

Sermon 08/01/21
(Baptism)

Text – 1 Peter 3:21

Theme – “Baptism Now Saves You”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Baptism now saves you." So says the Baptismal Rite in our hymnal. So says our Small Catechism. So says the Apostle Peter. And, most important of all, so says the Holy Spirit. But why? And how? That will be our focus today, as we continue our examination of the Catechism with its fourth Chief Part: Baptism. (pause)

The first question Luther asks (and answers) for us here is the most basic: ***"What is baptism?"*** How a person answers this question really determines everything that follows. Luther's answer — OUR answer — is this: **"Baptism in not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word."**

You will notice there are three things mentioned there: water, God's command, and God's Word. All three are necessary for the baptism to be a real baptism. Without any of the three, it is not a true baptism but only an imitation, a mockery, a parody. So let's start with the simplest of those three things: the water.

The first thing to be clear about is that the water we use is not special water. That is, it is not the water that does the miraculous things God promises in baptism. Water is simply the vehicle, the instrument, through which God works. So, the water is not "holy" water. It is not from some special, sacred source -- like the Jordan River or the Sea of Galilee. Nor does it get any power from being blessed by some great saint or holy man or religious dignitary. In fact, the water we usually use here at Our Savior's comes from the sink in the bathroom next to my office. Some great and magical water,

right? No, it is just tap water. *Warm* tap water (hopefully), but still only tap water. Until, that is, the next component is added.

Of course that would be the Word of God. Specifically the Gospel. The Good News of Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. Of how He came down from heaven to be our Savior. How He was born for us, lived for us, died for us, rose again for us. How He kept the commandments and Law of God perfectly in our place, and gives us the credit by faith. How He took the full punishment and penalty for all our sins -- and the sins of the whole human race -- by dying on the cross where He suffered hell itself for us. How He rose on Easter to break the seal of death, to burst the bars of hell, to shatter sin's bonds, to crush Satan's power and stranglehold on us. How He ascended into heaven, where He now rules heaven and earth and all things -- and He does so for our benefit, for our welfare, for our salvation.

This Gospel Word is connected/joined/combined with the water in Baptism. You see, in order for the Gospel to do anyone any good, it must be delivered and given to individuals. It must be applied to us, personally, and made our own. And of course that is exactly what baptism does. As the water (combined with that Gospel, remember) is poured or sprinkled over the head of a person, the Gospel is made YOURS. By name, YOU have been called to be God's own, and so you became God's child and heir. But take away that Gospel Word and the water is just plain old water. It does nothing more than wash the person's head. It does not take away sin. It does not give the Holy Spirit. It does not create faith. It does not save. But when that water IS joined to the Gospel Word, it does all those things — and more!

The last thing Luther mentions that a baptism needs is God's command. And we dare not overlook that. Without God's command, there would be no such thing as Baptism. Without God's command, the Church would have no authority to baptize. Without God's command, we would have no

assurance that our baptism did anything for us, let alone save us. But *with* that command -- and that promise -- from God, we have certainty of our forgiveness, our adoption, our salvation. (pause)

The Catechism follows up this definition of baptism (and what it is) by telling us what it *does*. We confess: "**It (baptism) works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.**" Now, as I tell the confirmation students every year, what more could you ever ask for than that? Those are greater than health and wealth, power and fame, family and friends, happiness and long life. And it is **baptism** which gives them all to you!

Forgiveness of sins. Well, that's certainly something you need. And badly. I know it; you know it. You are a sinner. A great and terrible sinner. You *need* a Savior. And, as we mentioned earlier, you have precisely that very Savior in Jesus Christ. The Son of God and Son of Mary. Perfect God and perfect Man. He has done everything for you: obeying the Law in His life, and satisfying the Law with His death. As great and wicked a sinner as you are, even greater and more powerful a Savior is He. He has wiped out all sin. He has tipped the scales in your favor. He has paid for your sin — and the sin of the whole human race. And here, in baptism, He gives this very forgiveness to you.

So, when Satan whispers doubts and accusations in your ear, you know how to answer: "I am baptized". And in that gift you have full forgiveness. All your sin was washed away in that water. Not just the little sins, like pushing your friend down during recess or swiping a candy bar from the store but even the most heinous of sins. Not just the sins committed before you were baptized. But ALL sin. Gone. Forgiven. Swept away in the baptismal flood. Nothing can stand in its way, just as nothing can withstand the tidal waves of a tsunami. You were power-washed clean at baptism. Do not doubt it.

That's why we can also say that baptism delivers us from death and the devil. After all, the only power Satan has over us is due to sin. So if our sin is gone, then so is his control, his authority, his

power. Oh, sure, he still is there every day: tempting, taunting, trying; attacking, assaulting, accusing. But he is beaten. Conquered. Vanquished. Jesus has crushed him.

The same thing for death. When we die and leave this life, we continue to live. That is, our souls go to be with the Lord. To enjoy the bliss and peace of being with Him, free from sin as His forgiven children through baptism. But we also have the promise of the resurrection on the Last Day. Then bodies and souls will be rejoined to live forever in the new heaven and earth that He will give us. Like Eden, but even better since Satan will never be able to slither into this Paradise. And there we will live as God always intended, as dear children with their dear Father. Ruling over all things with Him. Knowing Him face-to-face. With all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Forever. (pause)

Of course, many people struggle with the idea that all this -- forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, eternal salvation -- that all these things are given to us in baptism. They wonder how **water** can do all that. But remember, as we said at the beginning of this sermon, it is NOT the water that does it. Rather it is God that does it all. That is, it is His promise given in His Word, joined to the water, that does it. God's Word does exactly what it says. It accomplishes what He intends. If I were to say "dishes be done" they would still be sitting there, dirty, in the kitchen sink. But God's Word does it. So in the beginning, at creation, God said "*Let there be...*" and all things came into existence. And that same creating Word is there, in baptism. (pause)

So, what does all this mean for our daily lives? Perhaps you remember the Catechism's talk about the Old Adam and contrition and drowning, about the new man emerging and living in righteousness and purity forever. But what does all that mean?

Well, let's start by defining terms. The "Old Adam" refers to our sinful nature, which we have inherited from our ancestor Adam. As said before, we are all conceived and born sinful; we all live lives of sin, even after conversion. There is a constant and life-long struggle going on within each of us (and

all Christians). A fight between the recreated child of God by faith in Christ (given to us in baptism) -- what the Catechism calls the "new man" -- and that old sinful nature. Perhaps you remember old cartoons showing a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other, always in conflict. Well, in essence, that is what we are talking about: that sinful nature (and Satan) never give up in this lifetime, but constantly try to lead us astray. However, the Holy Spirit guides and leads the "new man" to resist such temptation, and instead to follow in the ways that are pleasing to God. And, of course, that would simply be to live in faith toward God and love toward our neighbor.

Every day, then, is a battle between God and the devil -- with us as the battlefield AND the prize. If we try to fight on our own, we are bound to lose. To fall into sin and unbelief, into pride and self-righteousness. We are no match for the devil. But God is more than a match for him. He has defeated Satan before, at the cross, and He will beat him again today — and every day — if we but let God do the fighting for us. And we do that by trusting in Him, in His salvation, in His love, in His providence and care. Whenever Satan comes after us with temptation, the answer is to put our faith in the Lord. To trust Him as our Father who always will do what is best. Even if we cannot see it, we know it to be true. The cross proves His love.

And so our baptism enables us to trust in the Lord. To confess Him as our Father. To believe in Him, even if we are suffering. Sin caused Adam and Eve to see God, not as their loving Father, but as their angry Judge. And so they hid from Him. Satan wants to deceive us, to blind us, in the same way: to make us not see God as our loving Father but as the One who hates us, who fails us, who threatens us. But He is not! He has shown His face of love in Christ. And He has given it to you in baptism.

And it is that same faith which moves and enables us to love our neighbor. As Christians, we understand that what Christ has done for us He also has done for all others as well. Jesus died to pay for their sin, no less than yours. God loves them with the very same love He has for you. And so we love

them as well. Not perfectly, obviously, but we DO love them. And we strive to show that love everyday. (pause)

So, you are baptized. You have received the forgiveness of sin, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal life. And all in the water/the Word/the command of baptism. It has changed you, it has remade you, it has given you rebirth as the child and heir of God. By name He has called you to be His own. And all this is certain and sure because God has said so. And it is yours because it was YOUR head and heart sealed with the sign of the cross, it was YOUR name spoken at the font, it was YOU who was washed clean there. What a joy it is to say "I am baptized!" Not just when the devil comes skulking up and tries to plant confusion and doubt in your head, attempting to erase and destroy faith. But also as you live each day as that child of God. Reminding yourself whose you are, and the great price He so willingly paid just to have you as His own. *"Baptism now saves you"* indeed. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Wed/OS -- Nicene Creed
FE -- Offertory/Offering