

## **Holy Baptism, The Daily Sacrament** **Matthew 3:13-17**

(Adaptation of a sermon by Rev. Craig Stanford, Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning we commemorate the "Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Though most Christian denominations do not fully appreciate the event, it marks our Lord's formal entrance into His Messianic mission. He was baptized into our sin and death, that we might be baptized into His death and resurrection.

There are three basic unique understanding of just how a person is made righteous before God, and are reflected in each one's understanding of baptism. Two of these understanding lead to trusting things that might lead to eternal destruction.

One position begins with the belief that every human being from conception is *tainted* by sin. Sin is only a force that hinders, but does not utterly destroy, one's ability to do good and please God. This position says that within the soul of every human being there is a spark of goodness. Holy Baptism infuses God's grace into the soul of the baptized in order to strengthen a person's ability to do the good that resides within him/her. In Roman Catholic doctrine, Holy Baptism is not a means of salvation, but rather a booster shot that helps each individual attain *their own* salvation.

Many Protestants teach that Holy Baptism is a human work done out of obedience to Christ's command. It is merely a symbol of the co-operation that takes place between Christ and the Christian. They teach that "Baptism is an outward symbol of an inner reality." It is an act performed by human beings as sign of one's commitment to Jesus. This understanding makes baptism a part of the Law, not an instrument of pure Gospel used by God. It is something the Christian *has to do* because God said so, that is the very definition of Law.

Finally, we come to the last position. I say without apology, that the third doctrinal position is the one taught by Holy Scripture. Baptism is, by the testimony of Holy Scripture, a divine work. That is, it is a work of God, wherein all, and I mean all, the benefits of Christ – His entire person and work – are given freely and solely by God's grace to the one being baptized.

It is that simple. Everything that is in the Gospel of Jesus is packaged in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Everything that is said of the Gospel is also said of Baptism.

The Gospel gives forgiveness of sins . . . so does Baptism!  
The Gospel consists of the entire person and work of Jesus Christ . . . so does Baptism!  
The Gospel washes away sins . . . so does Holy Baptism!  
The Gospel gives eternal life . . . so does Holy Baptism!  
The Gospel gives a place in heaven . . . so does Holy Baptism!  
The Gospel imparts the Holy Spirit . . . so does Holy Baptism!  
The Gospel creates a new nature. . . so does Holy Baptism!

There is nothing that is said of the Gospel that Scripture does not also say of Holy Baptism. You might call Baptism the Gospel in liquid form! It is the Word used in connection with water. It is

water used in connection with the Word.

Dear friends, Jesus understood the significance of each event in His earthly ministry. When He joined John in the Jordan River in our Gospel reading, He knew exactly what baptism marked and what it would bring upon Him.

On the day that Jesus was baptized the battle between Him and the devil began in earnest. Immediately following the words of God the Father, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” the Gospel continues, “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

The Gospels give us no time to sit back and look longingly at that wonderful moment of Jesus' baptism. They move quickly from our Lord's Baptism to His temptation in the wilderness to make it clear that the war between Jesus and the devil had been joined. They are joined in conflict, and to the victor will belong the spoils. You dear friends, are the spoils of war!

We have only two birth narratives in two Gospels; Matthew and Luke. The Gospel of St. John's Gospel begins with a theological introduction, and then jumps to the work of John as He is baptizing. And John points to points us to Christ.

The Gospel of Mark begins with John's baptizing in the wilderness, and quickly gets to the point of Jesus' baptism. In fact, all four of the Gospels speak about the Baptism and its place in Jesus' ministry.

John the Baptist arrived preaching a “Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4).” Jesus preached a Baptism of the water and of the Spirit to Nicodemus (John 3:5ff). “Unless a man is born of the water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Jesus summarized His entire atoning work as a “Baptism” (Mark 10:38-39) through which He would first pass and through which all His disciples would follow. When Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees to prove His authority Jesus pointed to the divine and saving nature of John's Baptism (Luke 20:4).

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus commissioned those who hold the public keys of the New Testament Church to go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching in the name of the Triune God. (Matt 28:19-20)

Baptism is also connected to the filling of the Apostolic Office vacated by Judas. The candidates for the office had to be men “who went in and out among us; beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us.” (Acts 1:21-22). In the first public sermon preached by St. Peter on Pentecost, he called upon the people, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts 2:38-39)

After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, St. Paul heard the Gospel from Ananias and was immediately baptized. Showing again that the proclamation of the Gospel included the

proclamation of Holy Baptism. That pattern would be repeated throughout the New Testament Church (Acts 10:48; 11:12ff; 16:15;18:8; 19:3-5; and 22:16). Preaching a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ and Him crucified and resurrected is the fundamental proclamation of the New Testament Church, because in it, everything that belongs to Jesus Christ is hidden.

Paul connects y Baptism as they work of God by which we are connected to Christ, by which His atoning work becomes ours. “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:3-4)

Yes, Baptism is one time event. But it is the everyday life that a Christian draws breath. In the life of a Christian, Baptism does two things. “Baptism signifies that the old Adam in us, should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (S.C.)

Secondly, in the eyes of God, holy Baptism cleanses all our thoughts, words, and deeds. As sinners, everything we do, even every breath we breathe, is tainted by sin. Water and the Word wash all that away.

Every time you come here to offer your confession of sin and hear the Gospel you are living your Baptism. Every time you come here to worship God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are living your Baptism. When you are troubled by your sins; when you waiver in doubt; when you don't feel like a Christian; and when all the world is falling apart around you, your Baptism remains. Why? Because it is God's work not yours! Listen to this closely! It is God's promise to you, not your promise to God, that counts.

In his Large Catechism, Luther writes: “No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than Baptism, for through it we obtain perfect holiness and salvation, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.”

False forms of Christianity have turned things around. They make our work, our promises, and our commitment more important than what God has done for us in Christ, in His means of grace, and in His Church. They look at Baptism and see and hear very little – water and some words. They do not look with eyes of faith, so they have to look for something else in order to find peace for their troubled soul. They run from one religious experience to another. They keep trying to find the next religious high. They look for the latest cultic fad that will bring purpose and meaning to their life.

Many are trying to find a way in which they can feel more useful to God.

Christians like these are a lot like athletes who engage in “Extreme Sports.” They are constantly in pursuit of that adrenalin rush, that extraordinary feeling of being alive. They cannot find this feeling in the ordinary every day stuff of life, so they have to escape to another kind of life.

Christians fall into the very same trap. Ordinary service to God in the Church and in serving our families and neighbors just does not produce the desired results - - namely the "Christian experience." But God has given everything needed for the Christian life in Holy Baptism. He gives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He purifies the ordinary, everyday stuff of life and makes even the ordinary extraordinary in faith.

Have you ever considered those who serve this congregation - council members, Sunday School staff, Ladies' Aid, altar guild, communion deacons, and others? Let me tell you a little bit about each of them. Every one of them has, at one time or another, expressed his/her concern over holding a position in this church. They did so because they did not feel like they were good enough, holy enough, or wise enough to be considered worthy of the task. That is of course, exactly what makes them worthy. They are like the pastor with whom they serve. They are only fit to serve because they have been fitted with the righteous robe of Jesus Christ. They were robed with His righteousness in Holy Baptism.

Nothing you can do will make you holier or more pleasing in God's sight. In fact, some of you who serve this congregation, may feel even less equipped and far less holy than you did upon taking up your task. You are Baptized - you already have Christ's very own holiness. You have everything that is needed to make you pleasing in God's sight.

Baptism for the Roman Catholic and for the Reformed is deficient. It has to be supplemented with human works. That is the same thing as saying that Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection is deficient and must be supplemented by human works.

Baptism is not deficient, for in it we have the entire person and work of Christ. He was baptized into our sin so that we could be baptized into His righteousness. As people who live in our baptism, we have been washed clean in the water and the Word. We have, in faith, received that which God gives. God the Father now looks down upon us according to His gracious disposition and says, "Behold My sons and daughters in whom I am well pleased." Amen