

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
The Baptism of Our Lord, Series C  
Saturday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Sermon: Our Baptism with Our Lord  
Texts: Romans 6:1-11

Focus: Through Baptism, we were buried with Christ and raised with Christ to new life.

Function: That they would rejoice in God's wonderful gift of life in Baptism.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: "This Baptism with water... indicates that the Old Adam in us should be daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sin and evil desire, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (SC, 4<sup>th</sup> Part of Baptism).

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

Amen. There is a tomb in this room, a kind of mass grave in which dozens of people have been killed. Do you know where it is? No, there aren't hidden Indian burial mounds beneath the floor. And as far as I know, there are no dead cowboys either. The tomb to which I refer is the Baptismal font. *[Point]*

In Baptism, we have died with Christ. And in Baptism, we have been raised to *new* life in Christ. That is what St. Paul writes in our epistle today:

"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, ESV).<sup>1</sup>

In Holy Baptism, God kills our old Adam, putting to death our sin nature, and raises us to new life as forgiven sinners full of the Holy Spirit. Through water and the Word, we are killed and

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

made alive by the blood of Jesus and the Spirit of God. Through Baptism, we are given faith to believe in Christ, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

After referring to the manner by which eight souls were saved from the flood by Noah's Ark, St. Peter writes: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21). "Baptism... now saves you..." Baptism saves! Through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, God saves his people by drowning them and raising them to new life.

*But how can this be?! That is the same question asked in Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*: "How can water do such great things?" (SC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Part of Baptism). When I first began attending a Lutheran congregation, I asked myself the same thing. Even though I was baptized as an infant in the Lutheran Church, by the time I was 6 years old, my family was worshiping at an Assembly of God (AG) congregation—a Pentecostal denomination. They advocated for a so-called "believer's Baptism" by full immersion after a supposed "age of accountability," at which time each individual Christian must choose for himself or herself whether or not to be baptized. This view is not exclusive to the Assembly of God. Most Baptists and non-denominational churches teach the same thing. And so I was brainwashed into believing that my Baptism as a baby was invalid.*

Throughout my childhood, I repeatedly appealed to my mother to allow me to be "re-baptized"—a silly notion in itself, when the Bible says there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). But my mother refused. She still had enough Lutheran theology about her that she wouldn't give me permission. So instead, one day after watching a bizarre scene in the

Robert Duvall movie, *The Apostle*, in which the main character, a mixed-up preacher rebaptizes *himself* in a river, I rebaptized myself while standing in Little Muskego Lake and ducking my head underwater three times “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Ever since then, I regret the act.

Why? Because I despised the wonderful miracle already done to me at my baptism as a baby. Baptism is not something we do for ourselves. And Baptism is not intended to be a public statement or show of faith, as it is treated in some denominations. I must admit that I often wonder why some Christians make such a big deal about how and when you get baptized if they don't believe Baptism actually *does* something. If it isn't a means of grace for them, why argue about sprinkling or dunking, or how old you are when you do it?

Baptism is a miracle done *to us*, not an action taken *by us*. Baptism is passive. God does the work through your pastor and parents—or whomever your baptismal sponsor may be. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in a letter to his great-nephew (also named Dietrich):

“You are being baptized today as a Christian. All those great and ancient words of the Christian proclamation will be pronounced over you, and the command of Jesus Christ to baptize will be carried out, without your understanding any of it.”<sup>2</sup>

Little Dietrich would be baptized without any understanding of what was happening to him and no choice whatsoever whether or not it should be done.

And that is *precisely* the point! For if we truly believe that we are saved (justified) by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then Christ *alone* must do all the saving! We can have no more part in choosing to believe or be baptized than we can in making ourselves rise

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<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Thoughts on the Day of Baptism of D.W.R.,” in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, vol. 8 in series *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. John W. Degruchy, trans. Isabel Best *et al* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 389.

from the dead on the Last Day. We can do nothing. Christ must do it *all*. Through Baptism, we are crucified with Christ. We are drowned, dead, and buried. And then we are brought to life again. We are a new creation.

Nor the method matter by which form the water is applied: sprinkling, pouring, dunking---all are acceptable. What matters is that you get *wet*! The Greek word *baptidzein* is used in the New Testament to refer not only to actual Baptisms, but also to the washing of dishes, hands, and even furniture (cf. Mark 7:4, NA27). You wouldn't dunk a whole couch into a river or water tank to clean it---i.e., *baptize* it! You would spray or sprinkle it or wipe it with a wet cloth.

Now it is true that immersion is a better *picture* for Baptism than sprinkling or pouring, for then it actually *looks* like the spiritual drowning that it brings about. But not every church throughout the world has ready access to lots of deep water. And some churches want to do their baptisms in the building instead of at a lake or swimming pool.

My Aunt Laurel used to be a pastor in the Church of God denomination before she became a Methodist and had a medical retirement. I remember visiting her tiny church in Coin, Iowa, and asking her where the “dunk tank” was.

“Dunk tank?” she asked with a raised eyebrow. “Don't you mean baptistry?”

“Yes, I'm sorry. Baptistry. I didn't know what to call it.”

“That's fine,” she laughed, “but when I come to visit *your* church, will you show me where the *bird bath* is?” Of course, she was referring to the baptismal font. Fair enough! But as I said already, the amount or application of the water doesn't matter. What matters is that you get *baptized* to receive the wonderful gifts God wants to give you.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter told the crowd in Jerusalem: “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. For 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). Here St. Peter clearly connects the forgiveness of sins and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with the waters of Holy Baptism. And he assures them that this promise is “for you *and for your children.*” Baptism isn’t just for adults. Baptism is for everybody.

We are all sinners who need forgiveness. And in Baptism, God forgives our sins through the washing of water and the Word. We need forgiveness. Baptism delivers God’s forgiveness. Why shouldn’t you be baptized? Why shouldn’t your *children* be baptized too? Are they not sinners in need of Christ’s salvation? If you or your children are not yet baptized, then please speak to me after the service today. Let’s talk about it and “get her done.”

Or “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 in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:3-5).

God is waiting to kill you—to *drown* you—and to make you alive. Will you answer his call? In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.