

I Am Baptized!

by Rev. Bart Day

Introduction

**Throughout this study, notes for the leader will be in italics.*

Before reading the introduction begin the class by asking the students the following:

1. How do you feel when you find out there is a Baptism scheduled for church on Sunday? Are you ever frustrated because the Baptism takes up more time?
2. What is Baptism? What benefits does Baptism give? What does such baptizing with water indicate?
 - See the Small Catechism (CPH 1986), pp. 199-207; 210-212.

Tom DuBois, a Missouri Synod Lutheran and world-renowned artist, wrote the following words describing his painting, "The Cloak," which portrays a beautiful, finger-sucking, newly baptized girl just wrapped in her new white baptismal robe.

When I first started going to Church regularly I was a tad annoyed when there was a Baptism at the beginning of the service. I thought: "Why should all of us have to sit through this? Isn't this something the family should do privately with the pastor on a Saturday, and not interrupt the Divine Service for all of us on Sunday?"

"Not another baptism! How long will church be today?"

How often have you had those thoughts when you opened the bulletin and saw the announcement that there would be yet another Baptism? How impatient and rushed we are when it comes to receiving great and glorious gifts from our heavenly Father! Perhaps in our busyness we have failed to slow down and see the tremendous blessings that our Lord is granting his children in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. As Luther penned in his catechism hymn on Holy Baptism:

All that the moral eye beholds
Is water as we pour it.
Before the eye of faith unfolds
The pow'r of Jesus' merit.
For here it sees the crimson flood
To all our ills brings healing;
The wonders of his precious blood
The love of God revealing,
Assuring his own pardon.
(To Jordan Came the Christ, our Lord, LW #223)



For this life-giving water "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."

Tom would, over time, come to more fully appreciate the lavish gifts given in Holy Baptism.

What an extraordinary honor to be present the moment the Word of God and the instrument of water washes this sin-stained human being from the ancient sin that guarantees perpetual death into a new life a new perfect creation of everlasting life. I am troubled at the thought of the way I used to think. At last I realize how richly blessed I am to have such wonderful and faithful parents who have assured me of God's grace in my baptism as an infant. Now when I attend early service and the announcement informs me that there will be a baptism at late service I will be there to live in this moment of grace and glory in a Christ-instituted and God-doing event.

Images of Baptism

The following section will engage a discussion on the biblical images of Baptism. In recent years, thanks to a resurgence of celebrating the Paschal Triduum (the three days of Christ's Passover from death, burial, to resurrection: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday) the church has taken Romans 6 as the dominant image used to interpret Baptism: death, burial and resurrection with Christ. While this is a powerfully profound image it is certainly not the only biblical image that can be used to speak of Baptism. In fact, we now believe that prior to the Council of Nicea (325) Romans 6 was not the primary image of baptismal interpretation, but John 3 and the image of rebirth. The purpose of this section then is to talk about different biblical images and how they might be used in our day to better explain the depth and riches of our baptismal regeneration by Christ.

You will note discussion questions on only two images: death, burial and resurrection and the mark or seal of the Holy

Spirit. Prior to the class you may wish to consider some of the other themes listed below but not included for study. If one of these images is more meaningful to your particular group I would suggest it being added to the list. Other images include: Baptism is forgiveness of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38); initiation into the “one body” of Christ and his community (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:42); sanctification and justification in Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11); adoption into a new family, become a son or daughter of God the Father (Eph. 1:3-5; John 1:12-13; Gal. 3:25-29; Rom. 8:14-17); enlightenment (Heb. 6:4; 10:32; 1 Peter 2:9); being grafted into Christ and so sustained through him (John 15; Rom. 11:19-23); a cleansing bath, the washing away of sin (1 Peter 3:21-22; Titus 3:3-8); a ride upon Noah’s ark being rescued from death (1 Peter 3:18-22); being clothed in Christ with a robe of righteousness (Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 3:9-10; Rev. 7:9).

The late-fourth-century bishop Cyril of Jerusalem beautifully described Baptism in the following way:

Great indeed is the Baptism which is offered you. It is a ransom to captives; the remission of offences; the death of sin; the regeneration of the soul; the garment of light; the holy seal indissoluble; the chariot of heaven; the luxury of paradise; a procuring of the kingdom; the gift of adoption.

Like Cyril, the New Testament does not present us with a single image by which the church interpreted the meaning and implications of Baptism. Instead, the New Testament and the early church understood Holy Baptism by means of several complementary images.

Read the following passages and discuss the image and how it shapes our understanding of the work of Christ in holy baptism.

1. Read Rom. 6:3-11 and Col. 2:12-15.

- What is the image of Baptism?
- What does it mean to be joined to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection?
- *Of all the possible biblical and liturgical images by far the most readily available and dominant image is of Baptism effecting our participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Maxwell Johnson offers the following insights concerning Romans 6. To appropriate the paschal imagery of Romans 6 in our baptismal practice, theology and catechesis we must let death be death, both our own death and the death of Christ himself. When St. Paul writes in Rom. 6:5 that “we have been united with him in a death like his” or in Gal. 2:9 that he has “been crucified with Christ,” he is not simply referring to a ritual act but to the real historical death of Christ by crucifixion, a process of public rejection, humiliation and death he knew all too well in the Roman world of the first century. And, if we are baptized into the death and burial of Christ, then we are baptized into that death, a death marked at least in the Synoptic Gospel tradition by Jesus’ own cry of forsakenness and abandonment: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) [Max Johnson, Images of Baptism (Liturgy Training Publications, 2001), 9.]

Here one might wish to engage in a discussion of what it means to let death be death. How does the world view death? Is it nothing more than one last inconvenience to be conquered?

Johnson continues to remark that there was a time when people usually died in their homes surrounded by immediate family, extended family and other loved ones; when they were lovingly prepared for burial by their families; and when, after the funeral, they were buried with full, active and conscious participation and assistance of the gathered assembly itself, often in a cemetery adjacent to the church building. Today, with the notable exception of hospice programs and deliberate pastoral-liturgical attempts to reintegrate literal burial into the funeral rites, death has been gradually divorced from life and given over to modern medical technology as well as, ultimately, to those in the funeral industry. Images of Baptism, 5-6.

- Does this image help us more fully understand the work of Christ in Holy Baptism?
- *As long as Romans 6 remains the dominate image we must more fully grasp the suffering and death of Christ. This is not an attempt to crucify Jesus all over again or work up the emotions of people on Good Friday. The purpose is to confess that he is and remains the crucified one! The crucifixion is a past event that continues to effect the present and the future of the church. As we sing the second Sunday in Advent:*

*Those dear tokens of His Passion
Still His dazzling body bears,
Cause of endless exultation
To His ransomed worshipers.
With what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture*

Gaze we on those glorious scars!
(Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending, HS98 #802)

- Perhaps as death has become more distant to us personally we have become more uncomfortable in speaking about the cross of Christ. Lutherans often seem particularly uncomfortable in the presence of the crucifix. Why?
- Jürgen Moltmann said it best, “[The cross] is often better recognized by non-Christians and atheists than by religious Christians because it astonishes and offends them. They see the profane horror and godlessness of the cross because they do not believe the religious interpretations which have given a meaning to the senselessness of this death. All they find in it is ‘the image of irreconcilability.’ To restore Good Friday in all its horror and godlessness it is necessary for Christian faith first of all to abandon the traditional theories of salvation which have made the way the cross is spoken of in Christianity a mere habit. From the very first the Christian faith was distinguished from the religions which surrounded it by its worship of the crucified Christ.” *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 40

2. Read 2 Cor. 1:21-22 and Eph. 1:13-14.

- What is the image of Baptism?
- What is the work of God the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism?
- For preparation one should look through the *Small Catechism* (CPH 1986) on *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 145-168 as well as the *Large Catechism on the Third Article of the Creed* (Kolb/Wengert pp. 435-40).

Jesus shows us the work of the Holy Spirit most beautifully in John 14:26. Notice that the work of the Holy Spirit is never to draw attention to Himself but to bring us faith in Jesus Christ, teaching and reminding us everything Jesus has said (John 14:15, 23-24).

So where do we find the Holy Spirit? If the Holy Spirit is simply everywhere and I cannot get my hands on Him what good is He for me? The Lutheran Confessions clearly point us to where the Holy Spirit may be found. At the conclusion of article 8 [Concerning Confession] of the Smalcald Articles (Kolb/Wengert p. 322-23) Luther writes, “In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before.” And again, “Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil.”

So when I wish to find the Holy Spirit at work I go to where Christ has promised His gracious presence: the Word, Holy Baptism, holy absolution, the Holy Supper of His body and blood. Recall the third catechism question on Baptism. “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.” The work of the Holy Spirit is to create faith, faith in Christ. Faith is not the content of salvation but is rather the instrument by which I lay hold of Christ and His work done for me.

For Luther and us it is all about the external word, God’s word, which He has deigned to combine with the ordinary physical elements of water, bread, and wine. Here I find the Holy Spirit delivering the benefits of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection for me!

- What does it mean to be “sealed” or “marked” by the Holy Spirit as one belonging to God and God’s people?
- There is no better quote than John 20:19-23 to show the unity of Jesus’ death, resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit as one of the great mysteries of the entire Christian faith and life. This single text unites Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost. All baptismal images carry with them the Holy Spirit.
- Notice that there is a corporate identity that occurs for those who have been joined to Christ in the water of Holy Baptism. We often highlight this corporate identity in relation to those who receive the Sacrament of the Altar, but notice that St. Paul uses this same imagery when talking about Holy Baptism in 1 Cor. 12:12-27. What does it mean that “we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body”? What is our corporate identity as the baptized? What does this mean in the life of the church?

The Rite of Holy Baptism

The following section will examine various parts of the baptismal liturgy that were considered for inclusion in *The Lutheran Service Book*. Some of these portions may or may not be in current use in your congregation. The purpose of the following study is to examine how the rite of Holy Baptism helps the church’s teaching on the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Since this is not a comprehensive study of the rite of Holy Baptism only four selected portions will be discussed. This does not mean that other portions are not worthy of discussion. One might also consider the following:

- *Why is the naming ceremony at the beginning of the rite? What is the significance of the Lord calling us by name in the waters of Holy Baptism? What does it mean that we take the name “Christian” in our Baptism?*
- *Why does the church use a gospel lesson from Mark 10:13-16 which seems to say very little about Baptism? What is the connection between the “kingdom of God” and Holy Baptism as already taught to Nicodemus (John 3:1-8)? What does it mean when St. Mark says, “Jesus taking them up in his arms gave them an intense blessing” (Mark 10:16)?*
- *What is the role of sponsors in the church? How can sponsors or parents actually speak on behalf of another regarding the desire to be baptized? Is faith our possession?*
- *The post-Baptism blessing “Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ...” is now the blessing which is read as the pastor places his hands on the head of the catechumen at confirmation. What is the connection between the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the rite of confirmation?*
- *Why the use of oil in the baptismal rite? What is oil used for in holy Scriptures?*
- *What is the meaning of giving a baptismal candle? How are fire and light used in Scripture? Why is the candle lit only from the paschal candle? What is the paschal candle and when is it lit?*

A Baptismal Account

Ask your students to close their eyes and listen to the following baptismal account (“A Rite of Passage” by Aidan Kavanagh). This fictional account is a combination of elements found in many baptismal rites that remain for the early church. While it does not reflect a single baptismal rite, all of the ritual portions are found in various early church baptismal rites.

I have always rather liked the gruff robustness of the first rubric for Baptism found in a late fourth century church order which directs that the bishop enter the vestibule of the baptistry and say to the catechumens without commentary or apology only four words: “Take off your clothes.” There is no evidence that the assistants fainted or the catechumens asked what he meant. Catechesis and much prayer and fasting had led them to understand that the language of their passage this night in Christ from death to life would be the language of the bathhouse and the tomb—not that of the forum and the drawing room.

So they stripped and stood there, probably faint from fasting, shivering from the cold of early Easter morning and with awe at what was about to transpire. Years of formation were about to be consummated; years of having their motives and lives scrutinized; years of hearing the word of God read and expounded at worship; years of being dismissed with prayer before the Faithful went on to celebrate the Eucharist; years of having the doors to the assembly hall closed to them; years of seeing the tomb-like baptistry building only from without; years of hearing the old folks of the community tell hair-raising tales of what being a Christian had cost their own grandparents when the emperors were still pagan; years of running into a reticent and reverent vagueness concerning what was actually done by the Faithful at the breaking of bread and in that closed baptistry.... Tonight all this was about to end as they stood there naked on a cold floor in the gloom of this eerie room.

Abruptly the bishop demands that they face westward, toward where the sun dies swallowed up in darkness, and denounce the King of shadows and death and things that go bump in the night. Each one of them comes forward to do this loudly under the hooded gaze of the bishop, as deacons shield the nudity of the male catechumens from the women, and as deaconesses screen the women in the same manner. This is when each of them finally lets go of the world and of life as they have known it: the umbilical cord is cut, but they have not yet begun to breathe.

Then they must each turn eastwards toward where the sun surges up bathed in a light which just now can be seen stealing into the alabaster windows of the room. They must voice their acceptance of the King of light and life who has trampled down death by his own death. As each one finished this he or she is fallen upon by a deacon or a deaconess who vigorously rubs olive oil into his or her body, as the bishop perhaps dozes off briefly, leaning on his cane. (He is like an old surgeon waiting for the operation to begin.)

When all the catechumens have been thoroughly oiled, they and the bishop are suddenly startled by the crash of the baptistry doors being thrown open. Brilliant golden light spills out into the shadowy vestibule, and following the bishop the catechumens and the assistant presbyters, deacons, deaconesses, and sponsors move into the most glorious room most of them have ever seen. It is a high, arbor-like pavilion of green, gold, purple, and white mosaic from marble floor to domed ceiling sparkling like jewels in the light of innu-

merable oil lamps that fill the room with a heady warmth. The windows are beginning to blaze with the light of Easter dawn. The walls curl with vines and tendrils that thrust up from the floor, and at their tops apostles gaze down robed in snow-white togas, holding crowns. They stand around a golden chair draped with purple upon which rests only an open book. And above all these, in the highest point of the ballooning dome, a naked Jesus (very much in the flesh) stands up to his waist in the Jordan as an unkempt John pours water on him and God's disembodied hand points the Holy Spirit at Jesus' head in the form of a white bird.

Suddenly the catechumens realize that they have unconsciously formed themselves into a mirror image of this lofty icon on the floor directly beneath it. They are standing around a pool let into the middle of the floor, into which gushes water pouring noisily from the mouth of a stone lion crouching atop a pillar at poolside. The bishop stands beside this, his presbyters on each side: a deacon has entered the pool, and the other assistants are trying to maintain a modicum of decorum among the catechumens who forget their nakedness as they crowd close to see. The room is warm, humid, and it glows. It is a golden paradise in a bathhouse in a mausoleum: an oasis, Eden restored: the navel of the world, where death and life meet and become indistinguishable from each other. Jonah peers out from a niche, Noah from another, Moses from a third, the paralytic carrying his stretcher from a fourth. The windows begin to sweat....

The bishop rumbles a massive prayer—something about the Spirit and the waters of life and death—and then pokes the water a few times with his cane. The catechumens recall Moses doing something like that to a rock from which water flowed, and they are mightily impressed. Then a young male catechumen of about ten, the son of pious parents, is led down into the pool by the deacon. The water is warm (it has been heated in a furnace), and the oil on his body spreads out on the surface in iridescent swirls. The deacon positions the child near the cascade from the lion's mouth. The bishop leans over on his cane and, in a voice that sounds like something out of the Apocalypse says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in God the Father, who created all of heaven and earth?" After a nudge from the deacon beside him, the boy murmurs that he does. And just in time, for the deacon, who has been doing this for fifty years and is the boy's grandfather, wraps him in his arms, lifts him backwards into the rushing water and forces him under the surface. The old deacon smiles through his beard at the wide brown eyes that look up at him in shock and fear from beneath the water (the boy has purposely not been told what to expect). Then he raises him up coughing and sputtering. The bishop waits until he can speak again, and leaning over a second time, tapping the boy on the shoulder with his cane, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was conceived of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified, died, and was buried? Who rose on the third day and ascended into heaven, from whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead?" This time the boy replies like a shot, "I do," and then holds his nose. "Euphemius! Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the master and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is to be honored and glorified equally with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the Prophets? And in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church which is the communion of God's holy ones? And in the life that is coming?" "I do."

When he comes up the third time, his vast grandfather gathers him in his arms and carries him up the steps leading out of the pool. There another deacon roughly dries Euphemius with a warm towel, and a senior presbyter, who is almost ninety and is regarded by all as a "confessor" because he was imprisoned for the faith as a young man, tremulously pours perfumed oil from a glass pitcher over the boy's damp head until it soaks his hair and runs down over his upper body. The fragrance of this enormously expensive oil fills the room as the old man mutters: "God's servant, Euphemius, is anointed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Euphemius is then wrapped in a new linen tunic; the fragrant chrism seeps into it, and he is given a burning terracotta oil lamp and told to go stand by the door and keep quiet. Meanwhile, the other baptisms have continued.

When all have been done, in this same manner (an old deaconess, a widow, replaced Euphemius's grandfather when it came the women's time), the clergy strike up the Easter hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead, he has crushed death by his death and bestowed life on those who lay in the tomb." To this constantly repeated melody interspersed with the Psalm verse, "Let God arise and smite his enemies," the whole baptismal party—tired, damp, thrilled, and oily—walk out into the blaze of Easter morning and go next door to the church led by the bishop. There he bangs on the closed doors with his cane: they are flung open, the endless vigil is halted, and the baptismal party enters as all take up the hymn, "Christ is risen," which is all but drowned out by the ovations that greet Christ truly risen in his newly-born ones. As they enter, the fragrance of the chrism fills the church: it is the Easter-smell, God's grace olfactorally incarnate. The pious struggle to get near the newly baptized to touch their chrismed hair and rub its fragrance on their own faces. All is chaos until the baptismal party manages to reach the towering ambo that stands in the middle of the pewless hall. The bishop ascends its lower front steps, turns to face the white-clad neophytes grouped at the bottom with their burning lamps and the boisterous faithful now held back by a phalanx of well-built acolytes and doorkeepers.

Euphemius's mother has fainted and been carried outside for some air.

The bishop opens his arms to the neophytes and once again all burst into "Christ is risen." He then affirms and seals their Baptism after prayer, for all the Faithful to see, with an authoritative gesture of paternity—laying his hand on each head, signing each oily forehead once again in the form of a cross, while booming out: "The servant of God is sealed with the Holy Spirit." To which all reply in a thunderous "Amen," and for the first time the former catechumens receive and give the kiss of peace. Everyone is in tears.

While this continues, bread and wine are laid out on the holy table; the bishop then prays at great length over them after things quiet down, and the neophytes lead all to Communion with Euphemius out in front. While his grandfather holds his lamp, Euphemius dines on the precious Body whose true and undoubted member he has become; drinks the precious Blood of him in whom he himself has now died; and just this once drinks from two other special cups—one containing baptismal water, the other containing milk and honey mixed as a gustatory icon of the promised land into which he and his colleagues have finally entered out of the desert through Jordan's waters. Then his mother (now recovered and somewhat pale, still insisting that she had only stumbled) took him home and put him, fragrantly, to bed. Euphemius had come a long way. He had passed from death into a life he lives still. (Aidan Kavanagh, *A Rite of Passage*, Liturgy 70, vol. 8, 1977)

For Discussion

After the account is shared, ask your students for their impressions of the story. Continue the discussion of their impressions by asking the students to talk about their congregation's baptismal practice.

Print and distribute the proposed Orders of Holy Baptism from The Lutheran Service Book. Please note that the first rite will be found in the pew edition while the second rite will be found in the Agenda titled the Short Form found in Luther's Small Catechism. While you may discuss any and all portions of these baptismal rites we will focus on only a few segments that are perhaps new to many. A word of evangelical understanding is perhaps needed. A visit to various congregations will find many different practices in regard to the rite of Holy Baptism. Luther himself cautioned that a host of man-made usages were apt to becloud the essentials of the sacrament. While our Lord calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light through the water combined with Christ's word, the church has long rejoiced in various attendant rites that help explain the working of God in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. While these rites are not the Baptism proper they can add to the proclamation of the Gospel and the gift of the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil and the seal of eternal life, given through water included in God's command and combined with God's Word: in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

What was most striking about this baptismal account?

How does your congregation perform the rite of Holy Baptism?

What parts of the rite are most meaningful for teaching the meaning of Holy Baptism?

If there were no limitations, how would you do the rite differently?

Exorcism and the Signing of the Cross

*While there is great historical precedent for exorcism in the baptismal rite, including from our own LCMS fathers, we are more interested in the theological significance of the rite. For the significance of the pre-baptismal exorcism and the later renunciation of the devil to be fully understood, the absolute work of Christ must be understood. As David Scaer writes, "Exorcism, the driving out of Satan, draws a line between the kingdoms of God and of Satan, over which believers cross through Baptism. Though this crossing from one kingdom to another is expressed in the renunciation of Satan (Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his works? Do you renounce all his ways?), this is the believer's commitment to what God has already done. We must say emphatically that no one can free himself from Satan's grip. Pelagianism, Arminianism, Socinianism, and Rationalism—that is, any form of synergism, with its optimistic understanding of human moral capacities—have little use for the seriousness of sin and Satan. Exorcism is an answer to synergism, since here God alone acts to release the believer from Satan's grip. Not only is the use of the exorcism in Baptism a statement of the awareness of the supernatural power of Satan and evil, it is also a complete rejection of human righteousness. Only after Jesus has conquered Satan in our lives (exorcism) are we able to renounce the latter and then confess Jesus as Lord. Together the exorcism and the renunciation constitute the prelude to confessing the creed and the act of Baptism itself. (David P. Scaer, *Baptism*, vol. XI Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, p. 184)*

In St. Mark's gospel, after casting out demons, Jesus is accused by the teachers of law of Himself being possessed by the devil, Beelzebub! (Mark 3:20-22) Jesus goes on to say that a house cannot be divided against itself, nor can Satan be opposed to himself. Jesus then says, "In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house" (Mark 3:27). This is precisely what Jesus was doing; binding up the strong man, Satan, by freeing people from the power and possession of the devil. At the beginning of

the baptism rite, having heard the promise of salvation which comes through Baptism, we are reminded that “the Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own.” Then the pastor says, “Therefore, depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Soon after, the candidate “receives the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.”

For Discussion

1. What does an exorcism performed on a newborn baby say about the child?
2. What does the world believe about the power and work of the Devil?
3. What does the church believe about the power and work of the Devil?
 - *Here I would suggest that the world believes very little about the real power of the devil. Most do not even acknowledge the existence of actual sin. The church, on the other hand, continues to pray with our Lord, “but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13). The baptismal exorcism is a clear confession to the world of the power of Christ over sin, death and the power of the devil.*
4. How does exorcism bind the strongman and make way the entry of Christ in the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word?
5. What is the meaning of the signing with the cross upon the forehead and heart?
 - *This ancient tradition of signing with the cross is called in Greek the sphragis. Sphragis means a seal, sign or stamp of approval. St. Basil argued that it was among the unwritten traditions going back to the Apostles: “who taught us to mark with the sign of the cross those who put their hope in the name of the Lord.” The word in ancient times was used for the mark with which an owner marked his possessions. In the early church this sign came to signify two aspect of Baptism: that the one marked belonged either to the flock of Christ or to the army of Christ.*
 - *St. Gregory of Nyssa draws the connection between the exorcism and the signing with the cross when he explains, “The imposition of the Cross in Baptism is a phase of the struggle against the demon. The use of the sign of the Cross in Christian life is an expression of the fact that it continues to be a struggle against the demon. By Baptism, he has been conquered; marked with the sign of the Cross, the newly baptized no longer belongs to him; henceforth the Christian need only make this sign in order to repel the attacks of the demon and put him to flight.” (Ho Bapt. XXXVI, 372 A)*
6. Why does the church still encourage the making of the sign of the holy cross?

The Flood Prayer

The “Flood Prayer,” attributed to Martin Luther, is filled with rich water imagery from the Old and New Testaments. Spend time identifying and discussing the various events mentioned in the prayer. Why is each event significant in the baptismal life of the church?

Carefully read the “Flood Prayer” which follows the signing with the holy cross. This is a prayer which has not been used in LCMS baptismal rites and will sound new to most people. There is certainly so much here that an entire study could be written only on this one prayer.

Almighty and eternal God, according to Your strict judgment You condemned the unbelieving world through the flood, yet according to Your great mercy You preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all. You drowned heart-hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, yet led Your people Israel through the water on dry ground, prefiguring this washing of Your Holy Baptism. Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood, and a lavish washing away of sin. We pray that You would behold N. according to Your boundless mercy and bless him with true faith by the Holy Spirit that through this saving flood all sin in him which has been inherited from Adam and which he himself has committed since would be drowned and die. Grant that he be kept safe and secure in the holy ark of the Christian Church, being separated from the multitude of unbelievers and serving Your name at all times with a fervent spirit and a joyful hope, so that, with all believers in Your promise, he would be declared worthy of eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

For Discussion

1. The Flood (scan through Gen. 6:1-9:17).
 - What is the connection between the flood and the waters of Holy Baptism?
 - *Although parents are fond of decorating their children’s rooms in flood imagery we should not forget that the flood is a sign of God’s judgment and wrath against an unbelieving world. In Baptism, and*

daily through confession and absolution, the Old Adam is drowned and put to death through contrition (sorrow for sins) and repentance (faith). Part Four of Baptism in the Small Catechism (CPH 1986), pp. 210-12 will be helpful to your discussion. Baptism is real death while at the same time being real rescue in the ark, “the holy ark of the Christian church,” where we are kept safe from temptation and unbelief through the hearing of God’s word and the receiving of His life-giving sacraments.

- What does 1 Peter 3:18-22 say about the connection between the flood and Holy Baptism?

2. The Exodus (scan through Ex. 12:1-14:31).

- Before discussing the connection made in the prayer it is necessary to fully grasp the meaning of the Baptism of Jesus. Begin the discussion by asking the class why Jesus was baptized. Remind them that John was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). How can sinless Jesus then receive a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? What sins did He have to confess or repent of?
- Professor Chad Bird of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana has written these wonderfully insightful words concerning the baptism of Jesus: “Do you see what Jesus is up to? He is uniting Himself with sinners. He, as the Sinless One, is doing what the sinners are doing—being baptized—and in so doing, Jesus is standing in for us. He’s becoming what we are, wearing our skin, continuing the walk that will lead Him to the cross. Luther so keenly understood, ‘He is entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is, becoming a sinner for us, taking upon Himself the sins which He had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in His holy baptism,’ (LW 51:315).

“Jesus tells John to baptize Him so as to fulfill all righteousness. How amazing—Jesus is here saying that God instituted Baptism primarily for Christ’s sake and then only afterwards also for your sake (Luther). Yes, Baptism is first and foremost for Jesus—not because He needs Baptism but because Baptism needs Him. It was as if Christ was baptizing the water with His body that you might be baptized by the water into His body. Christ put Himself into the water that the water might put Him into you. Indeed, there has only been one baptism ever—the Baptism of Jesus. As Paul says, “One Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all.” Every other Baptism—yours and mine—is not a repetition of Jesus’ Baptism but an incorporation into Jesus’ Baptism: His bloody death and glorious resurrection. His Baptism is your Baptism so that your Baptism is His Baptism. This is what it means to fulfill all righteousness, to do everything necessary to make you right with God. But to make you right with God, Jesus had to become what made you wrong with God. So there’s Christ, sinless in Himself, knee deep in the muddy waters of the Jordan, becoming the sinner you are. But Jesus doesn’t just take away your wrong; He gives you His right. He’s like a rich man dressed in fine clothing who finds some poor beggar wrapped in rags. And the rich man not only undresses the beggar and washes him clean; the rich man strips off His own fine clothing and puts them on the beggar and then places the beggar’s rags on Himself. And so we see a blessed exchange: Christ not only takes off your filthy rag-like sins by forgiving them; He clothes you with His own righteousness. That’s what He does when He baptizes you into His own Baptism, into Himself.”

- What is the connection between the exodus event and the waters of Holy Baptism as made in the prayer?
- What may we draw from 1 Cor. 10:1-2 in this connection?

3. The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (read Mark 1:9-11 and Matt. 3:13-17).

- What does it mean to say that through the Baptism of Jesus, God the Father has “sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin.”
 - Recall the first of God’s creation; the heavens and the earth, including the waters of Gen. 1:2. It is not haphazard chance that our Lord chose to rescue and redeem us through the very physical element that was created together with the crude materials that made up the first of His creation, the heavens and the earth. The water, part of God’s first creative work, even before the first day of creation, is the means by which He will re-create His fallen children by joining them to His death, burial and resurrection in the washing of Holy Baptism! God would not have chosen another means to rescue us. All water of His creating has now been sanctified (made holy) through the Baptism of Jesus so that any water may be joined to the word of God bringing forgiveness of sin, life and salvation. There is no “holy water” no need to seek Baptism in the waters of the Jordan River, for Christ from before the dawn of the first day chose water as His means of bringing redemption and new life. He joined himself to that water forever in His Baptism and now offers us to washing in the same.

The Clothing with the White Garment

The following historical information will be helpful in better understand the meaning of the giving of the white robe after Baptism. This information is taken from Jean Daniélou, S.J., *The Bible and the Liturgy* (University of Notre

Dame Press, 1956), pp. 9-53.

Throughout the early centuries of the church the final ceremony of the baptismal liturgy was the clothing of the newly baptized with the white garment. St. Ambrose says, "After Baptism you have received the white garments, that they may be the sign that you have taken off the clothing of sin and that you have been clad in the pure garments of innocence (De Myst. 34). These white robes are given to replace the old garments taken off before Baptism which were figures of the "old man." The white garment is a symbol of the new. The origin of this Baptismal symbol is certainly found in St. Paul: "You who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ."

The white garment signifies both the purity of the soul and the incorruptibility of the body. St. Cyril brings out the first aspect: "Now that you have taken off your old garments and been clad in white garments, you must also in spirit remain clothed in white. I do not mean to say that you must always wear white garments, but that you must always be covered with those that are truly white and shining, so that you may say with the prophet Isaiah: "He has clothed me with the garment of salvation and He has covered me with the vestment of joy." The incorruptibility of the body is highlighted by Theodore of Mopsuestia: "Since you came up from Baptism, you are clad in a vestment that is all radiant. This is the sign of that shining world, of that kind of life to which you have already come by means of symbols. When indeed you receive the resurrection in full reality and are clothed with immortality and incorruptibility, you will have no further need of such garments."

This gift of glory is a participation in the glory of the Lord at His glorious Transfiguration when "His garments became white as snow." St. Ambrose delights: "He who is baptized is pure, according to the Gospel, because the garments of Christ were white as snow when, in the Gospel, He showed forth the glory of His resurrection. For he whose sins are forgiven becomes white as snow" (De Myst. 34).

The white garment also has an eschatological meaning, in that it points toward the glory in which the martyrs are clothed after their death. The glorious Revelation of St. John says that those who have triumphed over the devil by martyrdom are clothed in white (Rev. 3:5 and 18).

For the early church the white garment of baptismal glory carried with it a rich array of symbolism: the state of Adam and Paradise before the fall; Christ who came to restore the grace lost by Adam and a prefiguring of future glory, anticipated already in this present life.

For Discussion:

1. What does the giving of the white garment symbolize? See Is. 61:10.
2. How are the heavenly robes of Rev. 7:14 made white? What is the connection with Holy Baptism?

Conclusion

Who am I? Where did I come from? Everyone is asking the questions but the world offers no real answers. Most people in the world are only living to gain possessions and fulfill their sinful pleasures of the flesh. The world cannot answer the questions with anything more than fleeting pleasures.

Luther was baptized on November 11, 1483, at St. Martin's Day, in St. Peter's Church in Eisleben, Germany. Throughout his life he celebrated in recalling this event. Whenever he was in doubt or despair, tormented by the devil, he would cry out, "I am baptized!"

That was Luther's answer to the question: Who am I? Into this dying world our Lord Jesus speaks to us through His Word and Sacraments. In Holy Baptism, the holy Trinity reveals and bestows our true identity. In Holy Baptism Jesus takes the sin that is ours and offers to us His own righteousness. Who am I? In Christ I am a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come. Where did I come from? I came from a loving Father who created all things, including me, and will on the last day, through the power of the Holy Spirit, raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

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