



As many of our congregations are celebrating Confirmation, we are reminded of the importance of learning the six chief parts of the Lutheran Catechism. But for some students, once they walk down the aisle of church in that white robe and red carnation, they never do any significant study of that material again.

This three-part Bible study is the second in a series that take Catechism content and present it for high school students.

This series of Confirmation 2.0 studies reminds us that the story of the Triune God's work isn't just a story playing out on the pages of the Bible or on the pages of the *Small Catechism*. It is playing out in real time in the lives of present-day human beings like you. God is actively working in his world and in his church.

One of the clearest ways we see him working is when a person gets baptized. Baptism is a moment when the Christian story as it's told by the Creed takes a very tangible and concrete form. It is the moment when a person is formally incorporated into the Christian story and becomes a part of it.

These sessions look at God's work in the Old and New Testament and how the Lord works through our stories in Baptism.

CONFIRMATION 2.0: BAPTISM – LESSON 1

OPENING DISCUSSION

In the previous set of Bible studies, we unpacked the Apostles' Creed. In this next study, we will connect the Apostles' Creed to the experience of Baptism. But first, let's discuss how we see the Lord working through water in the Scriptures.

Split participants into groups and ask the following question:

- How many Bible stories can you think of that include water?
The flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, Joshua and Israel crossing the Jordan, Baptism of Jesus, calming the storm, healing of the man at Bethesda, etc.

Whoever can come up with the most in an allotted time period wins.

STUDY

This series of Confirmation 2.0 studies began with the Apostles' Creed as a way of telling the story of the Christian faith. The story of the Triune God's work isn't just a story playing out on the pages of the Bible or on the pages of the *Small Catechism*. It is playing out in real time in the lives of present-day human beings like you. God is actively working in his world and in his church. One of the clearest ways we see him working is when a person gets baptized. Baptism is a moment when the Christian story as it's told by the Creed takes a very tangible and concrete form. It is the moment when a person is formally incorporated into the Christian story and becomes a part of it.

To understand more fully how amazing it is that our Lord works through the waters of Baptism to bring people into his story and into his people, the church, it will be helpful to take a look at how the Lord has worked through water throughout the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament.

But first, we need to point out that in a biblical imagination, water can evoke a variety of thoughts and images.

- Water can be a place of chaos, unpredictability, and danger.
- Water can be a source of life.
- Water can cleanse from impurity.

As we look at the following passages, keep these thoughts and images in mind.

Leader Note: The goal of reading so many passages is to inform the imagination with as many different pictures of the Lord working through water so that when the conversation shifts to Baptism later, these passages will still be fresh in the minds of the participants.

Read Genesis 1:1-10 (Focus especially on verse 2).

- What is the Spirit of God doing in verse 2?
Hovering over the waters

- How does the creation that the Lord speaks into existence differ from the description of the earth in Genesis 1:2?

Where there once was darkness, now there is light. Where there once was formlessness, there now stands creation that has taken shape. Where there once was an empty void, now there is the fullness of the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning, God takes what was formless, dark, and void, and creates a universe that is orderly, bright, and full. God is capable of making something wonderful even out of chaos and darkness.

Leader Note: Reading this story informs and shapes how we come to understand Baptism as a part of God's re-creative work. God creates people anew in their Baptism.

Read Genesis 7:11-8:1.

- What does the Lord use water to do in this passage?
- How have you ever experienced the destructive power of water?

Through the waters of a flood, the Lord condemns the wickedness and sinfulness of the earth and preserves his righteous people.

Leader Note: Again, this story gives us extra insight into how the Lord works to condemn our own sinful nature in Baptism and preserve the new creation within us.

Read Genesis 9:12-16.

- What does the Lord promise that he will never do again with water?

Read Exodus 14:10-31.

- How does the Lord work through water in this passage?
- How do the people of Israel respond to the Lord's work? (See verse 31.)

In the Exodus account, the Lord delivers his people from their enemies, and water plays a significant role in the story. Similarly, it is a passage through water that signals a move out of slavery into the freedom of living in the kingdom of the Lord.

Leader Note: This story too will help shape our understanding of Baptism as a move out of slavery to sin and death into the kingdom of our Lord, Jesus.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-15

- How does the Lord work through water in this passage?
- How does Naaman respond to the Lord's work? (See verse 15.)
- How have you experienced the cleansing power of water in your life?

Note to leaders: this doesn't necessarily have to be an overtly spiritual question. It can prompt simple responses about how effective water is for cleaning, etc.

Leader Note: Just as the Lord healed Naaman in the waters of the Jordan, so too today he provides healing for his people in the waters of their Baptism. Baptism cleanses us from our sinful disease, and we emerge from our Baptism clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Read Ezekiel 47:1-12

A bit of context is helpful for this passage. Ezekiel sees this vision from the Lord and records it as one of the final visions in his book of prophecy. He writes this in a time when God's people are living away from home in exile in Babylon. The temple, the place where the Lord promised to be present, has been destroyed. This final vision gives us a picture of future hope and life flowing from the temple. God's presence and grace will someday spread all over the place – even into the desert – and bring new life wherever it goes. That's the background here. Go ahead and read the passage now.

- From where does the water flow and where does it go?
From the temple eastward to the desert and the Dead Sea.
- What happens as a result?
Life abounds. "Everything will live where the river goes." (47:9) There will be fruit for food and leaves for healing.
- How have you experienced water as a source of life in your own life?

Leader Note: Just as the waters flowing from the presence of God in the temple give life to everything they touch; the Lord gives life to his people in their Baptism.

When you take a short tour through the Old Testament to see how the Lord has worked through water in the lives of his people, you see that water plays a part in stories of creation, destruction, deliverance, cleansing, and renewal of life. If you were to take a longer tour of the Old Testament, you could find even more stories of how the Lord has worked through water.

Let the stories you've read fill up your imagination for a moment. Picture water as a part of creation. Imagine a flood covering the face of the earth. See the waters split as God's people move out of Egypt. Gaze at the wonder on Naaman's face as he comes up out of the Jordan with purified skin. Draw in your mind the most beautiful, green, flowery landscape with a life-giving river flowing through it to transform a desert.

- Which of the stories we read was your favorite? What about it made it your favorite?

- With all of these images in mind, how do you see them influencing your understanding of Baptism?
- What connections are you able to make between the Old Testament and your own life today that perhaps you've never noticed before?

This is only the beginning of what we can learn from God's Word about Baptism. We'll touch on even more in future studies.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious Heavenly Father, throughout the ages you have demonstrated your powerful work in many ways in the lives of your people. We thank you that you continue your work today and continue to create, deliver, heal, and renew in our day and age. Bless us as we go this day and give us your Spirit to guide us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen!

CONFIRMATION 2.0: BAPTISM – Lesson 2

OPENING DISCUSSION

In the previous study, we took a tour of some Old Testament stories that help shape our understanding of Baptism. In this study, we will build off of that Old Testament foundation by taking a look at some examples of Baptism from the New Testament.

By way of starters, though, you could get the group talking by simply playing a quick game of “Would You Rather” with water-related topics. (You can add more flair to this if you'd like. I'm a boring pastor who routinely needs help from DCE friends to spice up introductions to Bible studies.)

Would you rather:

1. Wash dishes or do laundry?
2. Swim in a lake or ocean?
3. Hang out in a pool or a hot tub?
4. Take a shower or bath?
5. Lazy river or wave pool?
6. Waterslide or diving board?
7. Make up your own more fun examples.

STUDY

The story of the Christian God's work through water builds off the kinds of stories we read about last time in the Old Testament. Today, the Christian practice of Baptism flows out of the kinds of stories we read in the New Testament related to Baptism. In this study, we're going to explore some of those.

Before we jump into any of those stories, though, it might be helpful to hear just a bit of background about Baptism in the first place. In Old Testament Law, you can find commands for God's people to wash particular things to purify them from uncleanness. (See Leviticus 11:32 or 14:6-16 for a couple of examples if you're curious.) In the days of Jesus, there were some Jews who observed regular bathing for purification as a part of their religious practices. To “**baptize**” simply means “to wash.” Jesus himself has some strong words with the Pharisees over the baptizing or “washing” of hands, cups, and dishes in Luke 11:37-41. Baptism appears to be the kind of thing many people in Jesus' day would have been familiar with if you understand Baptism simply as a washing or cleansing.

However, Baptism begins to take on extra meaning and significance with the arrival of John the Baptist. Unlike other Jewish washings, John performed Baptisms on people. While what John was doing had previously been done with Gentile converts, now he does something scandalous by baptizing Jews.

Read Matthew 3:1-12

- What does John preach? (See verse 2.)
- What prophecy from Isaiah does John fulfill? (See verse 3.)

- What is the purpose of John's Baptism? (See verse 11.)
John baptizes for repentance, which means to "turn around" away from sin toward the Lord. This is a significant part of preparing the way for the Lord.
- How does John describe the one who is coming after him? What is he like? What will he do?
- How do you think you would have reacted if you had gone out into the wilderness to see and hear John?

Read John 1:19-34

- What does John say about himself?
He says that he is not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. He is the voice crying in the wilderness as Isaiah prophesied.
- What does John say about Jesus when he sees Jesus coming?
He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the one John was speaking about before. Jesus ranks before John. John came so that Jesus might be revealed to Israel, the people of God. Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Son of God.

John the Baptist comes on the scene as a witness to Jesus who will prepare the world for the public ministry of Jesus as the Son of God. John uses water as a means for cleansing hearts from sin and making them ready for the promised Messiah.

Jesus comes and meets John at the Jordan River and surprises John when he asks John to baptize him. In the account of Jesus' Baptism by John, we see that Jesus follows in the footsteps of God's people of old, Israel. We also see that he is obedient to the will of his Father and will carry out the ministry set before him. Finally, we see that Jesus has given us a path to follow. He has made a way for all of us to enter into the waters of Baptism to live in him.

Read Matthew 3:13-17

- How does John react to Jesus' desire to be baptized?
- What does Jesus say in response to John?
- What does the voice from heaven say about Jesus?
- How does Jesus' Baptism impact the way you view Baptism today?

To give you one quick glimpse into how Jesus follows in the footsteps of God's people Israel, check out what immediately follows Jesus' Baptism in the Gospel according to Matthew.

Read Matthew 4:1-11

Just like the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea and underwent a period of testing for 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus passes through the waters of his Baptism and enters the wilderness for a 40-day-long period of testing. The difference between Israel and Jesus is that Jesus endures this testing period with perfect obedience to his Father and to his Word. He then comes back into the Promised Land to begin his ministry. It's a pretty cool connection!

We're going to fast-forward now to the end of the Gospel according to Matthew. After his resurrection, Jesus commissions his disciples to carry his ministry on earth forward. Part of this ministry includes Baptism.

Read Matthew 28:16-20

- What is the first thing Jesus tells his disciples to do?
Make disciples
- What are the two things they should do to make disciples?
1. Baptize 2. Teach them to observe everything Jesus has commanded
- How do you see followers of Jesus living out this commission from Jesus today? In other words, how do you see the church making disciples in these ways today?

The disciples of Jesus listened to his commands and made disciples in these ways. There are some powerful examples of how the Lord's work grew in the early church. Baptism was a foundational part of this growing work.

Read Acts 2:1-4; 14; 22-24; 32-41 (If you have time, read 2:1-41. It's all really good.)

Peter stands up on Pentecost and preaches a sermon about Jesus of Nazareth whom God raised up. Because he is risen from the dead, he is Lord and Christ, the Messiah promised to Israel. Many Israelites were there on Pentecost to celebrate the feast and heard the message about how Jesus was put to death by his own people but had been raised to new life. This message cuts the people in the crowd in heart and they ask Peter what they should do.

- How does Peter respond to their question? (See verses 37-39).
Repent and be baptized.
- What will they receive?
Forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit
- Who are these promises for? (See verse 39.)
- How many people were baptized?
- How do you see the Lord creating, healing, delivering, or bringing life in these verses?
- What do you learn about Baptism from these verses?

Read Acts 8:26-39

- How do you see Philip fulfilling the command of Jesus from Matthew 28?
- How do you see the Lord creating, healing, delivering, or bringing life in these verses?

Read Acts 9:17-19

This is the story of Saul's conversion after he has the experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

- What is one of the first things Paul does after he regains his sight?
He is baptized.

- How do you see the Lord creating, healing, delivering, or bringing life in these verses?

Read Acts 16:11-15

- Who gets baptized in these verses?
- How do you see the Lord creating, healing, delivering, or bringing life in these verses?

Read Acts 16:25-34

- Who gets baptized in these verses?
- How do you see the Lord creating, healing, delivering, or bringing life in these verses?

We see from the time of the early church that the first followers of Jesus followed in his footsteps and according to his command. When people came to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, Baptism ordinarily followed soon afterward. Baptism was part of what it meant to make disciples. In the pages of the New Testament, we see that the Lord who had been at work through waters to destroy wickedness, heal disease, create anew, and bring life wherever he goes continues to work through the waters of Baptism. The story that began in Genesis is still playing out among the first Christians and it is this same story that plays out in the church today when God's people are baptized.

If you have been baptized, you are a part of this unfolding story too. The things that have happened to you have happened because the Lord is a God who works through water. His Son, Jesus, has paved the way for you through the water to follow where he goes. His followers have obeyed his commands through the centuries to make new disciples and teach them in the way they should go. This teaching has come all the way to you so that you might have forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of everlasting life. And now, the story goes on in you and through you to another generation.

We will talk about the unfolding of the Baptismal story in your own life in our next study. Stay tuned.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. You poured out that Spirit on your people at Pentecost and brought the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life to the world. Make disciples for yourself out of all nations in our age and work in us that we might live faithfully as your people in our time and place; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

CONFIRMATION 2.0: BAPTISM – STUDY 3

OPENING DISCUSSION

In this series of studies, we have charted out a pathway of Baptism that began with the Lord's work through water in the Old Testament and continued through his New Testament work in the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus, and his apostles. Now, we turn to the baptismal works of the Lord in his church today.

For an opening discussion, there are a few options:

- If you have a group where many or most of the participants are baptized, you might consider going around the room and asking the group what they remember or what they have been told about the day they were baptized.
- You as the leader might consider sharing the story of your own Baptism.
- If you are doing this study in a church context where you have access to the Baptismal font, you might take a field trip with your group to the church's font and talk about what goes on there or share a story about the most recent Baptism you remember taking place there.

STUDY

As we mentioned at the end of the last study, the Lord keeps working to create, deliver, cleanse, heal, and bring new life in Baptism. The church today follows the commands of Jesus just like the early church did, baptizing people of all nations to make them disciples of Christ.

Very often, when a person is baptized in a Lutheran Church today, the story of God's work through water is retold during the Baptismal rite as a reminder to us that God is continuing the story of his work in the present day. We retell this story in the form of a prayer called the "Flood Prayer," which we use a part of our Baptismal rite. The prayer goes like this:

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 hard-hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, yet led Your people Israel through the water on dry ground, foreshadowing 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 [insert your name] according to Your boundless mercy and bless [him/her] with true faith by the Holy Spirit, that through this saving flood all sin in [him/her] which has been inherited from Adam and which [he himself/she herself] has committed since, would be drowned and die. Grant that [he/she] 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/shel would be declared worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- What stories from the Bible did you hear in this prayer?
Noah and the flood, the Exodus, Baptism of Jesus
- What themes do you see emerging from these stories?
Washing, renewal, liberation from captivity and enemies
- What connections does this prayer make between stories in the Old Testament, the Baptism of Jesus, and Baptism today?
- What do we ask for the Lord to do in this prayer for the person about to be baptized?
That the Lord would hold a person by His mercy. That He would bless them with faith. That their sin would be drowned. That they be kept safe as part of the church. That they would serve with a fervent spirit and joyful hope. That they would be declared worthy of eternal life.

Some of my favorite stories are ones in which multiple plot lines and many different characters all get tied together into one larger story. I'm going to date myself here, but a movie like this that was popular when I was in high school was called *Crash*. There were all these different characters from various backgrounds having a variety of experiences all over the city of Los Angeles. At first, they seem like separate and somewhat scattered plotlines, but eventually it all comes together, and you see that everyone in the movie is connected to each other.

When I think about Baptism, I see it as a similar moment that brings a variety of different biblical plotlines together. If you have been baptized, it brings you into a huge story that spans millennia and continents and a story that includes billions of characters. It's really quite astounding if you stop and think about it.

But I suppose there is one key plotline that's a driving force in the experience of Baptism that we haven't talked about yet. Just like Baptism is a story of cleansing, deliverance, and renewal, it is also a story of death and resurrection. The story of death and resurrection is a centerpiece of the story of Jesus, and consequently, it is also a centerpiece in the story of a person's Baptism as well.

Paul talks about this in multiple places in his letters. Let's take a look at some of them.

Read Romans 6:1-4

- According to Paul, if you have been baptized into Christ, what else have you been baptized into?
Jesus' death
- What is the end result of being buried with Christ?
That we might walk in newness of life just as Christ was raised from the dead.

This might lead someone to wonder, how does that work? If we are buried with Christ, what dies and what gets raised to new life? Thankfully, Paul addresses those questions in the verses that follow.

Read Romans 6:5-10

- What gets buried in Baptism and dies?
Our old self. Leader Note: We refer to this sometimes as our "Old Adam" or our sinful nature.
- What does burying the old self do?
It brings the body of sin to nothing. This is to say that it takes away our sin and removes us from slavery to sin. Do we experience the full extent of this yet? No. We still await the day when the new creation begun in us will come to completion. Sin does still cling to us, but we are not under its dominion anymore. We belong to Christ.
- What does Paul say we believe as baptized people of God? *(See verse 8)
That we WILL LIVE with Jesus. This is the hallmark of Christian belief. Baptism works in us the belief that we will live even though we die. In fact, we have already died and have already begun living with Christ. Someday, this life will be brought into full view.

The next logical questions to ask would be, "Okay, so my sinful self has died with Christ and has been buried. I believe that I will live with Christ, but what is that supposed to look like in the here and now?"

Paul addresses that question next.

Read Romans 6:11-14

- How are baptized people of God to consider themselves?
As dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus
- What do you think that looks like for you today?
Paul already gives you some suggestions in these verses but think for yourselves about how you might die to sin and live for God.

If you read through even more of Paul's letters, you see that many of his encouragements to his Christian readers is to live as people who have died and been raised with Christ. Because of their Baptism, they are called to live a new life. Already they have been healed, cleansed, forgiven, set free, and created anew. What it means to be a follower of Jesus is to lean into those realities and live like they are the truest parts of your story.

Read Galatians 3:27 and then Read Galatians 5:16-25

- Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is the easiest for you to live by? Which is the most challenging? Why?

Read Colossians 3:1-4

- Since you have been raised, what would it look like for you to set your mind on "things above?"

For any of you who have been baptized, you are living out the story of dying and rising, and you're doing this on a daily basis. Every time you repent and turn to the Lord, you are dying to yourself and living to God. When you walk by the Spirit, your old self is being crucified and your new self is coming alive. This is what makes remembering your Baptism so special and so important. Remembering your Baptism is a helpful way to remind yourself that you are someone new and you're someone living in a new story. You have been cleansed, forgiven, set free, and created anew by the God who has been making things come alive since the beginning of time. You are united to his Son, Jesus. You have been buried and raised with him to new life already. While you wait for the fullness of that new life to come into view, you have the opportunity to live renewed ahead of time. Each day is a new opportunity to lean into your new identity as a character in God's great story.

For any of you who haven't been baptized, this is what it means to be baptized. Baptism is a remarkable occasion in which these amazing plotlines running throughout the Christian Scriptures collide in the life of a real person. A baptized person then gets to live in this story with these amazing plotlines, and the Lord unfolds his story and carry it even further. If you have more questions about Baptism or have a desire to be baptized, talk to your parents, youth leader, pastor, or all of the above.

TAKING IT HOME

- Why is it a big deal to remember your Baptism?
- Imagine a friend sees the Baptismal font at your church and asks what that's for. What would you tell them?
 - When they follow up and ask why you baptize people in the first place, what would you say to them?

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal God, you have raised your Son Jesus to new life and have united us to his death and resurrection in the waters of Baptism. Help us to walk by the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon us and guide us as we seek to live anew in you each day. Through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior, Amen!