

BAPTISM SAVES

This is the season of Epiphany, in which Christ is displayed and revealed by the Holy Scriptures (“Epiphany” means “to be revealed”). And here Paul tells us: “When the kindness and love of God our Savior “was epiphanied,” was revealed, he saved us.

4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

The Devil has done a dangerous thing: He has taken the heart of the doctrines of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and he has swapped them, traded them; turned them upside-down.

When we recognize our Enemy’s move, we can warn one another, we can teach more clearly what the truth is, and we can see that our helpless feeling is misplaced, because God is still on our side. God still saves us through Baptism.

Fourth Commandment sins are troublesome in any time. Whether a young person opposes his parents or school teachers or whether anyone rebels against the government, this is a sin that turns into an infection, a sinful way of life that too often ends in... tragedy. In the third chapter of his letter to Titus, Paul addresses sins against the Fourth Commandment and admits that at one time or another “we all were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures” that led to such sins. But God saved us. His love in this case is the rare and wonderful word for love which in Greek is **philanthropy**. Philanthropy is “love for mankind.” God revealed this love in Christ our Savior, and we are connected to Jesus, bathed in his bathwater, which is baptism.

There are three chief things to remember with baptism. **First: It is ordained and commanded by God.** We see this where Jesus institutes baptism for all when he says: “Make disciples of all nations by baptizing” (Matt. 28:19). Therefore Baptism is divine; a gift from God to us. **Second: Baptism is to be our deliverance from sin, death, and from the devil’s power.** So we should not pull baptism apart, separating the water from the words. **Water** is good for the body, and the **name** of God, which is the Word of God in baptism, is good for the human soul, but baptism is for the whole person and especially for your

salvation, both body and soul. If there were no resurrection of the human body, we might not need a washing of the body in baptism but only words. But there is a resurrection, the physical resurrection of the body on the last day, and my baptism reminds me that not only has my soul been cleansed of sin, but my body as well, with an anointing better than any spices or incense or pure nard could achieve: you and I have been bathed with the washing of regeneration. In baptism, we are born again of water and the Word of God.

Thirdly: Remember the benefits of baptism. The washing away of sin means the end of the power of the grave. Since the wages of sin is death, then the cleansing of sin means the end of death: the cover the coffin, the lid of the urn, is blown away by the power of the forgiveness of our sins, and on Judgment Day we will wake up from our sleep, the winter nap of our earthly existence, and be raised to life in the never-ending Springtime of life in heaven.

Likewise, the devil's grip on us is ended because our Old Adam is drowned in baptism. That's not to say that he won't try, he doesn't stop clawing away at us through temptations and the lies of the world, but where an unbeliever can do nothing but sin, we baptized children of God also have the ability to say No to the devil, and this, too, is a gift from God.

When should baptism come? Just as Old Testament believers were brought into the covenant on the eighth day after they were born, so also baptism is offered to everyone, either when they become believers or, in families that are already Christians, when they are born.

Baptism does not depend on the faith of the one who receives it. For one thing, baptism creates faith and gives what it offers. Also, God's grace is always a matter of what God gives, not what man does. For if the Lord's Supper were up to you and me, then you and I should conjure up the body and blood of Christ through some magical act or ritual.

But we can't. We could run circles around the altar and mutter words in every language on earth and under it and never do what God does so simply with his own promise and with the words he gives to us. Without the promise; with the power of the Word of God, we would have nothing in either the Lord's Supper or in Baptism.

But since we have the promise, we have what baptism offers: Faith, forgiveness, the washing away of sin, and the resurrection to eternal life.

Who can do such a thing? Who could ever be able to properly baptize? The pastors and ministers who are called to do it, do it publicly in the place of Christ and in the name of Christ on behalf of the Church.

In an emergency, any Christian can baptize. But that's an emergency: Childbirth in and of itself is not an emergency; otherwise, we would never baptize in church except for adults. We prefer to baptize in church, so that the whole congregation can meet the baby and see the Means of Grace in action.

But if an exuberant father has performed a baptism in the delivery room, that isn't a sin. It's the means of grace. But we should be careful not to make it our habit to usurp the authority of the Divine Call of our pastors.

Our time is short, and there is so very much to say. Baptism washes away all sin. Is there a sin that worries you, that bothers you in the quiet hours of the dead of night? Confess it to God in your prayers, and know that your baptism washes away not only the sin you were born with or that you committed before your baptism, but even the sins you may have been committing while you were being baptized, if that would be possible, and all of your sins since then, to the very last moment of your life. They are all covered by Jesus, and therefore they are all washed clean by your baptism, because baptism is commanded by Jesus, and his sacrament does not contradict his crucifixion or any of his other gifts.

If a person should fall away from faith during their lifetime and angrily spew hateful things at their family and claim to have no faith in God, but then, in the helpless stillness of their final breaths, can cry out in a voiceless prayer: Jesus, remember me! And Jesus still looks down at that bruised reed, and smiles at the prodigal lamb, for there is no such thing as unbaptism, and to be baptized is to remain baptized, whether on a battlefield, in the aftermath of an accident, or in a quiet room as life's ephemeral moment ebbs away.

How can water do all of these things? It is not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which trusts this Word in and with the water. For without God's Word that water is just plain water and not baptism. But with this Word it is Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Our Lord God has blessed us with everything we need to serve him, to carry his gospel to the world, and to build up the faith and the lives of our families. We use every gift he gives in his service, whether for our families at home, our community around us, and of course his Holy Christian Church. This is his good and gracious will.