

To God Alone Be The Glory

This morning we're doing something a little different. Instead of a sermon I'll give you 15 minutes to write down everything you know about Baptism. This is a test and your membership depends on it. If you don't write down the correct information, you will be turned into an aardvark. By now you realize I'm pulling your leg about the test. But I would like you to understand Baptism so you can encourage your friends to have their children baptized. I want you to be able to draw strength for the times when Satan sends wave after wave of doubt to pound down your faith and make you feel unworthy of God's love. Or what if you move to a town where none of the available churches regard your baptism as valid? When you try to join, they insist you be baptized all over again. How would you respond? Our review of Baptism can help you with all this. Most of us were baptized as babies, but through the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, I hope you will be convinced that BAPTISM IS ALWAYS FOR TODAY.

Martin Luther summarized what the Bible teaches about Baptism in his Small Catechism. Let's read the first part. **What is baptism?** Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word. Which is that Word of God? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Isn't Baptism wonderfully simple? You apply water to someone in the name of the Triune God. Anyone who makes it more complicated than that can quickly bring themselves into conflict with the Scriptures.

How could anyone complicate baptism? Well, they could raise the question, "How should the water be applied?" The simple answer is: "The Bible doesn't specify how." Yet some of my Christian friends insist that baptism must be done a certain way or else it is not valid. Some years ago a man who ran a Christian Day School visited me in order to recruit children from the church I was serving at that time. Because I knew his denomination but didn't want to stereotype him unfairly, I directed our conversation toward baptism to see what he would teach our children. "If I came to your church to become a member, would you insist that I be re-baptized by immersion (dunking completely under water), even after I grew up in a home where we read the Bible together for at least 20 minutes each evening, even after 12 years of intense theological training, even after years of preaching and teaching as a pastor and a lifetime of confessing Christ as my only Savior from sin? Would you insist on rebaptism by immersion?" He calmly said, "Yes."

He and other Christians are convinced that that the Bible word for 'baptize' means 'immerse.' Now, if they are right, then the Bible will never use the word for 'baptize' to mean 'sprinkle' or 'pour,' right? So if we can find a Bible passage where 'baptize' means 'to apply water in a way other than immerse,' their evidence goes away, right? Well, in Mark 7:1-4, the Holy Spirit records this incident for us. "The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law...gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees...when they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups,

pitchers, and kettles and dining couches.)”
The Greek word translated ‘washing’ here is ‘*baptizw*,’ the word we usually translate ‘baptize.’ Let’s see what happens if we take the word to mean ‘immerse’ in this context. A cup you can dunk with perhaps just a pitcher full. In order to dunk a pitcher you would need a kettle full of water. To dunk a kettle you would need a small bathtub. To dunk a dining couch you would need a huge bathtub or a small swimming pool. But the Jews in Jesus’ day didn’t have indoor plumbing. They drew most of their water from wells or cisterns. They didn’t have big bathtubs in their homes or small swimming pools outside their homes. So then the only way they could baptize their dining couches was by sprinkling or pouring. Therefore *baptizw* does not need to mean ‘immerse.’ And therefore baptism may be done by applying water in any manner, including immersion.

It’s too bad people get hung up on how to apply the water in baptism. Far more important is what baptism does for us! When people understand the benefits of baptism, they consider baptism one of God’s greatest gifts ever. Let’s read the second part of Luther’s explanation of baptism together. **What does baptism do for us? Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. What are these words and promises of God? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”**

Do you see why Christians the world over have found Baptism so amazing? Applying

water to someone in the name of the Triune God actually washes sins away! It gives us everything Jesus won for us by his perfect life and innocent death. Baptism actually imparts salvation! It forces the devil to unshackle the baptized and set the captive free. Can you see Satan stomping off as he mutters under his breath, “But I was counting on ridiculing and torturing that one for eternity!”

Now it all comes into focus, doesn’t it? Satan is the one who wants people to think baptism is complicated. If Satan can spread his lies, and twist the meaning, and obfuscate, and confuse—well, he won’t get the whole flock, but he may pick off a few strays. Or maybe he can convince people that baptism is just something we do to show God we are serious about making a commitment to him. Maybe Satan can trick people into thinking baptism does not save them. But it does! 1 Peter 3:20-21 says, “*In it [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.*” The flood waters, which drowned the rest of the world, lifted up the ark and thus saved Noah and his family from death. The flood water saved Noah. In this sense the flood water symbolizes baptism which saves you. Baptism saves you. Don’t you just love it when the Bible states things clearly?

Because baptism saves people, that’s one reason we baptize babies. No, there is no Bible passage that says, “Baptize babies.” But then there’s no Bible passage that says to give women Lord’s Supper. Only men were at the institution of the Lord’s Supper, but the church has always communed women. The Christian church baptized

babies from the earliest years until the 1500s, when Satan got some Christians to think differently about baptism. Here's why we baptize babies. 1) Jesus said, "*Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...*" Children have never been excluded from the concept of a nation. 2) Children have sin from conception and therefore need a Savior. I know, I know, it's hard to imagine what sin little babies could possibly have committed. But sin is more than what we do, it's also a condition we inherit from our parents. Not only does the Bible say (Ps 51:5), "*Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me,*" it also says, "*Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward*" (Ps 58:3). It doesn't take long before the cries little babies use to communicate "I'm hungry" or "I'm wet," turn into cries that demand, "What's taking you so long? When will you naughty parents come in here and pick me up?" Babies grow up, and then sass their parents, talk bad about others, lust after people they aren't married to, become discontent with the uncountable blessings God has already given—all in-born traits, not something they have to be taught. Aren't you glad baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, just like God's Word promises? 3) Baptism saves. It works saving faith in little hearts, and their faith lays hold of Jesus the same way your faith does (Mt 18:6).

Right about now the skeptic inside each of us wants to ask: "Come on. You throw water on someone and it forgives sins?" **How can water do such great things?** Read with me. It is certainly not the water that

does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God's Word the water is just plain water and not baptism. But with this Word it is Baptism, that is a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit. Where is this written? Saint Paul says in Titus, chapter 3: "God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying."

In other words, baptism is powerful because God's Word is powerful. God used his Word to create everything in just six days. So it's easy for him to join his almighty Word to the water and cause baptism to wash away sins and lock in eternal life.

Does anyone see a potential problem here if we teach people that they are saved through baptism? Listen to Luther. "[This is] an error that always prevails: When we preach that upon us is bestowed grace and the forgiveness of sins, without any merit on our part, people are disposed to regard themselves as free from obligation and will do no works except those to which their own desires prompt them" (Sermons of Martin Luther, Vol VIII, p 141-142). So, yes, we are concerned that people will misuse baptism. But it's not the fault of God's Word if people miss this point: Baptism means something important for our everyday living.

The Catechism asks: **What does baptizing with water mean?** Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily

contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Where is this written? Saint Paul says in Romans, chapter 6, “We were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

God wants Baptism to be the foundation on which we try to live for Jesus! Think of it this way. Imagine you were born a slave. You have no rights, no sick days, no love lavished on you. You’ve never been off the master’s property. You’ve never even seen inside his house. And then one day the master calls you into the mansion and explains that you have been adopted. You now have the freedom to come and go. You are to sleep inside the house in your own bed. When you’re sick someone will take care of you and call the minister to pray with you. And best of all you’ve been written into the will—you have an inheritance.

That’s what Baptism did for you. God adopted you into his family through Baptism. Now how are you going to live, O former slave? If you were to become a spiritual couch potato, ignore the other adoptees when they are sick or missing, or take the Master’s name in vain, you would be showing the opposite of appreciation. So baptism signals us, “Hey, don’t act like a slave—act like a responsible member of the family.” Anything God calls wrong, you agree, “Yep, that’s wrong,” even if some people say it’s okay. And you try to do only what is right.

But imagination falls short of reality, because Baptism doesn’t just lay before us the law as a guide. It helps motivate us so that we follow the law willingly. For example, why are you here this morning? Are you afraid God will “toast” you like bread if you skip? Did someone drag you here against your will? Maybe some spiritually immature people feel that way. But you’re here because you want to be. So where did you get the power to want to be here? You didn’t manufacture it yourself. Your baptism is still working in you. Every time you do something to glorify God out of love for him who loved you, your baptism is still working the benefits that it first brought you. When you struggle with your sinful flesh, remember your baptism as if you were immersed. When you feel sorrow for your sins and confess them to God, you are holding the sinful flesh under the waters of baptism, drowning it until the old you stops wriggling. And when you come up out of the water, who’s in charge? The new self and the Holy Spirit. You might as well have come back from the dead with Christ. And now that you’re alive, baptism empowers you to live like you’re no longer spiritually dead. Baptism is always for today.

Next time you say your prayers, remember that God accepts your prayers because he recognizes his stamp of approval on you. The stamp of approval is his name, given to you by Baptism. So Baptism gives power to your prayers. Because of baptism your Savior Christ looks on you as one who by faith has laid hold of him. **BAPTISM IS ALWAYS FOR TODAY.**