

Third baptism

by [Rachel Brownson](#) in the [December 26, 2012](#) issue

Uncovered in his isolette,
patches taped over his eyes, the baby
lies hot and quaking in the light as
my hand hesitates over the chalky shell,
the room sounding its clicks and soft alarms.

Ex opere operato, the sacrament draws
its holiness from the work done, not
the purity of the practitioner, but
every pettiness, every scalding word
and deliberate ignorance crowds
behind my eyes, in the crevices between
wrist bones, along my ears' creases.

The mother shifts in her wheelchair,
adjusts her milk-heavy breasts, sighs.
I wet my fingers, slide them cool
along the newborn brow, into the soft
dip of fontanel, and say the words.