

Why?

Acts 16¹⁶⁻³⁴; [Psalm 97; Revelation 22^{12-14,16,17,20-end};] John 17^{20-end}

Then he and his entire family were baptised without delay. [Acts 16³³]

I was going to begin this sermon by being just a little naughty. I was going to ask how many of you are here for Sapphire? Some would have said yes of course you would. Then in my dry, pedantic, Scottish way I would remonstrate with you because this isn't about Sapphire, this is all about God.

Sapphire is God's gift to her mum and dad (for whom I was privileged to officiate at their wedding);
Sapphire is God's gift to her family and to this Church community;
and in Baptism we learn more about what God requires and offers to Sapphire and all the baptised, their parents and sponsors who speak for them.

So why assemble here to witness this Baptism? Briefly:

✦ It says something about God

What we see in the reading from Acts is that Paul and his companion Silas are so convinced about God and of the faith in Jesus that they think that more important than their own wellbeing and safety: faith wasn't an add-on to their lives, it was life itself.

So they annoy those who kept the girl who could foretell the future and stop them being able to make money from her;
They endure the mob rule and being beaten;
They endure being imprisoned in the dark and respond to that by singing (even if they weren't rehearsing the Halleluia chorus, to sing a lament in those circumstances is something!)
They endure an earthquake where all were liberated but none went free.

This probably wasn't the day that Paul and Silas had planned for themselves, but such was their faith that God that they kept going through it and at the end the Church grows when the Philippian gaoler and his family are baptised.

For Sapphire and for us all we pray for a faith where God is allowed to lead and through that leading, to bless.

✦ It says something to ourselves

The earthquake had potentially dreadful results for the gaoler - he would probably be killed for such a mistake. His response was to do the job himself and had drawn his sword before Paul intervened.

He was shown a different way - instead of rely on himself he was shown a way to rely on God and that they key to unlock this was repentance.

The Christian community, parents and godparents need to show Sapphire that they are not self-reliant and that the forgiveness that God offers is important enough for us to be humble enough to say sorry to him (and to others).

The gaoler didn't get his job by lacking in confidence or in bravery - and now in accepting baptism he isn't worried about his reputation - God means more to him than even that!

✦ It says something to others

This faith is for sharing!

The first sharing was in the hospitality of baptism being extended to the gaoler's family: they were all baptised at the same time. That probably meant children who were under age.

I often hear the argument that people do not baptise their babies because they want them to grow up and make their own decisions. What nonsense. That is like saying we want our children to grow up and decide whether they will be vegans or not by not feeding them until they are old enough to make up their own mind!

What really matters is not that baptism is requested - that gets God involved; what matters is that it is followed up by parents and godparents and the people of God living out that baptism faith!

This is for Sapphire but it is about God - and our task is to be sure that it keeps on being about God!