, and as the first of the Sacraments of initiation, we are all gathered here to welcome young Ella into a relationship with Jesus Christ. In some parts of the world we call this occasion a 'Christening' – that is, where she takes on Christ and Christ claims her for himself. It is a special occasion for the parents, and for the god-parents, and her wider family. But it is also a wonderful celebration for the Church.

When Ella was born, Tamlyn and Roland named their child. In giving her a name, this was the first of many gifts she would receive, and it is a name that, I know, carries deep emotion for the parents.

But after her name, perhaps one of the greatest gifts she can receive is the gift of faith, a gift that is constantly given and received as she grows older and takes on her own role in life and in the Church and in Society. It is by baptism that God gives the grace of the Holy Spirit, a bond that unites Ella with God, so that we must always remember the words of Jesus that we just head, in a different translation: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom."

Today we honor this command as the Church accepts Tamlyn's and Roland's request that their child be baptized. The entire Church rejoices with this family and with Ella, and we willingly embrace her as a Christian and follower of Jesus Christ – the name that is above all other names.

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When we entered the Church we began this service by asking what was the name that Tamlyn and Roland had given their daughter. This is because when one is baptized, they enter into a relationship with God not as a slave, but as a friend and child of God who know each other's names. It is as if we are doing the formal introductions between Ella and God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – and we are all witnesses to that joyous event.

We also signed Ella with the sign of the cross which is the mark of Christians because Jesus Christ died on the cross.

But we are all gathered here because we too remember our own baptism, and how important the Faith is for each one of us. Even if we practice it differently – we recognize a common baptism and belief in Jesus Christ – and this is what we celebrate this morning.

For those of us unfamiliar with Baptism in this Church, please allow me to just explain briefly what is going to happen in this service. Just now we shall say some prayers, to which the response is 'Lord, graciously hear us'. These prayers are to intercede to God and ask him to bless Ella, and her family. We then ask the Saints to pray for us too, because we believe they can pray for us when we can't. We then exorcise and anoint Ella with the Oil of Catechumens. This is to remove the stain of Original Sin from her and to prepare her to receive the new life we all believe that we all receive in Jesus Christ.

In Baptism we make use of several symbols – these are outward signs representing a deeper reality. The oils have been blessed at the Cathedral during the Chrism Mass before Easter. After we have anointed Ella we then bless the water which will cleanse Ella, and we publicly, on Ella's behalf, renounce sin and Satan. At that point the actual baptism takes place and we then anoint Ella again with another oil, the Oil of Chrism. This signifies that Ella is a full Christian, a priest, a prophet and a queen in the eyes of God. In this royal, priestly and prophetic state we then clothe her in White to signify she is a new creation. We will then light the candle, that represents the flame of faith the parents and Godparents have promised to keep alive for Ella until she is old enough to tend it herself. Let us for a brief moment pause to thank God for our own faith, and ask him for the Grace, courage and perseverance that we might be better examples for Ella. And now, let us pray to God together so that we might share this gift of Faith to Ella as well.

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