



INTO HIS DEATH & RESURRECTION

Lenten Devotions on Holy Baptism

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Into His Death and Resurrection: Lenten Devotions on Holy Baptism

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To the glory of our Triune God
and for the Evangelical Lutheran Church
wherever she is found.

Introduction

This volume stands in the tradition of using the season of Lent to go through the Small Catechism of Dr. Luther. We have learned of the Ten Commandments, which show us our sin – what we owe God and our neighbor and how we do not do what we should do. We have learned of our Triune God, and the work that He has done for us in creating, redeeming, and sanctifying us by learning the Creed. We have learned what it is to be a Christian people (made so by God’s work) and to heed the command and promise of our heavenly Father in prayer – calling upon Him as dear children call upon their dear Father in the Lord’s Prayer.

This year we get into how our God works among us. How are we made Christians? How is it that we, so removed from the time and place of our Lord’s atoning death, can receive the benefits of His completed work? The first answer that we have from God’s Word, often our first reception of our Lord’s gifts, is Holy Baptism.

The Small Catechism does a great job in teaching us what the Word of God teaches. What is baptism? What benefits does it give? How can water do that? What does this really mean for my life? These questions are taken up in proper order and the answers are given with the clear Word of our Lord behind them. Where is this written? Which are these words and promises of God? No doctrine can come out of thin air, but must come from the Word of God. No lasting comfort can be found except in the Words of eternal life, the Word of our Lord. The Catechism teaches this by example for us.

This year, gather the household around the Word and these short devotions. Add more in if you like as your family is able. Learn to treasure the gift of God that we have in Baptism.

The format of these devotions is the same as we have been using. Each week covers a part of the Catechism on baptism. The fifth week covers the topic of Infant Baptism, keeping with the emphasis we find in the Large Catechism. There is one additional thing this year, each Saturday is set aside for taking on a topic that may come up in speaking with other Christians about Baptism. These are meant to be both a building up of your faith, so that you may give a defense. They may also serve as a warning and caution about false teachings. Lastly, they may also be helpful in offering correction to the erring that are all around us in the landscape of American Christianity. May God sustain you in the truth and use you to lead others out of error.

You are baptized. This is a great comfort. Read along this Lent to see just how blessed you are.

Rev. Joshua V. Scheer
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Nicodemus and Baptism (John 3)

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

Lent is a penitential season, and so the Word of our God will particularly be strong in its application of the Law to us as sinners, and it will likewise seek to be sweet in its proclamation of Christ as our Savior who rescues us from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. Here in the Gospel lesson appointed for Ash Wednesday we are confronted with much of false piety – that is, putting on a religious show of things while having no inward piety. Hypocrisy is another word for this show among men that cannot be successful before God.

Where your treasure is. What is it that you treasure in life? That’s is where your devotion, your piety will go. If you treasure that which is earthly, your devotion will simply be earthly. You can do a quick check of how you spend your free time, of what things you follow and read up on, and what you spend your money or resources on. Is your heart on these things?

This Lenten devotion is meant to lay out for you a treasure that is simply put, not of this earth. Nicodemus could not understand what baptism was because he could not grasp such a heavenly blessing at first. Baptism is done on this earth, in time, but it is a spiritual, eternal blessing for you. Baptism is a treasure that cannot be destroyed by moth, rust, thieves, persecutors, mockers, or any other earthly thing. It can be disregarded by unbelief however, and from that can come condemnation. Protect us from this dear Father in heaven!

You are baptized (if you aren’t go talk to a Lutheran pastor). That is more valuable than anything else in your life. There is no amount of wealth, pleasure, influence, bodily health, governmental favor, or any other thing of this life that can compare to it. God grant that you treasure it, that your hearts may be found in such a treasure, trusting in God’s promises in baptism this Lent.

Almighty God, grant us to observe this Lent with repentance and faith, treasuring the things that You give, most especially Holy Baptism. Amen.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”” (Romans 1:16–17)

Christ Jesus has been sacrificed once and for all in the teaching of the Scriptures. His work of our salvation is done, or as He declared from the cross before giving up His Spirit – finished. The work being done, how is it that such work makes its way across place and time to reach us today.

This text from St. Paul teaches us that the Gospel has power in it to save. The Gospel, that is, the good news of the finished work of Jesus Christ to gain forgiveness, life, and salvation for us has power in it. It delivers to us in time what Jesus earned for us long ago. Romans 10 exalts the preaching of the Word, especially the Gospel - because it is used by the Holy Spirit to create faith, and faith in Christ alone saves sinners. This Gospel from the Word of God is what is the power undergirding and effecting the Sacraments of our God as well. For it something in Scripture is declared to give faith in Christ, to bestow forgiveness, to save – it is necessarily founded upon the power of the Word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lutherans have often called the Sacraments the visible Word. The Word delivers what Christ earned. It creates the faith to trust the promises of God and receive the blessings that God gives where He has promised to give them. That brings us to Holy Baptism. This whole Lent we will be hearing from the Word about the blessings of Holy Baptism, about how our Lord delivers what He earned for us through this water and the Word. It is no different with absolution and also with the Lord’s Supper – as these too have the Word and the promises of the Gospel attached to them. The God who saved us in the past brings that salvation to us in the present through these means and we can thank God for it.

There is no shortage of distractions from this simple teaching of God. The problem is that many grow from distraction to deception, leading us to forsake the things like baptism to trust in decisions, emotions, or even our own works. Instead, return to baptism – where God gave you new birth and salvation.

Heavenly Father, keep us steadfast in Your Word. Help us to see the glorious blessing of having Jesus’ finished work delivered to us here and now, that we may be Your own. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Colossians 2:11-15

“having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:12–14)

You are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is the whole theme of this Lenten Devotion. This passage from St. Paul clearly teaches this. First, the death of Jesus. Paul reminds us that all our trespasses are forgiven by the cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This is the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. His blood is shed to set aside the legal demands of the Law for us – because He Himself took upon those legal demands and the punishment for our transgression of them. This He set aside – nailing it to the cross. The death of Jesus Christ our Lord accomplishes our salvation. The punishment due for us is fully poured out upon Him. He is our substitute and by His death He fully takes on the wrath of God.

You are baptized into Christ’s death. You are buried with Him. You died with Him. Your sins are gone because Jesus died for you and by baptism you are connected to Him. Faith believes this promise and receives the benefit of Christ’s work according to His promises.

The resurrection of Jesus is also here. You are baptized into that as well. You are raised with Him by faith in the powerful working of God. Trusting God’s work in the death and resurrection of Jesus is what we do as baptized Christians. There is comfort from this and confidence as well. It doesn’t depend on our work but God’s. As you are in Christ’s saving death, you are also in His new resurrected life. He is called the first fruits of the dead – He rose first. We see that in our lives as we live new lives now as the Spirit makes us able. We will see that fully on the Last Day at the Resurrection of the dead, where in our risen flesh we shall see God.

Baptism puts you into Christ’s death. It puts you into Christ’s resurrection. You are in Him. Where He is you shall be. Baptism promises that and does it.

Almighty God, by Christ’s death you have saved us from our sins. By His resurrection you have given us new life both now and forever. Help to live as Your baptized people. Amen.

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts 2:38)

You were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, according to the express words of our Lord Jesus to His apostles, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). But throughout the book of Acts, which records the first Christian baptisms carried out by these same apostles, Christians are baptized “in the name of Jesus.” Some have been puzzled by this. Others have thought they’ve found here a contradiction. Did they baptize in the name of Jesus? Or in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? Yes. It’s the same name. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, they have one name, because they are one God. Jesus does not say to baptize in the “names” of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in their “name.” And the Christians in Acts are baptized in this same name, which is the name of Jesus. In short, Jesus is Lord. That’s His name (as it is the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit). This is the Christian message, as the sainted Dr. Luther reminds us in the Large Catechism: Jesus is Lord. He is God and man, who by His blood has won me from sin and death and hell, has saved me from the tyranny of the devil, and has asserted Himself as Lord and God in His resurrection. This is why St. Paul will say, “...that at the **name** of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is **Lord**” (Phil. 2:10-11). The Christians in the book of Acts were baptized in the **name** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, just as we were. It’s no contradiction, but a beautiful confession of who Jesus is, that this can be expressed so simply with the words, “baptized in the name of Jesus.”

Lord Jesus, keep us faithful to the name given us in our Baptism. Amen.



Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4)

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Matthew 4:1)

Baptism cannot just be plain water. Look at what happens immediately after the Lord Jesus’ baptism. Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit. Here, the Son of God condescends for our salvation. He doesn’t need to be led. But He submits Himself to the Spirit’s guidance. He is led by the Spirit for our sake, so that Paul might say: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). Jesus was led so that we who are led by the Spirit might be sons of God. To become a son of God is a great miracle. That’s why baptism cannot just be plain water.

Baptism cannot just be plain water. After His baptism, Jesus is tempted by the devil. The devil hates Jesus and wants to destroy Him. The devil hates all those who are in Jesus and wants to destroy them too. A servant is not above his Master. The devil, like a roaring lion, seeks to devour us.

So, what does this have to do with baptism? Why would the devil hate baptism so much? Baptism is water included in God’s command and combined with God’s Word. Baptism clothes you with Christ. Baptism is God’s Word, which is the only thing which can silence the devil and put him to flight. If the devil hates baptism, then you can be sure that it is not a mere bath.

Baptism cannot just be plain water. If you were to pile up all of earth’s treasures on one side and put baptism on the other side, baptism would be worth more than all of it combined. Baptism is worth more than heaven and earth because God commanded it and attached His Word to it. Thanks be to God, for His great gift of Holy Baptism!

Lord Jesus, You suffered the temptations of the devil after Your baptism. We too are daily attacked by the devil, who hates us and our baptism. Grant us the strength to remember and trust our baptism, which include Your precious Word and command, and thus put the devil to flight. Amen.

The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

The office of the Holy Spirit is to give life. In the beginning, the heavens and the earth were formless and void. There was no life, no order. Over these lifeless and formless waters, the Holy Spirit brooded. The Holy Spirit brooded like a hen. As a hen sits upon her eggs that she may hatch her young, so the Scriptures say the Holy Spirit brooded as it were on the waters. The Holy Spirit brooded so that He might infuse life into these elementary substances.

The office of the Holy Spirit is to give life. He not only brooded over the waters at the dawn of creation, but the Holy Spirit was involved in giving life to the animals and especially to man. Psalm 104, the basis of Luther's meal prayer, says: "These [living creatures] all wait for You . . . You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:27, 30). The Holy Spirit gives us life at conception, maintains that life by means of food, drink, house, home, government, good weather, and the like.

The office of the Holy Spirit is still to give life. The Holy Spirit doesn't just give earthly life. No, in the waters of Holy Baptism, a much greater miracle than creation occurs. In the beginning, the Holy Spirit brooded over a formless, churning, and watery void. But in Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit broods over a twisted and corrupted sinner who is by nature a child of wrath and an enemy of God. And yet, the Holy Spirit lovingly gathers this churning, hateful mess of a man under His wings like a hen. And through the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit infuses a new spiritual life into this corrupted creature and makes him new.

The Holy Spirit gives life. In the beginning, He gave form to the water. Now, the Holy Spirit uses water as His way of killing a sinner and creating a saint.

Father, help us to remember the Holy Spirit's brooding over us in baptism. Amen.

Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. (Matthew 3:5-6)

The Law and the prophets prophesied until John the Baptist. And then, everything changed. God sent a new prophet with a new preaching and a new rite. John's powerful preaching of repentance and faith in the coming Christ was the death knell of all the things that are past and the morning cry of the New Testament.

John's baptism was also novel. A baptism for repentance and the forgiveness of sins was new. Sure, there were various baptisms under Moses. There were washings or baptisms of priests. They had a bronze laver, where they were to wash their hands and feet, lest they die (Ex. 30:18-21). There were baptisms or washings of things and flesh. Lepers, for example, were to wash their clothes and their flesh with water when they were being ritually purified.

But these baptisms, these washings, only dealt with the outward things. These washings could never make the conscience perfect. These washings didn't take away sin. These washings were incomplete.

But John's baptism did forgive sin. John's baptism did cleanse the conscience of every dead work. John's baptism dealt with the heart of the matter: repentance. Repentance is two parts. The first part of repentance is terror and sadness over our sins. The second part of repentance is faith in the Christ, Whose blood cleanses our conscience.

John's baptism used water, just like our baptism. But baptism isn't merely a bath, like some believe. It isn't merely a washing which cleanses the body. No, both baptisms are from heaven. Both baptisms deal with the inner man, the conscience. Both baptisms forgive sins. When God's Word is combined with water, God gets to the heart of the matter: He gets to our hearts and makes them new.

Heavenly Father, You sent John with a new message and a novel rite, which we know as the baptism of John. Through this, You cleansed the hearts of Your people, making them a prepared people for the coming of Your Son. Have mercy upon us, O Father in heaven! Awaken in all the baptized true repentance, so that they might escape the wrath which is to come. Amen.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Matthew 28 is where our Lord institutes Holy Baptism. Today, we will take a closer look at these wonderful verses.

Our English texts say, “Go.” But Jesus does not give us a command there. In Greek, the word is a participle. It should be translated as, “Having gone.”

No, the one command that Jesus gives is “make disciples.” This is what the church does. The church loves her Lord and wants others to love Him too. The church, like her Lord, desires all people to be saved. This command to make disciples or learners is not just for the Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham. No, this promise is for all of the nations. The kingdom of heaven is open to all people.

How does the church make disciples? Jesus uses two participles. We will speak of only one of these participles today. The church makes disciples by “baptizing.” Disciples are made by baptizing them. To baptize means to wash. When all people, especially babies, are washed with water and the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” are spoken, they are baptized.

Baptism is our Lord’s command. This is how we make disciples. Our Lord commanded baptism. That means that baptism isn’t something optional or inconsequential. Baptism is necessary.

Baptism is necessary because Christ commands it. But baptism is also necessary in what it does for us. No one can be a disciple or learner of Christ without the Holy Spirit. The things of God are foolishness to the natural man. Baptism is necessary because it makes us a learner of God. In baptism, God teaches us. In baptism, God gives us ears to hear and hearts to believe. Thanks be to God, for the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s Word!

Lord Jesus, You commanded baptism for our good. Give us lips to proclaim the excellencies of Your baptism, so that all nations might be made into Your disciples. Amen.

Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. (2 Kings 5:12)

Naaman was angry. He expected a magic show. What he got was not impressive in the slightest. The prophet did not even come out of the house. The prophet sent a lackey in his place. And this lackey told Naaman, the commander of legions and hero of Syria, to go and wash seven times in the dirty Jordan river. How can that dirty Jordan water do anything?

Naaman was furious because he looked only at the water. Today, the world only looks at the water. The eye only sees the water and it is not very impressive. How can tap water do this? Shouldn't we at least jazz it up with rose water? Shouldn't we send away for actual Jordan river water, since it was where Jesus was baptized?

Our baptisms are not very impressive if we look only at the water. God's command through Elisha and God's command in Matthew 28 are amazingly simple. They are not showy or flashy. A little water, a spoken word, and that's that. There's no magic spell; no complicated ritual. In an emergency, anybody can baptize with water.

Nevertheless, baptism is God's command. And God's command includes water. If God had commanded us to go on a pilgrimage to be saved, we would do it. If God had commanded us to crawl on broken glass to have our sins washed away, we would do it. God could have commanded something great and showy. But He didn't. The command is simple and straightforward. A little water and the words of baptism's institution, and a man is washed and made clean.

Don't only look at the water. Listen. Listen to God's command. God's command might seem silly, it might seem stupid, but remember this. If God commanded something great, you'd do it. And now, Christ commands something very simple for all the nations. Thanks be to God for this simple command, that we might be washed and be clean!

Heavenly Father, You commanded Naaman to wash and be cleansed. Enlighten our minds and guide our speech so that others might also recognize the simple command of baptism, which makes us clean. Amen.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

The inspired writer urges us, as true priests of the New Testament, to approach to the Lord with the confidence of faith. With a true heart we should come, not with a two-faced piety. In full assurance of faith we should draw near. This faith is not a matter of feelings, but it is a matter of objective certainty. Our faith is a firm reliance and trust.

What is our full assurance in? Our full assurance is in Holy Baptism. Holy Baptism was the event where our bodies were washed with clean water. Holy Baptism was when our consciences, by the power of God's command and promise, was sprinkled and washed and cleansed.

Holy Baptism is not subjective. Holy Baptism is objective. It happened to you. There were witnesses. There is a date and a baptismal certificate you can point to. Your family may even celebrate your baptismal birthday; the day you were baptized into Christ. Baptism isn't a feeling or something inside of you. Real water was poured onto your head. The words of God were spoken by a real preacher.

And baptism wasn't a one-time shot. Even when you bear an evil conscience, Christ promises that your evil conscience might be sprinkled once again when you return to your baptism. Even though you were baptized only once, baptism's effect continues. You are baptized. You have access to the benefits of baptism each and every day. This is why you can have full assurance.

Baptism makes us priests of God. Baptism prepares us for priestly work by purifying and cleansing us. Thus prepared, we are privileged at all times to approach the throne of grace. Christ Himself has purified us by His blood through Holy Baptism. Our evil consciences are sprinkled clean; our bodies are washed with pure water. Thanks be to God!

Heavenly Father, thank You for sprinkling our evil consciences clean and for washing our bodies with pure water in Holy Baptism. Help us to remember our baptism, that we might have full assurance of faith. Amen.

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”
(Mark 16:16)

There is a strange but popular notion, especially among American religionists, that if Jesus saves then baptism can't save. A group calling themselves “pre-denominational” is handing out fliers asserting that church can't save you and baptism can't save you because “they didn't die for you.” Instead, we are urged to call on the name of Jesus, say a sinner's prayer, give Jesus our heart, etc. and be saved. The irony here is that what these misguided enthusiasts are trying to do is noble and good. They are trying to secure the beautiful truth that Jesus alone saves. Nothing and no one else. He alone died for us. He alone is God in the flesh who shed His precious blood for us. And as we confess in the Christian Questions and Answers of our Small Catechism, no creature could make satisfaction for our sins but this God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. Or as St. Peter says, “Salvation is found in no one else” (Acts 4:12). Amen! But then they unthinkingly replace Jesus' works with our works. “Baptism can't save, your choice for Jesus saves.” No. My choice for Jesus happens after Jesus chooses me. And Jesus chooses me in my Baptism. He Himself says so. He says whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. He says through His apostle, “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6). Or as we sing in that beautiful Christmas hymn, “Come from on high to me; I cannot rise to Thee!” (LSB 386.2) If Baptism were my work, it would be worthless to save me. But it's Jesus' work. It's how He has decided to come to me from on high. It's how He has told me He will save me and wash me clean. So before I can sing, “Jesus is my choice,” (LSB 743.4), I need to hear the words of Jesus, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). And in Baptism, in Jesus putting the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on me, I know He has chosen me.

God's own child, I gladly say it. I am baptized into Christ. Amen.



The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15)

Second Sunday in Lent

Matthew 15:21-28

She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:27-28)

It's true, we face the devil every day. Our flesh and the world are not the only soldiers of evil but Satan himself would rear his ugly mug with all the hideousness of his demonic strength. The devil comes for Christians and non-Christians alike. We are tempted daily that our faith would waver, and we would give up our faith and the Gospel entirely. The devil does this by destroying your Christian family, threatening to take your jobs or earthly comforts away because of your confession, and many other forms of terrors.

Christ does not hold out on you. He did not hold out on this poor woman. Your Jesus has given you the very words to pray in these times: "but deliver us from evil." And He does. Not because of any worthiness of you, but of His own divine love and mercy. As dogs we beg, but we are lifted from our groveling on the floor like children, lifted to see Jesus face to face. Christ does not give to the dogs His blessings, He gives them to you. Many are His gifts.

Each day our cry is new: "have mercy, Lord." Your Christ knows your fight and the weight of the cross. He also knows that you need to be reminded of the cross daily, even as you cross yourselves! Jesus answers your cry of mercy.

Merciful Father in heaven, hear our prayers for the sake of Your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord who has taught us to pray that You would deliver us from evil. Grant that we would live our lives in peace from every harassment of the devil and that when our final hour comes we may enter into Your heavenly kingdom free from all tears and sadness. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth" (Genesis 9:17)

God's wrath was literally poured out against man's sin. Every broken commandment. Every forgotten Word of God. Every heresy and impious teaching of megalomaniac sinners that ran rampant on the earth. The Christian should never forget God's wrath over sin. His hatred and utter disgust towards sin should be a constant reminder of our cry for mercy: "God, be merciful to me a sinner." When the floodgates were opened, God swept globe away of evil, hate, and godlessness.

As you will see tomorrow, your baptism means something quite more. But let this alone be comfort for you. That in this very simple act of baptism your old sinful self was drowned and killed. Baptism is for Christians, not for the salvation of the flesh that is set against God. In your baptism, that man is killed. Even with the simple pouring of water over your head by the pastor, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the old is destroyed.

But what comes out—Christ. You are clothed in Christ. In Christ, God has made a covenant with you that not only have your sins been destroyed, but that you will not be. In Christ, you will live. Washed clean. Made new. Baptized by a saving flood. You may talk of a covenantal promise, but mentioning the promise means nothing if it is not made in Christ. This water is not just plain water, it's God's water—it has His command and Christ's work of salvation for you.

Almighty and ever living God, You have stirred up Your wrath against hell, Satan, and our sinful flesh. You have destroyed with water and make alive with water. Hear our contrite hearts and be merciful to us that, by Your Holy Spirit, we may be ever confident in the gifts that baptism bestows: a life that is lived in the promise of Christ; Your only Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

“This water [of Noah’s flood] symbolizes baptism that now saves you also... It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21)

Monday and Tuesday devotions are united. Yesterday, the Old Adam was told that he was dead. Today, you—the baptized Christian—are told of what Christ has done for you. Just before Peter brings up your baptism in these short verses, he hinges it all on the sacrifice of Jesus who suffered once for sins, He is the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit... (1 Pe. 3:18).

In this case, the reference to Noah’s flood is not meant as a homiletical scare tactic. This is not focused on the destructive power of the Flood, but on the saving of a total of eight people in a divinely engineered vessel of salvation. Yes, the water destroyed, it was judgement against unbelief. But God also provides the means of salvation.

A wise pastor had once said that these waters provided the means of recreation and are the foundation for the waters of baptism. Baptism now saves you because you are made entirely new. God has acted graciously to you as He did Noah. No longer are the depths of the flood a sign of eternal damnation. They are the covenant of God’s immense passion for saving sinners.

But again, remembering your baptism is nothing more than looking into the reflecting pool and seeing Jesus in the water. There is no reflection of fallen man’s narcissism. Only Jesus. Just as Peter preached, baptism now saves you by the resurrection of Christ. That is what you see in the waters. That is what you put your faith in. That when your final hour comes, and you sing “I am baptized into Christ,” your confession is Christ’s resurrection. His resurrection is your resurrection.

By your grace, O Lord, You saved believing Noah and eight souls in all, You called together Your saints into this ark, the Church, and redeemed it by the flood of Your Son’s blood. Grant, that by Your Holy Spirit, our hearts may be stirred into fervent faith in the waters of the resurrection. Amen.

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"
(Mark 16:15-16)

Why should you care about baptism? You *should be asking*: "what benefits does Baptism give?" It 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. In other words, let me say it this way: any of us who have sinned or will sin again, you need your baptism, if any of you will die, you need your baptism, if the devil is real—and he is—then you need your baptism, if any of you want to be saved according to the Word of God, then you need your baptism.

But Satan does not want you to care about any of that. He would rather you forget your baptism all together! He knows that Christians depend on the promises of God for salvation. He knows the power that is in baptism. So, he spares no expense to tempt you otherwise!

So, why should you care? Because your life—literally—depends on it. Rise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins (Acts 2). For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3). He has delivered you from the domain of darkness and planted you in the kingdom of Christ (Col 1). He saved you by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3). Your life depends on your Baptism, because your Baptism depends on Jesus. And if your life depends on Jesus then you must receive the gifts that He gives! And if you receive the gifts that He gives? Then what else do you need?

Merciful Lord, You have granted many benefits in baptism according to Your divine will and Word. Preserve us from all the wild assailments of the Evil One, that our baptism may douse the fears of the flames of hell, cleanse us from all corruption, and that the truth of Your saving Gospel may spring forth into our hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Sin is incompatible with the Christian life. Paul reminds us that the sins of the Old Adam are set apart from the Christian. The point of enumerating the sins of the sexually immoral, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, greed, drunkenness, or many other gross transgressions is to drive home the fact that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. These are incredibly personal sins and not always worn on the outside. None the less, the Law comes as a scalpel and will cut away the flesh, split tendons and ligaments, break bones and dissect organs, to find every cancerous cell of sin.

Baptism is neither like cosmetic nor transplant surgery. There is nothing about baptism that preserves the old body along to prolong the old man's life. That life is done for. It's over. The time has been called. Baptism is something different. Baptism is rebirth, it is making new, it is giving you a new man in Christ. Christ is the true medicine of immortality and He has given it to you abundantly. Baptism has washed you in this newness of life and set you apart, sanctified you in Christ's holiness.

But where Jesus has atoned and set you apart, the devil comes with even more enticing and terrible vices. The temptations that swarm us are far more deadly than novel viruses that no vaccine will cure. But that is why we must return to Baptism because in Baptism we find Christ, and if we find Christ, then we find His blood, and if we find His blood, then you find also life flowing from His cross, and if you find His cross, then you find the font of sanctification.

O Lord, by Your mercy may sin disturb us no longer and comfort us eternally by your Son's cleansing sacrifice. Guard us by the continual font flowing of Your baptismal grace from the accusation of the devil and drown out the demons that entice us to sin. May we, Your servants, live a secure and peaceful life in the confirmation of our baptism. Amen.

Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38)

The benefit of baptism is summed up here well in this little Gospel that everyone can understand it. The baptism of Jesus is to the baptism of death. This death is the foundation, font, bowl, and shell of baptism. For all those who are baptized, they are baptized into His death so that they may rise again in life like His. The benefits of baptism are the benefits of Jesus' baptism: that is, a life-giving water, combined with the Gospel proclamation of your sins being forgiven and sanctified in an instant by Jesus. Just as the death and resurrection of Jesus is a historical event, so is your baptism a historical event.

That is the point of singing "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say it." That the moment of your baptism is never a time that is outlived or forgotten in the pages of the Christian's book of life. Singing this hymn means that faith has baptism into Jesus to live daily. When you sing this hymn, it is not a statement of pious arrogance so that you may mock the devil by your own reason or power. But to sing this hymn with faith that Christ's baptism is for you, that He underwent a baptism of your death, for your sins and your resurrection, that this faithful confession of the Christ and His victory over Satan — and that mocks the devil.

Baptism cannot be separated from Christ. Christ cannot be separated from the historical moment of the cross. You cannot be separated from Christ and your baptism, so neither are you separated from salvation. So, sing loudly.

May God be praised.

O God, in baptism You have freed us from hell and the devil and You joined us with Christ in salvation. Grant to us Your Spirit's gift of confidence and joy in our baptism that it may well up in us a pool of comfort during our lives of spiritual frailty. Guard and keep us in this one true faith that, when Your son returns, He may find His bride adorned and cleaned. Amen.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”
(Ephesians 4:4-6)

There is one Baptism. There must be. There is one Spirit, one Lord Jesus, one faith that believes on Him, one God and Father of all. And we are the one body of Christ, born from above by one Baptism. This is holy, divine logic, reasoned out by the Spirit through St. Paul. Many will say, “I was baptized twice, once as a baby, and then again when I was older and joined such and such Baptist Church.” But no, there is only one Baptism. There is no such thing as a second baptism. Otherwise, these words of St. Paul are wrong, and we have put human logic above God’s logic. What the Baptists and other anti-infant Baptism sects, whom we used to call “Anabaptists” or “Rebaptizers,” are really saying is that the first baptism was no baptism at all. They reject infant baptism. And when you scratch the surface of why they do so, it gets scary. Why not baptize infants? Because, they say, they can’t believe. What? But Jesus says, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble...” (Matt. 18:6). Jesus is the one who tells us to trust in Him like children. And what is more, if children can’t believe, then how are they saved? Are we not saved by faith? Not according to the Baptists. Children before the “age of accountability” are not saved by faith, they say, because they can’t believe. Instead, God doesn’t hold them accountable for their sins, because they don’t know what they’re doing. Uffda! This is what rejecting infant Baptism entails! Rejecting the clear words of Jesus and saying that some people are saved outside of faith! No! Babies are sinners (Psalm 51:5), babies are given faith by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:44), babies are saved just as adults are. They need Jesus and this one Lord graciously comes to you, whether you are a baby or an adult, through one Baptism, where He makes His one Father yours, and you a member of His one body, and an heir of everlasting life.

Dear Jesus, make us believe as little children and let nothing make us stumble from our Baptism. Amen.



Exorcism of the Mute Demon (Luke 11)

Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 11:14-28

As [Jesus] (he) said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:27-28)

Jesus had just cast out a demon that was mute. The mute man spoke. Instead of praises to the Lord, some of the people falsely accused Jesus of casting out demons by the prince of demons, just like they had similarly accused John the Baptist (Luke 7:33). The kingdom of God was present in their midst, and blasphemy was the response of some instead of hearing God's word and keeping it in word and deed. Others attempted to test him, demanding a miracle from heaven. It is as if they were saying, "Jesus, prove to us who you say you are." Even at the end of this Gospel lesson for the Third Sunday in Lent, a woman misdirects her praise, misunderstanding the purpose behind Jesus' miracles, that people would heed and trust His teaching as the Word of the Lord.

Dr. Luther helps us answer a very important question this week: How can water do such great things?

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit...

Luther's 1526 baptismal rite includes a version of this line: "Therefore, depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit..." Amen!

Our Lord Jesus will never deceive you. He will always keep His promises to you. The Word of the Lord endures forever! "Blessed...are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Lord, Your mercy will not leave me; Ever will Your truth abide. Then in You I will confide. Since Your Word cannot deceive me, My salvation is to me safe and sure eternally. Amen. (LSB 559: 4)

And as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water...the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away...And the people passed over opposite Jericho. (Joshua 3:15-16)

All the people of Israel passed over the Jordan river. All the nation did. They all passed through the waters of the Jordan as on dry land because the Lord had commanded the waters to be cut off from flowing and that the waters coming down from upstream would stand in a heap. The Lord saved His people! What a picture this is!

The Lord's promises to us of salvation are for all people. It is as Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28:19-20)

It is as St. Peter proclaims in the second chapter of Acts: "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."

Our God is gracious and merciful as a faithful Father to deliver salvation to His people. It is as Dr. Luther reminds us: "For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace..."

All nations. For you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself. We enter into the Lord's land of promise, heaven, through the waters of Holy Baptism. Thanks be to God!

Oh, how great is Your compassion, Faithful Father, God of grace, That with all our fallen race In our depth of degradation You had mercy so that we Might be saved eternally! Amen. (LSB 559:1)

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy... (Titus 3:5-8a)

Who does the saving? God our Savior! He does the whole job, 100%. Why is there confusion in so-called Evangelical Christianity about who does the action in Holy Baptism? Titus 3:5 is exceptionally clear. He saved us. And God our Savior (His title in verse 4) saved us NOT because of works done by us in righteousness. Holy Baptism is not the work of the Christian, nor the work of the baptizing pastor. It is clearly and without doubt the work of Jesus Christ our Savior.

This work we sing about God's saving work: [The Gospel] (It) is the pow'r of God to save From sin and Satan and the grave; It works the faith which firmly clings To all the treasures which it brings. (LSB 580:4)

Titus 3 is a baptism text even though it does not use the typical New Testament word that gives us the word "baptism" in English. Holy Baptism regenerates. It renews. The Lord, in Holy Baptism, richly pours out the Holy Spirit upon us. We are justified by His grace.

The Gospel shows the Father's grace, Who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died That we might thus be justified. (LSB 580:1) We are His heirs. We have the hope of eternal life. Do not listen to those who deny what Holy Baptism is and the Gospel gifts it gives you. Hold to this trustworthy text, Titus 3!

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Lent 3)

Jesus answered [Nicodemus] (him), "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

Just about everybody loves Jesus. Eighty percent of Americans claim to be Christian. Of those nominal Christians, nearly half call themselves "born again." But what does that mean?

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Nicodemus was a Jewish ruler, part of the Sanhedrin that would later put Jesus on trial. He can make no sense of being "born again".

Many readers of John Chapter 1 know what Nicodemus hasn't figured out yet by faith: But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

God the Holy Spirit delivers the gift of the Holy Spirit, faith, and the forgiveness of sins in Holy Baptism. Being "born again" is being a baptized child of God.

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank You for the gift of faith which trusts Your Word in the water of Holy Baptism. Amen.

[Jesus said to them:] "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14)

The children Jesus embraces here include the very youngest. Theirs is the kingdom of God. Christ wants infants to be saved and gives them faith. Holy Baptism is Jesus' means for all to be saved apart from works, apart from reason, apart from decision, solely by grace and God's gift.

Infants need what baptism gives because they, too, are conceived and born in sins. No one is born innocent.

Jesus blesses the little children brought to Him. According to Colossians 2, Holy Baptism is the successor to Old Testament circumcision. If circumcision was administered to an eight-day old boy, this circumcision of Christ "made without hands" can and should be administered to infant boys and girls. Indeed, the apostles baptized entire households, not once but twice in Acts 16. Those households almost certainly included infants.

We baptize people of all ages who need what Holy Baptism gives: the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation for all who believe. We baptize people of all ages, not because Luther said so, but because Matthew 28, Mark 16, Acts 2, Romans 6, Titus 3, and 1 Peter 3 say so.

Article IX of the Lutheran Apology to the Augsburg Confession says in part: ... we confess that "Baptism is necessary for salvation," that "children are to be baptized," and that the "Baptism of children is not in vain, but is necessary and effective for salvation." Since the Gospel is taught among us purely and diligently, by God's favor we receive also this fruit from it: In our churches no Anabaptists have arisen. This is because the people have been strengthened by God's Word against the wicked and rebellious faction of these robbers. This is also among the distinct errors of the Anabaptists we condemn. They argue that the Baptism of little children is useless. For it is very certain that the promise of salvation also applies to little children. It does not, however, apply to those who are outside of Christ's Church, where there is neither Word nor Sacraments. Christ's kingdom exists only with the Word and Sacraments"

Thank you, Triune God, for graciously preserving and enlarging Your family in Holy Baptism. Amen.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

One of the groups in Church History that has withheld Holy Baptism from infants is the Anabaptists. The word means, “one who baptizes again.” As a Lutheran Christian that confesses “And I believe in Baptism for the remission of sins” in the Nicene Creed because of Ephesians 4, baptizing someone more than once makes no sense. You don’t need a second baptism, God uses the water and the Word to bless you no matter what age you are in the first and true baptism, the one baptism taught in Holy Scripture. If you were misled into a second “baptism”, repent of trusting the false teaching and embrace once again the good gift of God. Your true baptism brings the forgiveness of sins.

Yesterday, we read the first half of Article IX of the Lutheran Apology to the Augsburg Confession. In the second half, the Lutherans share a very unique argument in favor of infant baptism: God approves of it and gives the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized.

“...It is necessary to baptize little children, that the promise of salvation may be applied to them, according to Christ’s command to baptize all nations (Matthew 28:19). Just as in this passage salvation is offered to all, so Baptism is offered to all, to men, women, children, infants. It clearly follows, therefore, that infants are to be baptized, because salvation is offered with Baptism. Second, it is clear that God approves of the Baptism of little children. Therefore, the Anabaptists, who condemn the Baptism of little children, believe wickedly. God’s approval of the Baptism of little children is shown by this: He gives the Holy Spirit to those baptized [Acts 2:38–39]. For if this Baptism would be empty, the Holy Spirit would be given to no one. No one would be saved. And finally, there would be no Church. This reason, even by itself, can well enough establish good and godly minds against the godless and fanatical opinions of the Anabaptists.”

Lord Jesus Christ, You called little children to Yourself that they would be blessed as part of Your kingdom. Protect us from all godless and fanatical opinions that would separate us from Your loving embrace and eternal protection. Amen.

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

(John 3:5-6)

For almost two thousand years, the obvious meaning of Jesus' words in John 3:5 gave comfort and certainty to thousands upon thousands of pious Christians, that by Baptism, by water and the Spirit, we have entered into the kingdom of God, that is, we have our Lord Jesus ruling over us by the forgiveness He won for us by His bitter sufferings and death, and heaven opened to us by His resurrection. This, as Jesus says, He gives us by a rebirth, a birth from heaven, that comes through water and Spirit. But then the devil came in to plant the seeds of doubt. Did Jesus really say Baptism saves you? An interpretation now popular among Pentecostals, Baptists, and non-denominationals is that Jesus is really referring to a mother's water breaking when He says, “Unless one is born of water...he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Then, when Jesus speaks of the Spirit, he is talking about a Spirit baptism, that has nothing to do with water, but with you giving your heart to Jesus and feeling the burn of the Spirit, as on Pentecost (despite the fact that on Pentecost, Peter directly connects the gift of the Spirit with...BAPTISM!). We answer in two ways. First, this is absurd. What about a baby who doesn't break his mother's water? And why would we refer the water here to the fluids of a pregnant woman when Baptism has been a main theme of the Gospel of John all the way up to John 3, including Jesus' own Baptism, Jesus and His disciples baptizing, and John the Baptist pointing everyone to Jesus and His Baptism? But second, the grammar demands that we take Jesus' words to refer to Baptism. Jesus uses one preposition (of, in Greek *ex*) to connect the two nouns “water” and “Spirit.” If He had meant to disconnect them, He would have had to use two prepositions, “Of water and of the Spirit.” That's how Greek (and English) grammar works. So, by the pious reading of the Bible, the devil's seeds of doubt can go to the wind. We can laugh them off and take comfort in Jesus' sure words – you have entered into the Kingdom of God through your Baptism.

**Lord, rule over us by your Word till we see your face in the resurrection.
Amen.**



Feeding the 5,000 (John 6)

Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 6:1-15

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. (John 6:11-13)

On the mountain Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish so that all the people in that desolate place were able to eat as much as they wanted. In fact, Jesus created more food in this miracle than five thousand men, plus women and children, were able to eat!

After they had eaten their fill, He told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." The Lord's gifts are never to be wasted, no matter how abundant they may be. This is not only true of our daily bread, which God richly provides to support our bodies and lives, it is also true of our spiritual blessings, by which God strengthens and preserves us in body and soul unto life everlasting.

Baptism, as a good gift of God, should not be wasted. Though it is received only once, it is to be remembered and treasured our whole lives long, for the benefits of Baptism abide forever. As the Large Catechism states, "It is working and always continues working until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory." (IV:83)

As our Lord provided bread and fish in abundance for the five thousand and willed that nothing should be lost, so also in Baptism He provides forgiveness, rescue, and salvation for us and wills that these gifts should not be lost either. Let us therefore take up the gifts given in our Baptism each day as we walk in newness of life!

Lord Jesus Christ, as You willed that none of the fragments be lost, preserve for us the blessings of our Baptism, that they may not be lost to us. Amen.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. (Exodus 14:26-29)

In Luther's Flood Prayer we recall that God "drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, yet led [His] people Israel through the water on dry ground, prefiguring this washing of [His] Holy Baptism." (LSB, p. 268)

Baptism is not just a life-giving water but a death-giving water as well. Namely, it kills sin, both that which is inherited and that which has been committed since. Just as unbelieving Pharaoh and his army were drowned in the Red Sea, so also our sin and unbelief were drowned in the waters of the Baptismal font.

The death and drowning that happens in Baptism is rescue and salvation for the one being baptized. As God's people Israel were brought out of slavery in Egypt through the same Red Sea that drowned Pharaoh and his army, Christians are brought out of slavery to sin through the same baptismal water that drowns the Old Adam, the sinful flesh.

This is not meant to be a one-time event, for "we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment." Instead, such baptizing with water "indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die." Every day, as we repent and believe the Gospel, our sins are drowned and we rise again to new life as God's beloved children.

Almighty and eternal God, grant that we would be declared worthy of eternal life with all believers in Your promise. Amen.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 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 with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self 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. (Romans 6:1-6)

In Baptism a real death and a real birth take place: the death of the Old Adam and birth of the New Man. Through Baptism we Christians are truly regenerated and renewed. However, this has only begun in our present life; it is not yet complete. Despite his drowning in the baptismal waters, the Old Adam still dwells in us. Moreover, the devil and the world still remain around us. These enemies constantly try to deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. They would have us continue in the sins which were drowned and return to slavery under the impurity which was washed away.

For this reason, the drowning and rising, the death and resurrection of baptism is neither something locked away in the past nor something yet to come in the future. It is the present life of the believer. Daily we repent of our sins, daily we believe in Jesus Christ crucified for our forgiveness, and daily we walk in newness of life, presenting our members to God as instruments for righteousness, until that day when the Old Adam finally perishes, and we are perfectly and eternally renewed.

Heavenly Father, forgive us our sins for Jesus' sake, and raise us up that we might walk in newness of life with Him. Amen.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."
(Matthew 16:24-27)

It is God's will that baptized Christians follow Him in unwavering service and obedience. This is what it means to take up your cross and follow Jesus. It means that we should renounce everything that would keep us from following after Christ, and it means that we should be willing to suffer all, even death, for His sake. This is serious business, because to reject one's cross is to risk losing one's salvation.

This might lead one to wonder, as the disciples once did, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus' answer is the same today as it was then: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:25, 26) When we are confronted with Christ's unwavering call to take up our cross and follow Him, we must admit our daily failure to do so. Then we must flee for refuge in Christ alone, who took up His cross for us and paid for all our sins on it. When it comes to our salvation, there is no place for the Law or our works or our daily successes or failures, but only the righteousness of Jesus Christ, freely accounted to us by grace alone.

As those reckoned righteous by grace through faith, and not by works, we lead lives of repentance—denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus—day by day until we rise with Him from death to unending life.

O Christ, have mercy upon us and strengthen us to bear our crosses with patience and trust in You. Amen.

But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
(Ephesians 4:20-24)

The Small Catechism teaches that we should daily drown the Old Adam with all sins and evil desires, and daily the New Man should emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. This righteousness is Christ's, which becomes ours by grace alone through faith alone, apart from works.

Yet as those declared to be righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ, we are called to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called. We must not continue in sensuality and impurity, as though sin is irrelevant because God daily and richly forgives our sins. Instead, we are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds and put on the new self.

This new self (called the New Man in the Small Catechism) is active in concrete works of love for the neighbor: speaking the truth, resisting sinful anger, doing honest work, building up others in speech, and, above all, being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving one another. In such good works the New Man walks—not in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

We Christians find the motivation and strength to walk in these good works in the Gospel alone. We are kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving toward others, because God in Christ was first kind and tenderhearted toward us, forgiving us. Our Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again for us; thus in Him alone we daily die to sin and rise to newness of life.

Gracious God, give us Your Holy Spirit, that we may daily put off our old self and put on the new self, loving our neighbors as You have first loved us. Amen.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)

When one believes and is baptized, a New Man is born, who perfectly delights in God's will. However, the Christian also retains his sinful nature, the Old Adam (also known as the Flesh), who is under the rule of sin. These two cannot coexist peacefully. From the moment of faith the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.

This causes no small frustration in the Christian, just as the Apostle Paul himself expressed: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing...Wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7:19, 24a) Like Paul, the things that we Christians want to do are good, the fruit of the Spirit, but the flesh stands in opposition, keeping us from doing those good things we want to do and instead inciting us to do the very things we do not want, the works of the flesh.

"Who will deliver me from this body of death?" cried Paul. His answer: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24b, 25a) Christ alone, by His death and resurrection, has won the victory over sin for us. His victory is ours by faith alone, worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as those who have life by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Lord Jesus Christ, give us victory over the flesh by Your victory won on the cross, that we might walk by Your Spirit. Amen.

Then Paul said, John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.'" (Acts 19:1-5)

What was the Baptism of John? Was it a Christian Baptism? Was it the same as the Baptism Jesus commanded in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19)? This has been a hotly debated question for almost two thousand years. And in part it's been debated because we ask the wrong questions. Are John's Baptism and Baptism in the name of Jesus the same? Well, no, but in some respects, yes. Is John's baptism Christian baptism? Well, of course, since it's certainly not a heathen baptism! But no, if by that you mean, it is identical to what Jesus commanded after His resurrection. The real questions to be asked are these: Did John's Baptism promise forgiveness of sins in Jesus? Yes. Was it a Baptism to prepare for the coming of Jesus? Yes. Once Jesus came, lived, suffered, died, and rose again, was there need for a Baptism that pointed ahead to his coming? No. Instead, the Baptism Jesus instituted and commanded is the Baptism of the Lord who has already suffered and died, which connects us to His death and resurrection, so that His suffering and triumph over sin becomes ours through faith. And the Holy Spirit given to us in Baptism now preaches a Christ who is (not who will be, but who IS) our Brother, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones, who is literally present with us in mystical union with His Church. These things John's Baptism could not do. John's Baptism pointed ahead to what was not yet. What we have in Baptism gives us what is finished and accomplished in the fullness of time, all proceeding forward from the cross of our Lord Jesus. What a glorious treasure.

Lord, keep us steadfast to Your Word through Your Holy Spirit. Amen.



Jesus threatened with stoning (John 8)

[Jesus said] Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. (John 8:56-59)

This seems to be a strange way for Jesus to speak of Himself. Shouldn't He say “Before Abraham was, I was”? But that's not what He says – He says “I am” and the Jews who hear Him know exactly what He means.

In Exodus 3, when Moses asks the voice in the burning bush how he should answer the Israelites who ask him who sent him, the Lord tells him “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” When He says “Before Abraham was, I am,” Jesus is telling these Jews “I know that Abraham rejoiced, I know that he looked forward to My Day, because I'm the eternal God who was there.”

They understand what He is saying only too well; they pick up rocks to kill Him. That's what the Bible says the people of Israel are to do to a blasphemer. It isn't blasphemy for God in the flesh to call Himself God in the flesh, though. The great sadness of this event is that Jesus is in the Temple among His countrymen who know the facts of the Bible – and they completely fail to recognize Him as the Messiah they were supposed to have been waiting for. Of all the places Jesus should've been recognized, the gates of the Temple should be near the top. But it isn't. They don't recognize Him.

Those who hear God's Word recognize Jesus for who he is. We believe in Him and have eternal life. In Baptism He has chosen you to be His dear child. By faith you are a child of Abraham, who believed and was justified. And like Abraham, you will never see eternal death.

Dear Lord Jesus, by Your Word keep us in our Baptism, that we may look forward to Your Day with joy. Amen.

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:9-14)

The Apostle is speaking to Gentile Christians, that is, to Christians who are uncircumcised. They knew that under the old covenant, a son of Israel was circumcised to show he belonged to the people of God. However, Jesus instituted Holy Baptism, a sacrament where the body of flesh is put off – not by an operation on the body but by being united to the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Therefore, the circumcision of the flesh is no longer needed, because Holy Baptism has come and is the greater gift. Sons of Israel were circumcised when they were only eight days old, and the link made by Paul here between circumcision and baptism is a good reason that the Church practices infant baptism.

Paul says that Christ is not merely like God or has some things in common with God. He doesn't even say that Christ is mostly God. He says that in Christ all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. And even better – those who are baptized partake in this fullness by faith. We are buried with Christ, and we are raised with Him. He has all authority in heaven and on earth, and to all believers in Him He gives the fulness of the promises He made to Abraham.

Dear Lord Jesus, keep us in Your holy Church, that we would be cut off from the multitude of unbelievers and serve Your name at all times. Amen.

[Peter said] "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when [the men of Israel] heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "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 2:36-39)

The men who heard Peter's bold sermon had deep sorrow over the sin revealed in that sermon. By God's grace, they did not despair but asked Peter what to do. Peter tells them that they must turn from their sin and admit their guilt before God. And then he urges them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This baptism is not a mere symbol; Peter says it is "for the forgiveness of sins", and that they will also receive the Holy Spirit.

When the Lord gave the Ten Commandments, He told Israel He is "a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments." Here in Acts are sons of Israel repenting of their sin and receiving forgiveness, a promise that is not only for them but also for their children. The Lord promised to show mercy to a thousand generations of those who love Him, and He gives baptism to bestow that mercy on the next generation of those who love Him. This is one of the chief reasons that the Church baptizes infants – the Bible tells us that the promise of Baptism is for our children.

Dear Lord Jesus, cause us to appreciate and cherish our Baptism, to trust in the promise You made to us in our baptism, and remain faithful to You until You call us home to Yourself. Amen.

But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. (Mark 10:13-16)

The children probably saw the gentleness, mercy, and love in Jesus that the Pharisees could not. Their mothers brought them to Jesus for a blessing, but the disciples tried to keep the children back. Jesus did not hide His displeasure with His disciples, and He rebuked them immediately. Jesus tells them not only that He can and will bless the children, but that they are models of faith for us adults – and we will not be able to enter the Kingdom of God unless we receive it like one of these little children.

The Bible tells us why Jesus is annoyed – the Kingdom belongs to children! To hinder children or anyone else from coming to the Kingdom is a scandal and outrage, and Jesus doesn't wait even a moment to put an end to the disciples' forbidding the children.

This says a lot about what Jesus thinks of children, where they should be, and what role they have in the Kingdom of God. So much artwork and song is based on the idea of Jesus loving children, and with good reason. Jesus delights to have the little ones around Him. Children belong in the presence of Jesus. And because children are so capable of trusting without doubt, Jesus says we should learn from them how to receive the Kingdom.

This begins with how the Church administers Holy Baptism. We know that children can receive the kingdom, and the kingdom is received in Baptism. Therefore, the Church practices infant baptism, and has done so from the beginning. Even when an adult comes to be baptized, he does so as a child – new in the faith, not yet understanding many things but eager to be near this gentle and loving Jesus, and to learn from His Word.

Lord Jesus Christ, bless the children of Your Church. Guide them, that they may grow in grace and the knowledge of Your Word. Amen.

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:10-14)

Immanuel means "God with us," and this describes Jesus well. He is the fulfilment of this prophecy, and He is God with us. This name characterizes the person, the essence, and the work of the Messiah. Even eight centuries before Jesus' birth, the Lord plans for a certain virgin – not just an unmarried woman but a woman undefiled by a man – to bear the Savior into the world.

Lately it seems as though we are overrun with bad news. Whenever we see a frightening news story or we wonder what tomorrow will bring, we may sometimes ask aloud, "Where is God?" To us, and to the whole world, the Lord speaks this word of comfort and promise: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

In times of war, where is God? His name is Immanuel – He is God with us. In times of despair, where is God? His name is Immanuel – He is born to us. The eternal God takes on our flesh and lives among us. He sees our suffering and it moves Him ever onward to Calvary. He sees our fear and He preaches peace. He hears our prayer and gives us His Spirit so we may know Him and call on His name. This Jesus is Immanuel – He is God with us.

Dear Lord Jesus, You alone are Immanuel. You are the true God, with us in our flesh. Be with us when we are afraid, and comfort us with Your Word. Amen.

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:1-6)

Here the Lord shows us His two words He speaks to mankind: His Law and His Gospel. The Law is God's eternal will for mankind, and it shows us our sin. The Gospel is God's gracious promise to save us through His Son. Here God reveals His will for man, and He shows us through simple arithmetic what He desires for us.

In telling us that He punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him, the Lord wants us to know that His judgment against sin is real, and it is stern. We are not to take this threat lightly – those who hate God and His Law will come under strong judgment. In telling us that He will show love to a thousand generations of those who love Him, God would have us know that He earnestly desires to show us overabundant mercy and grace, enough to cover all our sins and bless us more than we could ever desire or deserve. This He does through His Son, Jesus Christ.

O most merciful God, have mercy upon us and forgive our sins. Keep us in Your Word, that we would not be counted among those under Your judgment, and that we would be raised to eternal life on the Last Day. Amen.

“The Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.” (Mark 7:1-4)

The Pharisees washed couches. The Greek says, they baptized couches. They obviously didn't dunk the couches in the Jordan River. When you clean your couch or your bench you do it by wiping it down. The word “baptism,” then, means not “immersion” but “washing.” There are many who insist, against the clear Word of God, that baptism means “immersion,” full dunking under water, and that baptism isn't baptism unless you do it this way. I would ask them all to dunk their couches under water and see how that works. I would also ask whether one can get clean by taking a shower or only by taking a bath. We could also go to many a Bible passage, where men, women, and children (entire households) are baptized where presumably no water deep enough for dunking would have been readily available (Acts 2:41, Acts 16:33). But best of all, we can point to the meaning of the word baptism. It means a washing. There is beautiful symbolism, as Luther teaches us in the Small Catechism, in immersing during baptism (the Old Adam drowning and a new man arising), but Baptism isn't simply a symbol. It is the reality of a washing away of sins, to make us clean before Christ, as His bride, beautiful and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27). It is a sprinkling of Jesus' blood (1 Peter 1:2) which makes us holy before God. It is the washing of the Spirit (Titus 3:5). Jesus was immersed. We can immerse. But what Jesus commands is this washing with His Word. And it does what Jesus says, regardless of how we apply the water.

Dear Jesus, let us die and rise daily in remembrance of our Baptism.



Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21)

“Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.” (Matthew 21:8)

The people spread their cloaks on the road under Jesus. Putting garments under a man was a confession of his authority and your recognition of and submission to his authority. So when Jehu was anointed king, it says, “Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, ‘Jehu is king!’” (2 Kgs. 9:13).

At the same time, as the people lay down their cloaks on Palm Sunday, we can picture a changing of clothes. “All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Is. 64:6). Off with it, and let it be trampled in the dust! We have better clothing coming to us through the One who rides into Jerusalem for our sake! “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Is. 61:10).

“The garments of salvation” and “the robe of righteousness” are Jesus Himself. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Jesus treads on our garments because He brings a better one: Himself, with whom we were clothed when we were baptized.

Dear Jesus, cover our sin with Your salvation and our shame with Your righteousness, that we may stand before You without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. Amen.



Anointing of Jesus (John 12)

Holy Monday
John 12:1-36

“Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” (John 12:1-8)

In this reading, we have a feast celebrating Jesus as the Lord of life, even though He Himself is yet to die and rise. We also have Jesus being anointed for His burial while He is still alive. It may seem out of order, but these things happen because Jesus' work is as good as done. He's not going to fail.

In baptism, things seem out of order for us as well. We've died with Christ, and yet we still live. We've gotten death out of the way, though it's still to come. We've risen with Christ, though we still live in this body of death. We can say that we have eternal life, even though the grave awaits us. And again, it's because Jesus' work is as good as done. He's already died and risen. He's already joined us to His death and resurrection in baptism. He will bring our baptism to its goal, remove the corruption of sin from us entirely, and raise us to eternal life. Jesus' work of redemption didn't fail, and His work of baptism won't either.

Dear Jesus, give us joy in the gift of baptism and bring to completion the good work You have begun in us. Amen.



Jesus finds the disciples asleep (Mark 14)

“And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ (Mark 14:37-38)

When we’re baptized, we’re baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6). We’re also baptized into a struggle. Our spirit longs to obey the law of God and do only those things that are pleasing in his sight. And yet our sinful flesh is unfit for the task, as Paul writes, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:18-19).

Paul asks, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” and immediately provides the answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25). While the disciples slept in the garden, Jesus stayed awake and did what He had told them to do. He obeys His own law and then provides us with His righteousness.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that we stop resisting the flesh and thus show contempt for the blood of Christ. Rather we resist the flesh by the Spirit, with a capital “S.” Because we are baptized, it is no longer our human spirit against our sinful human flesh, but we have received the Holy Spirit, who wars against our flesh. This Spirit is able to succeed where our human spirit cannot.

And so, if we’re tempted and prevail, we give thanks to Jesus for baptizing us and giving us the Holy Spirit. If we’re tempted and fail, we give thanks to Jesus for baptizing us and covering our sin with His righteousness. Therefore, at all times we thank Jesus for the glorious gift of baptism.

Dear Jesus, thank You for baptizing us. Forgive our sins that we commit because of our frailty, and strengthen us by Your Spirit to overcome temptation. Amen.



Judas agrees to betray Jesus (Luke 22)

“Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.” (Luke 22:1-6)

Here we have the devil’s perversion of baptism. Instead of the Holy Spirit, Satan has entered Judas. Instead of having his sins forgiven, Judas is spurred on to sin. Instead of being incorporated into the Church, Judas enters into company with those who hate Christ, where love of money and power prevail and love of the neighbor is nonexistent. Instead of having the love of God poured into his heart, Judas seeks the death of Jesus, the death of Love.

But the devil’s work is never his own, meaning, he never accomplishes the purposes he intends. Jesus commandeered this satanic baptism and used it for His own purposes. Jesus took the devil’s wickedness and directed it toward the purpose of saving us.

This doesn’t work the other way around: the devil cannot take Christ’s baptism—or any work of God—and use it for his own purposes. True baptism will stand against a thousand devils possessing a thousand Judases. The devil teaches heretics to scoff, “It’s just a handful of water. What’s that going to do?” But the devil cowers before that handful of water, because he knows that handful of water is *JESUS’* handful of water. The devil can imitate and mock baptism all he wants, but he can’t come close to it and, in the end, must flee before it.

Dear Jesus, deliver us from the Evil One. Cause sound teaching about baptism to prosper and hinder all false doctrine. Amen.



The Lord's Supper from a 1558 Book of Luther's Sermons

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 34-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

This Thursday is called “Maundy Thursday.” The word “maundy” comes from the Latin *mandatum*, which means “command.” Jesus gives us a new command on this night: love one another.

Now it would, of course, be a great disservice to this day to focus entirely on the Law of God. Christ institutes the Sacrament of His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and prepares to go die for the sins of the world. This night is not ultimately about commandments, but about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet this command, “love one another,” does not exist apart from the Gospel. It is only in connection with His ultimate love in His passion and death that Jesus could command us to love. And this is not merely a call to imitate Christ, as if He finally gave us the perfect pattern from which we do our copywork. Rather, in the very Sacrament that Christ instituted on this night we receive His love, both in the sense that His love forgives our sins and in the sense that His love is now ours with which to love our brothers in Christ.

Nor is the Lord’s Supper the only means by which Jesus gives us His love. It says in Romans 5, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). The Holy Spirit being given in connection with pouring can only refer to baptism (compare Acts 2:38). In baptism, Jesus gives us His love, again in a dual sense. He loves us and thus washes away our sins. And He gives His love to us—pours it into our hearts—and thus we love one another, just as He has loved us.

Dear Jesus, stir up Your love in our hearts, that we would joy in Your salvation and love one another. Amen.



The Crucifixion of Jesus By Lucas Cranach the Elder

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:30)

On this day God died, and your sins died with Him. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). God has forgiven us all our trespasses “by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). When the nails pierced through Jesus’ hands, your sins were run through. As Jesus hung, gasping for breath, your sins had their breath taken away. When Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” your sins gave one final scream, and when Jesus died, your sins perished forever. Jesus has killed your sins in His own body.

In baptism we are joined to the death of Jesus. Paul writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?... We know that our old man 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. For one who has died has been set free from sin” (Rom. 6:3, 6-7). And so not only is the death of Jesus the death of your sins, but because through baptism you are united with Christ in His death, your whole corrupt nature is dying with Christ. The Old Adam was plunged into the baptismal font, and when he was, he was pierced and his life is ebbing out of him and his breath is becoming shallow.

So forget how powerful your sinful flesh can seem at times and take Jesus at His Word. His Word says that baptism joined you to His death. Your sinful nature is dying. Jesus cannot lie. And finally Jesus will bring the sinful flesh to its end, and you will live before Him in righteousness and purity forever.

Dear Jesus, thank You for killing our sins in Your own body. Continue putting to death our sinful nature and keep us faithful to You all our days. Amen.



Crucifixion and Open Tomb

Holy Saturday
Matthew 27:57-66

“When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.”
(Matthew 27:57-61)

On this day, Jesus kept the Sabbath rest and extended His time in the tomb to fulfill His words that He would rise on the third day. It was necessary that Jesus remain in the grave on Saturday. But if baptism has joined us to Jesus’ death and resurrection, what does this day mean for us in terms of our baptism?

This day shows us the death of our corrupt flesh. The Old Adam is crucified even now by virtue of being tied to Jesus’ death through baptism. But he struggles and resists and fights for dear life, as we experience daily. When our earthly life ends, being joined to Jesus’ death is fulfilled, and the sinful nature dies forever, never to rise again.

When we die, our body is laid in the earth while our spirit departs to be with Christ. Since being joined to Jesus in baptism also means being joined to His resurrection, we have confidence that we will be raised with glorified bodies just as He was. Indeed, we will be raised with the very bodies we have right now, except that they will be sinless and perfect. The corruption of sin will be gone.

But we’ll hear more about the resurrection tomorrow. For today, let us delight in the fact that baptism will bring about the full and complete death of the sinful nature. When that happens, the struggle of Spirit against flesh will be over, we will have the victory in Christ, and we can rest from our labors.

Dear Jesus, hinder and put down our sinful nature, that our lives may be pleasing to You. Amen.



The Empty Tomb

The Resurrection of our Lord - Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-8

“And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” (Mark 16:6–7)

Don't be alarmed. Those words show up often in the Gospels. Here, at the sight of the empty tomb, the words are repeated. The disciples of Jesus are not to be afraid. Jesus was crucified for them. Jesus has risen for them as well.

The angel says “just as He told you”. The Words and Promises of God happens just as He says. This is outstanding news for us – think of all the Words you have read this Lent during these devotions. They are happening for you just as He said. Fears? You don't need to fear. Christ has been crucified. Christ has risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

You are baptized into all of this. You have no need to fear the world around you – the situations that are ongoing in this valley of sorrow. Our Lord has washed you clean and made you His own. He has earned the forgiveness of sins. That means death, the wages of sin – what sin earns – it is gone as far from you as your sins are. Sin, which brings the devils evil mastery is gone, and with it the devils tyranny over you. And since you have no sins left and death has no claim on you and the devil can't rule you – you have eternal salvation.

The risen Lord Jesus is proof of this. He who took on the sins of the world lives. Death could not have Him. The devil could not rule Him. Eternal life is His as He comes out Easter morn to show Himself to the disciples and prepare His Church for her task of bringing this news to the world. Your baptism puts you right there. No more sin. No more death. No more devil. No more damnation. Your sins are forgiven. Your death is used to bring you eternal life. Your master loves you so much He did this all for you. Your eternal salvation is safe and secure by the Word and promise of the risen Lord, into whom you are baptized.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have baptized us to be your own. Help us out of all fears and to trust what You have told us in Your Word. Amen.



Lutheran Church Service ca.1550
Preaching, Baptism, Supper