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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
The Baptism of Our Lord, Series B
Saturday, January 9th, 2021
Sunday, January 10th, 2021

Sermon: Getting Undressed (New Skin)
Texts: Romans 6:1-11

Focus: God's gift of Baptism turns us into new men and women.

Function: That they would daily die to sin and rise to newness of life.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: "Such baptizing with water... indicates 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" (SC, 4th Part of Baptism).

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen. Happy New Year! *Happy New Year!* Is 2021 off to a great start for you? Even though January begins in the darkness of winter, it brings with it a fresh scent of possibility. This is the month where millions of Americans make New Year's resolutions and seek to remake themselves into a better image of what they want to become. Gyms are full. Money makeovers are popular. Even Papa Murphy's is advertising a Keto pizza—which comes with no crust! (How is *that* a pizza?!) For a few weeks, at least, people take up new habits as they try to turn themselves into better people—new men and women. Sometimes we succeed in our resolutions and goals. Often, we do not. Change is hard. Turning over a new leaf, we often discover that the new leaves also brown and crumble like the old ones.

Perhaps your goals are loftier, spiritual, and heaven-ward. Maybe you seek to grow "closer" to God (whatever that means) through daily Bible reading, prayer, or devotion. You plan to finally put that pet sin to death and get rid of any trace of gossip, a short temper, drinking too much, or looking at porn. Out with the old, in with the new! 2021 is the year for a new *you*!

Yet the frustrating and disappointing discovery of the spiritual life is that we are fully incapable of making anything new or better out of ourselves. We are sinners, and the war against the flesh and the world is too much for us to win of our own accord. By ourselves, we are completely helpless and hopeless in the face of sin, death, and the devil. We cannot remake ourselves. The spiritual life is not a mere makeover in which we can simply wash our face or put on a mask. Our human nature is too corrupted by sin—too full of the “infection” of evil—to be simply redressed or presented in a better light. A pig with lipstick on is still a pig. No, Someone else must turn us into a new creature—a new creation.

C.S. Lewis gives us a wonderful picture of this in his splendid novel, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which is a spiritual allegory cast in the form of a travelogue similar to Homer’s *Odyssey*. In Lewis’s novel, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie (brother and sister), characters from the more famous book, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, find themselves pulled into the magical world of Narnia through a painting of a ship at sea. Their unfortunate and worthless cousin, Eustace, who gets tossed into the painting with them. Eustace is an obnoxious know-it-all and a nuisance who complains about everything.

Splashing about the ocean and foundering, the three children are rescued by none other than King Caspian, their friend and ally from an earlier visit (and book), and pulled aboard his ship, the *Dawn Treader*. They are on a rescue mission to find the seven missing lords of Narnia, and the further east they sail, stranger become the lands and islands they visit.

But the episode relevant to *our* purpose today takes place on a strange island where the shipmates anchor for rest after surviving a hurricane. Eustace, finding the company of his other companions intolerable, sets out on foot to explore the interior of the island. By stroke of luck (or fate), he witnesses the final puffs of a great dragon that crawls out of its cave and summarily

dies. Once assured that the miserable worm is indeed dead, Eustace himself creeps into the cave, where he delights in finding a huge treasure trove of gold and gems. He slips one large arm band onto his own arm and falls asleep on top of the hoard.

He is awakened by a sharp pain in his upper arm, where his flesh was swollen and become tight around the bracelet. Then he comes to the terrible realization that he has been turned into a dragon! “Sleeping on a dragon’s hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.”¹

Full of terror and disgust, Eustace the dragon flies back to his friends on the beach, who are very much afraid until they figure out that the dragon is Eustace under some kind of curse or enchantment. Unfortunately, he has become a dumb beast and can no longer speak except by nodding and shaking his head. Even worse, none of his mates know how to remove the enchantment, and he despairs that he may be given to this beastly form forever. And all the while, that arm band cut tightly into the shoulder of his left arm.

But everything changes one night when a strange, mysterious lion awakens Eustace in the middle of the night and urges him to follow. Eustace is afraid of the lion—not that it will *eat him* (it’s smaller than he)—but just the lion itself (113).

The lion leads him to the top of a high mountain where there is a well and pool of water glimmering in the moonlight. Eustace knows that if he could just “get in there and bathe it would ease the pain in [his] leg” (114). But the lion tells him he must “undress” before entering the pool.

Of course, Eustace the dragon doesn’t have on any clothes at all. By “undressing,” he understands the lion to mean that he must shed his skin like a molting snake. So he starts

¹ Lewis, *Dawn Treader*, 97.

scratching at his skin with his dragon claws, and the scales come flying off in every which way. Finally, the huge skin sloughs off and he steps out of it regarding the thing beside him “looking rather nasty” (114). Yet as soon as he moves toward the pool to descend the stairs, the lion again commands him to undress.

So Eustace repeats the whole process all over again, only to be told to undress a *third* time. Yet when he steps out of that third skin and sees his reflection in the pool, he realizes that it’s been “no good” (115). He is still a dragon. He cannot “undress” himself. He cannot remove the slimy scales of his dragon nature, try as he might. It’s “no good.”

“You will have to let me undress you,” the lion says. So the lion rips into him, sinking his claws in deep and shredding his skin. Eustace experiences the worst pain of his life, but at least he thrills to be rid of the nasty stuff. Then the lion takes hold of him and *throws* him into the pool, where he begins splashing and swimming around only to discover with delight that he has been turned back into a *boy* again! Eustace is a dragon no more! The lion has turned him into a new man. Then the lion draws him out of the water and puts *new* clothes on him. After undressing him, he redresses him.

Now those of you who have read Lewis’s novels know that the lion is the Great Lion Aslan, Son of the Emperor beyond the Sea, who is a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5), as he appears in that other world beyond the Wardrobe.

So notice what happens here: Eustace’s true nature is a nasty, selfish, sinful nature full of greed and spite for others. This inner self becomes evident on the outside because of the cursed treasure. Outwardly, he turns into a dragon, but inwardly, he has been a nasty beast all along. Tragically, he cannot change himself back into a boy. Only Aslan the Lion can do that. And in

order to become a new man, Eustace must first undergo an undressing and washing so terribly painful that they are like death. Beside the pool, his dragon nature is killed, yet out of the water emerges a new child. In other words, Eustace undergoes a kind of “baptism,” something he doesn’t do for himself but must have done *to* him.

While some religions teach that all people are basically good, the Bible says otherwise. Quoting Psalm 14, Paul writes in Romans: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:12, 23, ESV).² None of us does what is right. None of us is good. We are all bound by our terrible sin nature, our “Old Adam,” or, if you will, our dragon-nature.

And like Eustace, we cannot undress ourselves. We cannot turn ourselves from a dragon into a real girl or boy. We cannot get rid of our sin nature. We cannot save ourselves. Somebody *else* must do it. And the only way to get rid of it is to kill it.

That Someone is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross and rose again on the third day to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. St. Paul tells us that in Baptism we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

“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” (Rom. 6:3-4).

Just as Aslan tore away Eustace’s dragon flesh, so also Christ puts to death our Old Adam by dying on the cross in our stead. And when we are baptized, we are right there with Jesus—on the cross and in the tomb. Baptism is a spiritual death, an end to the Old Adam, our beastly

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.”

flesh, our dragon nature. Paul writes, “We know that our old self”—our Old Adam—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” (Rom. 5:7).

Then, just Eustace emerged as a boy from the water, so also when we come out of the waters of Baptism, we are brought back to life. In Baptism, we experience a spiritual rebirth—we are born again (John 3:3, 5). And because of this wonderful gift, God promises that even our *bodies* will rise again on the Last Day: “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” (Rom. 6:5). “So you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11). Baptism is a spiritual death and resurrection, a putting to death of our Old Adam, and a rising again to new life in Christ.

We cannot change ourselves, but God changes us in Baptism. We cannot kill our Old Adam, but Christ killed it on the cross. Like little children, we cannot undress or clothe ourselves, but in Holy Baptism, God clothes us with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, our Lord. In Baptism, we are joined to Jesus, and we become like Christ in his death and resurrection.

Baptism is something that should only be done to us *once* in our lives—“one Lord, one faith, one Baptism” (Eph. 4:5). Yet Baptism has ongoing *meaning and significance* for our lives. Martin Luther speaks of this in the Small Catechism:

“What does this baptizing with water indicate? It indicates 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” (SC, 4th Part of Baptism).

Each new day is a dawn of God’s grace, an opportunity to confess our sins and receive his forgiveness.

When Luther's conscience tormented him, he would throw it back in the devil's face and declare, "But I am *baptized!*"—shorthand for "I am saved. I am justified. I am rescued from sin because Jesus died on the cross. And now, through Baptism, I belong to Christ. So you cannot have me, devil! Sin, you cannot destroy me. Death, you have no sting!" And *that* is what Baptism is all about. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of  the Holy Spirit. Amen.