

The voices of children in the church

By [David Williams](#)

November 6, 2013

A couple Sundays ago, I performed a baptism.

As baptisms go, it wasn't the usual fare. I've baptized babies and very little ones, and that's a delight, utterly different every time. I've welcomed adults into the fellowship of the faith, and watched as the water that poured down their faces mingled with tears of joy.

But I've never baptized a kid before. Meaning, not a baby, and not a teen, and not a grownup, but a kid. It was a child of the church, loved by the whole community, who for various reasons just hadn't been baptized.

And he'd gotten old enough to ask whether it had happened, and to ask—repeatedly—if he could please be baptized. No one prompted him or cajoled him. It was his idea. He was persistent enough and serious enough about it that grownups listened, and they asked if he could talk with me.

So for a few Sundays after church, I sat down with him and we talked. We talked about God, as I do with the adults, and worked our way through ecclesiology and the doctrine of the Trinity. I don't generally weave dinosaurs and Lego Star Wars and karate into those conversations, but in this case, it seemed to work. He got it, grasping with his child's mind what the church is all about, and what God's love is all about. It was clear he was serious about it.

We didn't get into the convoluted theology. None of that stuff that tangles and snares us, and that we mistake for the real. It was very simple—but it was the same thing I do with the very-slightly-older humans we call grownups.

And for the baptism itself, he had his sponsors up there with him. But he also answered questions, the very same affirmations and renunciations I place before the adults. Those questions were straight out of our very decent and orderly *Book of Common Worship*, but they...errr...needed a bit of tweaking.

Why? Because those words themselves only point to what happens in baptism. They are not of themselves magic. It's why we have multiple versions open to us. And the Big Words for Adults would have required too much unpacking. Other words, simpler and stronger and bearing meaning to a child's spirit, can serve precisely the same purpose.

And so I asked, and he answered, renouncing sin, turning to Jesus, committing to the community of the Way. And then, through water and the Spirit and with the words of the Great Commission (those I left, of course), we welcomed him in.

Later, during the Lord's Prayer and during the final hymn, I was struck by something. His friends had stayed to see him baptized. When we prayed that great prayer together, I could hear them praying, raising their young voices so that they could be heard along with the adults. And I could hear them singing, strong and confident, as we belted out "What A Friend We Have in Jesus."

It felt good to hear the voices of children in church.

*Originally posted at [Beloved Spear](#)*