

Lesson 6: Holy Baptism

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

AS THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY SHOULD TEACH IT IN A SIMPLE WAY TO HIS HOUSEHOLD

FIRST

What is Baptism? Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

Which is that word of God? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "go 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**

SECOND

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.

Which are these words and promises of God? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." **Mark 16:16**

THIRD

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, as St Paul says in Titus, chapter three: "God 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, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying." **Titus 3:5**

FOURTH

What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "we were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." **Romans 6:4**

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Baptism is one of two “Means of Grace.” A Means of Grace is the way God brings His love and forgiveness into the lives of His people - just like the sink brings water into your home, God uses His Means of Grace to bring forgiveness to you.

The Lutheran Church has two Means of Grace (the Catholic Church has seven and the Reformed/Baptist Church Zero). Our means of grace are Holy Baptism and Holy Communion (the Lord’s Supper.) The Lutheran Church teaches a Means of Grace has to have 3 things:

- a) Commanded by God in Scripture
- b) Forgives Sins
- c) have a visible or physical element.

Holy Communion is commanded by God in 1 Corinthians 11, forgives sins and has bread and wine as physical elements. Holy Baptism is commanded by God in Matthew 28:19, forgives sins and has water as the physical element.

Baptism accomplishes several important things.

- 1) Brings someone into the Church Family
- 2) Forgives sins
- 3) Creates faith

You don’t find baptism mentioned in the Old Testament, however, beginning with Abraham, all the males were circumcised. And you see washing and regeneration mentioned and plenty of stories where God used water to deliver His people (Noah’s Ark, Crossing the Red Sea, Crossing the Jordan River and Jonah.)

Baptism was not unknown to the people in the Old Testament. A group of people called the Essenes walked into a large pool each day to ceremonially cleanse themselves (pretty amazing since they lived in the desert!) And when John the Baptizer started baptizing people in the Jordan River - the church leaders didn’t ask, “what’s baptism?” - but instead said, “*Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?*”

Just about every Christian church believes baptism forgives sins and provides an entrance into God’s family. Very few churches don’t require baptism. The major difference is in two areas: how much water and how old you have to be.

There are two primary ways to baptize people: sprinkling and dunking. The Lutheran Church (along with the Catholic and Episcopal churches) practice sprinkling - which means we only place a small amount of water on the forehead of the child. If you really want to be dunked - you can be - but since we believe it’s not the amount of water that baptizes you - even a little is enough.

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Dunking, or immersion is practiced by Baptists and Nondenominational churches. They use rivers, lakes and swimming pools and have the person walk into the water and go totally under (sometimes three times) to be fully Baptized.

That brings us to the second major difference - which also is important because it's why Lutherans and Catholics don't practice full immersion baptism. The Lutheran Church believes you can be baptized one second after your are born. The Baptist and Nondenominational churches require you to be old enough to make a decision for Jesus (they call it believer's baptism.) If Lutherans totally immersed babies in baptism - there wouldn't be any Lutherans left!

The primary difference in when you can get baptized is decided by what you believe baptism is. Lutherans teach it is a Means of Grace - in other words, it's God's work - not ours. That's why we can baptize babies. They may not be able to say yes - but they don't have to. God made the decision for them. And we trust the parents and godparents to "train up the child in the way he or she should go" - and this includes teaching them about their faith.

Baptist and Nondenominational churches are more interested in the person making a decision for Jesus and their baptism is an "outward sign of an inward renewal." Lutherans believe that God actually does something in baptism - He creates faith, forgives sins and makes the person part of His family. Baptists and Nondenominational churches believe baptism is just a ceremony so other people know that the person has committed their life to Christ.

The Lutheran Church teaches since baptism is the work of God - you only need to be baptized once. Getting baptized again won't help - and might cause you to doubt the power of God. Some churches encourage you to get baptized everytime you join or if you are feeling like you are far away from God - we believe that is why God gave us Holy Communion.

One important phrase you should remember is: "*ex opere operato*" - Latin for "out of the work..." While it sounds impressive, it simply reminds us baptism is God's work - so if you later discover that the person who baptized you is an alien from Mars - or was totally insane - or liked Pepsi - it's okay. Your baptism is still valid. Martin Luther said, "if the devil or his grandmother were to baptize someone it is still valid if they used water and said, 'in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' "

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Homework: Based on the Lutheran understanding of the Means of Grace - why are the following NOT Sacraments:

Marriage -

Confirmation -

Priesthood -

Write out Matthew 28:19:

What do you think the job of a “godparent” or “sponsor” is?

Describe a baptism you saw at church? Talk about what the candle means and what the parents/sponsors promise and the role of the person being baptized.

Look up the following verses and write what they say about baptism:

Mark 16:16

Acts 2:38, 39

1 Peter 3:21

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How much water is necessary for a Baptism?

How many times do you need to be baptized?

Read Galatians 3:10-14, Hebrews 10:19-23 and write a definition of “saving faith.”

How would you explain a Baptism to someone who didn’t know what it was?

Read Romans 6:1-11 and list at least three benefits of being baptized into Jesus.