

**Sermon for
A Year with the Catechism
What is Holy Baptism?**

Date: April 24, 2022

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 42:1-9

Epistle Reading: Romans 6:1-11

Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

Sermon Text: Romans 6:1-11

Sermon Title: What is Holy Baptism?

Introit: Psalm 2:7-11,12c; Antiphon Isaiah 42:1a

Hymns:

LSB 591 – This is the Spirit's Entry Now

LSB 590 – Baptized into Your Name Most
Holy

LSB 781 – We Give Thee but Thine Own

LSB 601 – All Who Believe and Are
Baptized

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Matins

Songs:

Grace Like Rain – Todd Agnew

The River - Jordan Feliz

Only Jesus - Casting Crowns

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Romans 6:1–11

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

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Grace to you and peace from our risen Savior Jesus. Amen.

There's something in the water. You hear that from time to time. It's usually a joke used to explain a high number of occurrences of some event. Actually pure, clean, drinking water is supposed to be good for your health. Which is why we don't like stuff in our water. We don't want non-water stuff in our water.

A recent scientific study found that in nearly all city water, water that comes through a water treatment plant, there is stuff. There are medications, chemicals and all sorts of things we use to treat various ailments and diseases, and that stuff is floating around in the water. That water that comes out of your tap, that water you thought was pure and clean, has stuff in it. Stuff that should not be there. Stuff that may not be good for you. There is some concern about the long term use of this stuff on people.

Today's subject is water, specifically the waters of Holy Baptism. Luther is clear about these waters. Long term use of Baptismal waters will kill you. That's because it's not just plain water in Holy Baptism. There's something in that water too. Something that affects you. In the waters of Holy Baptism, God has poured His Word, His name and His promise given through His Son Jesus. It's that last thing, that connection to Jesus, that has such a deadly effect. You see it's "the Jesus" in the water that kills us.

It's because He died. He died on the cross as the sacrifice for sinful, messed up people, like you. So as you enter these "Jesus" filled waters of Baptism you now find your death. Luther often talked about Baptism as death by drowning. He said you should drown yourself in the waters of your Baptism everyday; day after day. In doing so you kill the old you, the sinful you, and then rise to a new life, a new creation, in Jesus.

St. Paul is a little more graphic. Paul says Baptism is crucifixion. Baptism is being tortured to death, just like Jesus. He also says Baptism is like being buried in a grave to rot and mold away.¹ You see Holy Baptism shapes our very Christian existence. It shapes who we are, what we are, how we act, how we think, and what we believe. It shows us how our entire existence is based on death and resurrection.

Here's the problem, and I think this is true, not just for you, but for a lot of people in the Church, including many pastors. The problem is we do not take this dying and rising seriously enough. Too often we treat Holy Baptism as just the start

1 Romans 6:4

to a Christian life. Something that happened once, maybe many years ago. We treat it as the start of a process, rather than the entire process.

That's probably because we get distracted. We get distracted by the culture in which we live. Our American culture tells us that all of our problems are fixable. We just have to find the right procedures, or the right recipe. Then we just follow the directions and everything will be okay.

Now that's not an entirely bad way to think. Thinking that way is what has made America the great nation it is. We do work hard, get an education, earn money, sometimes great wealth, off of the hard work and self-determination spirit we try to teach, so you will live a good, successful, life. That idea, however, cannot fix every problem. There are some problems hard work cannot fix. There are some problems the best education cannot resolve, and for which the best books cannot help.

Baptism teaches us: no amount of effort on our part, no amount of ethical muster, or collection of wisdom, no matter how many people we bring together, can fix God's problem with us. We need to die and we need to be resurrected new again. That is what our Baptism does to us. That's what our Baptism teaches us. That is what our Baptism should teach us every day of our lives, as long as God gives us breath to breathe upon this Earth.

This is where your Catechism can help you, which is why this congregation bought you those catechisms and gave them to you. You see Luther had to deal with the same problems and misunderstandings when he was a pastor. In his day people thought Baptism was just one step of many, a person had to take to try to earn God's love and forgiveness. Luther taught Holy Baptism was not just the first small step of our Christian life, but the very center of our Christian life; everything about our Christian life.

Your Baptism is equally as important as Jesus' death and resurrection. Because in Baptism we are crucified with Jesus. Then just as He is risen from the dead, we rise too, just like Him.² That's why Luther says things like, through Baptism we are drowning the old Adam to death; the old sinful self to death, so that we can rise, to a new life through Jesus; to eternal life.

Some people think the way to become a better Christian is gradually work at being more moral; to gradually work at becoming a better person. That is all a bunch of lies. That is not the Christian faith. Those lies are what give some people the idea everyone in church is "just a bunch of goody-goody-two-shoes pretending

to be goody-goody people who never have problems.” All of you know that is not true. You all have families with troubles and problems of various sizes and seriousness. So if you can see the Church is not about pretending to be good, then why do some pastors teach that foolishness in their churches? Worse yet: Why do some people believe them?

The truth about becoming a better Christian is not about becoming a better person. That’s not a bad thing to do, but that is not what the Holy Christian Faith is about. The Holy Christian Faith is about gradually working yourself closer and closer to your grave. It is about gradually walking closer and closer to your death, which comes in God’s time, by God’s will.

It is in that final breath, that final moment, the true power of Holy Baptism shines most brightly. Brighter than Harry Potter’s wand; brighter than Gandolff’s staff, brighter than the most powerful forces that can be known in the Universe. Holy Baptism shines in that moment because in that moment your Baptism is your salvation which has washed you clean and made you perfect in the eyes of your perfect heavenly Father. Baptism is a two sided coin with your death on one side and your resurrection on the other. The two cannot be separated. They are one.

...and thank God for that. I’ve lost track of the number of beds where I have sat to remind someone near their own death, of: that very fact, that very promise, that very wonder of reality.

Like I said, long term exposure to this water will kill you, but that death, a death in faith, is not a scary death, it’s not a fearful death, because it is a death that frees us from sin and sin’s affect forever. It does that because through Baptism we do not die alone, we die with Jesus, who died to sin once and for all.

The Bible says:

One who has died has been set free from sin. If we have died with Christ we will also live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again and death will not have any power over Him. Because the death that Christ died He died to sin once and for all.³

...and you were Baptized into this death. You were buried with Him, by your Baptism into His death,

so that just as Christ was raised from death to life by the glorious power of the Father, you too will walk in to

3 Romans 6:9-10

newness of life. If you have been united with Him in a death like His, you will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.⁴

This little pool of water may look very unassuming. It might not look like much. In fact sitting here in the center of the isle it often gets in the way. That's kind of the point. It must get in the way. The way that leads to the cross, the way that leads to heaven, and the way that leads to the Father's throne must come through Holy Baptism. It is there we are born into the house of God. It is there we become children of God. It is there forgiveness comes, holy cleansing comes, and purity before God comes.

Once it comes as we grow and mature in the faith it remains on us. It stains us. It stains us just like sin stains us. It penetrates to the marrow of our bones. It marks you as one redeemed by Christ. It brands you as one of God's chosen. Coming to this water will kill you. It will also "live you." Living in your Baptism each day, everyday, is remembering that mark placed on you and God's call faith.

There is definitely something in this water.

Thanks be to God for that.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



4 Romans 6:4-5