
“you have put on Christ”

By Sr. Sharon Stola, OSB

“John, please step into the waters of salvation.” With these words John became the first adult to be baptized in the parish’s newly blessed baptismal font.

John and George’s journey to the baptismal font began months before this ‘Holy Night’ and the parish’s journey to the completion of their new worship space began years ago. It was with great excitement that the parish gathered two weeks before Easter to dedicate this new worship space. As this growing community processed from their present worship space (which accommodated 600 people) to their new space (accommodating 1300 people) they experienced the sounds of ringing bells and joyous conversation. The dedication liturgy was truly a prayer experience of a lifetime. The sights, sounds, and aroma of the celebration will live for years in the memories of those who were present for the ceremony.

And yet it was the celebration of the adult baptisms at the Easter Vigil which filled the new worship space with an inexpressible joy that touched the hearts of all present.

In the ‘old’ church the baptismal font was a portable wooden water container, which was kept in the sacristy and only ‘wheeled out’ when baptisms were celebrated. In the planning stages for the new worship space, the pastor worked with the faith community to educate and familiarize the parishioners with the ritual symbols which are used in each of the Church’s liturgical celebrations. Through these sessions the faith community developed an appreciation for the use of symbols in their worship life. The pastor walked the faith community through an explanation of the rites, their history (emphasizing their usage during

various time periods) with a special focus on the sacrament of Baptism. Retreat sessions were offered to help the faith community deepen their understanding and more fully experience the meaning of the symbols and the ritual actions which accompanies each sacrament and other liturgical celebrations. As the faith community experienced the ‘richness’ and ‘fullness’ of each symbol and ritual action, they became more aware of how their present worship space (especially their baptismal font) had limited their appreciation and understanding of these symbols.



Those who participated in these learning sessions had not only their minds opened, they also had their hearts opened to the ‘wonder’ of the liturgical symbols and rituals through both ‘book’ and ‘experiential’ knowledge. With their new found understanding that the new worship space must ‘speak’ of symbolic meanings without explanations; the discussion of the design and use of the baptismal font included an appropriate structure of

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‘living water’ that would allow for adult and infant immersion. The design of the baptismal font also reflects the fresh understanding of the faith community that the baptismal font must welcome and embrace those who approach it either for baptism or to bless themselves as an ever present reminder of their baptism in the waters of salvation. The evidence of these understandings were apparent during the celebrations of the adult and infant baptisms for the faith community has come to embrace with great love this inspiring symbol of their faith.

The water in the baptismal font continuously flows from the upper bowl to the lower pool area to emphasize the ‘living waters’ which bring life to those who enter them.

In the new church building the assembly can touch the baptismal water each time they enter the worship space due to the groundwork done by the pastor in bringing the parishioner to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the symbols. The need to ensure that these symbols ‘speak’ their meanings in the new worship space was uppermost in the parishioner’s mind. The new baptismal font is placed at the entrance of the nave. It’s composition of brick (matching the brick of the building walls) is lined with the same granite found in the altar mensa, the top of the ambo, and the foundation of the ambry. The water in the baptismal font continuously flows from the upper bowl to the lower pool area to emphasize the ‘living waters’ which bring life to those who enter them. It again reminds the faithful of their baptisms as they bless themselves upon entering the worship space. Here is where John and George were washed in the ‘waters of salvation’ and where several infants were

brought through the ‘waters of salvation’ the Sunday after Easter.

John and George’s experience at the baptismal font marked the first celebration of this faith community’s Easter Vigil in their new worship space. Evident was the glow of the Easter fire and the lighted candles scenting a warmth through the assembly that many remarked was beyond their wildest imaginations and expectations. There was a gasp from the assembly as the large paschal candle was lighted from the Easter fire, for this paschal candle was many times larger than what was previously used. The light radiating from this paschal candle more than lighted the building- it also lighted the hearts of the assembly. This awe continued throughout the Vigil as it was celebrated with a new sense of wonder which surpassed any previous celebration of the Vigil. The use of light dimmers and a more advanced sound system only proved to enhance an already beautiful celebration.

The highlight of the Vigil came as John and George were baptized. The sound of the water being scooped into a large pitcher and poured over the head of each, filled the worship space with jubilation. This faith community has come from a worship experience where the symbols were not rich or life-giving, to a space where the symbols ‘breathe’ life into the people being baptized and into the assembly gathered.

This same ‘breathe of life’ radiated from the faces of John and George and overflowed on to the faces of the entire assembly. One could not but notice that everyone was smiling and had a glow, especially the presider. For many this was the first time they had experienced an adult baptism. Because of the vision of the community to incorporate an immersion font, everyone present could enter the experience of John and George as the waters flowed over them.

As the choir began to sing “You have put on Christ” the assembly’s response was exceptional. Having joined John and George on their journey to the waters of salvation the assembly was experiencing the remarkable sense that they too were ‘washed in these waters’ and had come to an experiential understanding of the symbols and rituals of baptism. The presider’s role in this process brought life to this faith community, an effect not lost on the assembly, as they thanked him for ‘walking’ them through the rituals before the construction, so that their celebrations would now be ‘life-giving’.

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After the Vigil celebration it was obvious that the assembly who had gathered to participate in this celebration better understood the meaning of the symbols of baptism because the ritual actions gave ‘breathe’ to the journey of John and George and the journey of this faith community in building a worship space in which all the symbols have a ‘life.’ This faith community now has the expectation that every liturgical celebration will enable the symbols and rituals to speak to their fullest. The new worship space not only gave this faith community increased seating, it has given them a renewed understanding of ‘why’ they gather as a community and ‘how’ each celebration brings forth and opens the meaning of the symbols and the rituals that for so long they took for granted. The new church building is now the symbol of their own growth and deeper understanding of the rituals and symbols that encompass their worship life.
