

Matthew 3:13-17

It is the baptism of our Lord, a day we celebrate the sacrament of baptism. Do you know what a sacrament is? According to Concordia Publishing House in an excerpt from Martin Luther's Small Catechism (<https://blog.cph.org/read/everyday-faith/what-lutherans-teach/what-lutherans-teach-about-using-the-sacraments> captured 1/10/26) sacraments are actions initiated by Jesus Christ for two purposes. First, the Sacraments outwardly identify people as Christ followers, and second, they inwardly give Christ followers forgiveness, life, and salvation. Therefore, sacraments awaken and strengthen our faith in God's grace and mercies. As Lutherans, we celebrate only two Sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion. We celebrate Holy Communion as often as possible, but are baptized only once in our lifetime. You may wonder why baptism is a one time occurrence; that is because it is not our work but the work of God within us, and God's work doesn't need to be repeated.

Sometimes people get confused thinking, "I have truly repented of my sin. I've grown stronger in my faith and I feel more connected to God. I want to be baptized again." That is the baptism of John the Baptist, a baptism of repentance. The baptism we receive as a Sacrament is a divine, miraculous cleansing of the soul with water and God's Word upon which we receive forgiveness of sin and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The act of remembering your baptism is acceptable because it is not a repetition of your baptism but a reminder that you are a child of God whose words and actions are directed by the Holy Spirit.

Baptism isn't something we do... I've heard so many pastors talk about parents or grandparents calling the church office and asking the pastor to have their child "dunked" as though it is just a meaningless ritual. Baptism is far more than that, it is a means of God's grace, a way that we are blessed by the Triune God. As water in a shower or bath cleanses our bodies, the water of baptism combined with God's Word, cleanses our soul. The book of Galatians (3:26-27) tells us that when we were baptized into Christ we put on Christ. That means we are joint heirs with Christ who belong to the Lord God, the Holy Christian Church, and the Communion of Saints. Because Jesus was accepted as God's son at his baptism, we are accepted as a child of God at our baptism.

The first act of Jesus when he came to be baptized was humility. We see this when John the Baptist questioned Jesus. John obviously knew who Jesus was and knew that Jesus was greater than him. Jesus convinced him that he would be baptized even though there was no forgiveness of sin necessary. Then Jesus walked into the River Jordan. If you've ever seen the Jordan you know it is not a clear, sparkling stream. It is dirty with mud and other debris, not only that, the sins of the other people were symbolically washed into that water. And Jesus willingly entered the water and was baptized. God was pleased with this, and the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus when he emerged from the water.

Water. Water is the most valuable resource on the planet; all living things need water to survive. And we need to stay connected to Christ, the source of spiritual, living water that nourishes our souls.

Images of water are plentiful in the Bible. It begins in Genesis where God created water that covered the earth and ends in Revelation with the vision of a river that flows from the throne of God. The baby Moses floated in the river and later led the Hebrew people through the divided waters of the Red Sea. He tapped a rock in the desert and

water flowed out of it. After 40 years of wandering in the desert Joshua, Moses successor, led the people across the waters of the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Jesus and his disciples, many of whom were fishermen, spent a great deal of time around water. Jesus walked on water, calmed a storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, and talked about water with a Samaritan woman. A blind man was healed by putting mud on his eyes, then Jesus told him to wash in a pool to complete the healing miracle. At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus went into the River Jordan to be baptized.

Baptism, being immersed in the water for religious rituals, was not new to the people of Judea. One of the rituals still practiced today was to be immersed in water to regain spiritual cleanliness. The faithful enter the waters to wash away their separation from God due to sin and emerge renewed, refreshed, and spiritually clean.

John used the traditional waters, but had a new message, calling people to repentance to prepare for the coming kingdom of God, Jesus. No wonder John was confused when Jesus came for baptism. Matthew doesn't tell us if John said anything when Jesus went under the water, or if he remained quiet. But he certainly knew this was no ordinary baptism of forgiveness.

As I said earlier, our baptism is no ordinary baptism. Each one is a unique experience where we have died to our old life and live into new life in Christ. We celebrate the grace of God as we are born anew and receive forgiveness. We remember that we are children of God, loved by God, and pleasing to God.

Some lyrics of an old song kept going through my head last week. They were from Gilbert O'Sullivan's song *Alone Again, Naturally*. What I was hearing was: "But as if to knock me down, reality came around, and without so much as a mere touch cut me into little pieces leaving me to doubt talk about God in his mercies. For if he really does exist, why did he desert me in my hour of need? I truly am indeed, alone again, naturally." This song is so sad, especially because those of us who are baptized are never alone. The Holy Spirit resides with us and will not leave us. We have been baptized into the family of God. We are a child of God. God loves us and will see us through. God has promised that and God keeps promises. In Christ there is help and there is hope. When we live out of our faith, the waters of our baptism flow from our pores to encourage and bless not only ourselves, but the least and the lost.

No matter how much energy we expend for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ and in the service of our neighbors, there will always be enough spiritual water to go around. We and those we serve will be renewed and refreshed; we simply need to draw from it.

When we exercise our bodies, we lose water through perspiration. Once the water leaves the body it needs to be replaced. So when we exercise, we bring water with us. When we exercise our faith, the waters of our baptism flow from us to those we love and serve without being diminished. We have been blessed to be a blessing, to share the love of Jesus with all whom we meet. The good news is that the waters of our baptism never run out or lose their effectiveness. Once we have had a taste of Jesus, the living water, we will never thirst again.
All glory be to God.