

The Scriptures Establish the Purpose of Holy Baptism

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“Water is life. Live it large.” Thus billboards along the freeway advertise the water adventures to be enjoyed at Wisconsin Dells. One is led to believe that few things in life could be more thrilling than splashing down a water slide into a pool of water.

It is true that water is life. We couldn’t survive without water. More than 62% of the human body consists of water. We’re told to drink at least six eight-ounce glasses of water a day to stay healthy. We use water for bathing, for washing clothes, for cleaning everything from cars to vegetables. About 70% of the earth’s surface is covered with water. The vast majority of plant and animal life on earth live in water. We use water for transportation and as a source of power. We swim in it. We fish in it. We glide across it in a boat or on skis. Children run through water sprinklers in hot weather, and children of all ages enjoy a variety of water-inspired activities at water parks across the nation.

How interesting that God should choose something as common and vital as water to bring people into his kingdom. But how typical of God. He chose to enter human flesh to redeem mankind. He uses human language to speak to us. He uses simple bread and wine as the vehicles in, with, and under which he offers us the very body and blood of our Savior given and shed for us on the cross. God used human beings like Moses, Isaiah, Matthew, John, and many others to bring his word to mankind. Today he uses people like you and me to reach others with the precious message of the gospel. And he uses water and the Word to bring people into his kingdom. Baptism is not just a church rite. It is not a way by which a person commits himself to God. It is not merely a response to God’s Word. Through water and the Word, God brings all the power and blessings of the Gospel to the sinner who is being baptized.

Water is life. Baptism is life in a far higher sense. Water cleanses our bodies from dirt. Baptism cleanses us from sin. We drink water to stay alive and remain healthy. Baptism gives us eternal life and serves to keep us spiritually healthy as long as we live. Wisconsin Dells’ water-parks invite us to live life large. God wants us to live our baptisms large, to rejoice in the salvation baptism brings us, to live the new life baptism gives us, to be the new people baptism makes us, to realize the joy of living a life cleansed of sin, to appreciate the family of believers into which God brings us in baptism, and in baptism to clothe ourselves in Christ.

I. The Institution of Baptism

In his Small Catechism Luther says that “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word” as 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!”

Christ instituted baptism shortly before his ascension into heaven from the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. Prior to that, at Jesus’ instructions, the eleven disciples had gone to a certain mountain in Galilee. Matthew says that when they saw him there, “they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). Perhaps they were wondering what to make of everything that was happening. Would they see Jesus again? What did Jesus want them to do? What would happen in the future?

In response to their doubts Jesus spoke what has come to be known as the Great Commission. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19:20). Jesus says his authority is unlimited. Only one who is God can say that. But Jesus also says that this authority has

been *given* to him. Jesus is also true man. The authority that has been given to him as the Son of Man by his Father he now gives to his disciples. In solemn terms he instructs them to make disciples (i.e. learners and followers) of all nations by baptizing them and by teaching them. Teaching and baptizing are the means through which the Holy Spirit produces faith and thereby creates disciples.

A person is baptized “in the name of the Father,” meaning that God is now his gracious Father; “in the name of the Son,” meaning that he receives all the benefits of the Son’s work of redemption; and “in the name of the Holy Spirit,” meaning that he receives in baptism the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. “In the name of” has in it the meaning “by authority of” and “on the basis of.” Baptism has the authority of the Triune God behind it. The power and effectiveness of baptism is guaranteed by the Triune God. Baptism brings a person into a relationship with the Triune God.

The disciples are to baptize “all nations.” Although the disciples are Jews, they are to teach and baptize Jew and Gentile alike. They are to baptize all people, no matter what their race or nationality, no matter how young or how old they are, because all are conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51:5; John 3:5,6; Ephesians 2:3) and need to be born again (John 3:5). Baptism is the new birth that cleanses all people from sin and makes them God’s children and heirs of salvation. All of this happens on the authority of Jesus who instituted this sacrament as a means to impart forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation until the end of time.

From the Great Commission it is clear that the Word and baptism are the means God uses to offer and seal to people the salvation Christ has earned for all. Notice that Christ does not prescribe the order in which people are to be made disciples. Baptizing and teaching are commanded by him and need to be carried out as the situation requires. Babies are baptized and then taught. Adults are taught and then baptized. In either case the new birth is a miracle of God’s grace.

Baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ

The Great Commission specifies that the Trinitarian formula be used when baptizing. How then do we explain baptisms that were performed in the name of Jesus?

When Peter on Pentecost accused the crowd of crucifying Jesus, they were cut to the heart and asked “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38). On the basis of this passage some have concluded that baptism simply in the name of Jesus would be sufficient. However, Peter is not saying that. He is saying that they need to be baptized “by authority of Jesus Christ” in other words because Jesus had instituted and commanded baptism, because baptism is founded on Jesus’ name and is based on his sacrifice for sin, and because it is a baptism into union and communion with Christ. The same is true when Peter ordered that those present at the home of Cornelius be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:48).

Baptism Means Applying Water

The visible element in baptism is water (1 Peter 3:20-21). The word *baptizō* means simply to apply water. Although Luther preferred immersion, and although certain denominations today insist on immersion, the word “baptize” can mean any application of water, be it immersing, washing, pouring, or sprinkling. In Mark 7:4 the word is used in connection with “the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.” Some early manuscripts include “dining couches” in that list. In Luke 11:38 the word *baptizō* is used for the ritual washing of hands in daily Jewish life. In Hebrews 9:10 it is used to refer to the washings required by the Old Testament ceremonial law. This law never refers to immersion but does frequently mention sprinkling or pouring. None of the baptisms recorded in the New Testament necessarily imply that baptism took place by immersion. Just the opposite is

often the case. On Pentecost, for example, three thousand people were baptized in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). Jerusalem has no river, and one wonders if the enemies of Jesus would have allowed the cisterns and pools in the city to be used for baptisms. Besides, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is referred to as a baptism. Could not the baptism that Peter urged the crowds to receive (Acts 2:38) also have been by pouring?

Baptism was not entirely new to the eleven disciples. They themselves had administered baptism to those who wanted to become Jesus' disciples (John 4:1,2). They knew that John the Baptist had baptized many people, including Jesus himself. The disciples were also aware that the Jews had observed a kind of baptism. All of this invites some questions. What was Jewish baptism? What was the baptism of John the Baptist? Did it differ from the baptism instituted by Jesus? If so, why did Jesus submit to John's baptism?

Jewish Baptisms

Ritual washings were prescribed in the Old Testament as signs of cleansing for those healed of leprosy, for those who had come in contact with anything unclean, for the high priest on the Day of Atonement, etc. Jewish ritual also called for people to use water to cleanse their hands before meals (Mark 7:3). Such ritual washings needed to be repeated whenever the circumstances required.

Is there a connection between these Jewish baptisms and the baptism instituted by Christ? Concerning the Mosaic ablutions, Luther said in a Sermon for the Sunday after Easter,

Christ has instituted a cleansing wholly unlike the Mosaic ablutions under the Old Testament dispensation. Moses came with various laws relating to washings and purifications, but they were only cleansings of the body or of the flesh and had daily to be repeated. Now, since these ceremonials contributed nothing to man's purification in God's sight--a thing to be effected by nothing short of a new birth--Christ came with a new order of cleansing, namely, baptism, which is not a mere external ablution from physical impurities, but a washing effective in man's purification from the inward pollution of his old sinful birth and from an evil conscience, and bringing remission of sin and a good conscience.¹

Baptism was also a ritual of conversion to Judaism. Pagans would become proselytes by baptizing themselves. Such a baptism identified non-Jews with the people of God, but unlike the baptism instituted by Christ, it was not commanded, nor did it carry any promise from God.

Baptism and Circumcision

Circumcision, on the other hand, not only identified people as the people of God, but was commanded by God and carried with it a promise – the promise of the Savior who was to come. The New Testament, however, says that baptism has superseded circumcision. In the second chapter of Colossians, Paul says that believers are complete in Christ. In Christ they have total forgiveness. They have been delivered from the requirements of the law and from the powers and authorities of evil. They have been raised from spiritual death. In this context the apostle associates baptism with circumcision. “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:11,12).

¹ *The Sermons of Martin Luther Volume VII* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1983), 242.

Circumcision in the Old Testament was a sign that the individual stood in a covenant relation with God. It was the prerequisite and mark of membership in the people of God (Genesis 17:9-14) and the seal of God's covenant with Abraham (Romans 4:11). Circumcision brought a man the blessings of the covenant and committed him to the claims of the covenant (Romans 2:25). In those ways circumcision foreshadowed baptism because baptism gives an individual all the blessings of God's new covenant in Christ and commits him or her to a life in keeping with that new covenant. Paul tells the Colossians that circumcision has been superseded by the circumcision of Christ, that is by baptism, God's act of putting off man's body of the flesh, his sinful nature, by burying him and raising him with Christ. There was no reason for the Colossians to return to circumcision. It had become meaningless for the New Testament believer. Baptism had taken its place.

The Baptism of John the Baptist

What about the baptism of John the Baptist? Did it, like circumcision, become meaningless with the institution of Christ's baptism? John the Baptist had not simply adopted the Jewish practice of ritual baptisms. He had had a direct command from God to baptize: "The Word of the Lord came to John, son of Zacharias" (Luke 3:2). Mark says that John's call was to preach "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). John told the people that he would not have known who Jesus was except that, "the one who sent me to baptize with water told me" (John 1:33). Jesus states that John's baptism was "from heaven" (Matt 21:25). On one occasion the chief priests and elders asked Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things?" Jesus answered, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism – was it from heaven, or from men?" (Mark 11:28,29). Jesus' question implied that his authority, like that of John's baptism, came from God.

The Pharisees would not accept either Christ's divine authority or John's baptism. On one occasion they asked John, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (John 1:24-25). The prophet Ezekiel (36:25-33) had described a cleansing to be performed by the Messiah. How could John baptize if he was not the Messiah? And if he was performing some other kind of baptism, he was out of line because he had not come to them for permission to do so. "You brood of vipers!" John thundered. "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (Matt 3:7) John's baptism was the means to escape God's wrath, but simply going through the ceremony of baptism would not be enough. What was needed was repentance (Matthew 3:6), turning from sin to cleansing and forgiveness by God's grace. John once told the Pharisees and Sadducees, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (Matthew 3:11). John's baptism presupposed repentance, and he would not baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because they would not repent. John's baptism called for a change of heart that included sorrow for sin and a determination to lead a holy life. The Christ to whom John pointed would deliver the repentant person from sin's penalty. Tax collectors had shown their willingness to repent by accepting John's baptism, but the Pharisees and Sadducees showed their rejection of God's message by refusing to be baptized.

People have explained the significance of John's baptism in a variety of ways. Some have said that it was simply an opportunity for people to confess their guilt. Others that it was merely an outward expression of an inner change of heart. Others that it only prepared a person for entry into the kingdom of heaven. Some have said it was only a type of Jesus' baptism. But John's baptism brought the forgiveness of sins. It is described as a baptism for the "remission of sins." It was a baptism that was connected to Christ. John pointed to Christ as the one "more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie" (Mk 1:7). John told people, "The reason I came baptizing with water was that he (Christ) might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:31). To those familiar with the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah John said, "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). When some of John's disciples resented Jesus' success, John pointed to Jesus as the bridegroom and spoke of himself as merely a friend of the bridegroom. "He must become greater; I must become less The one who comes from heaven is above all Whoever believes

in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life” (John 3:30-36). Much later, when Jesus came to the place where John had been baptizing, people came to Jesus and said, “Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true. And in that place many believed in Jesus” (John 10:41).

On the basis of this Scriptural evidence Gaylin Schmeling concludes:

Since John’s baptism gave the forgiveness of sins, it was a means of grace, that is, a means through which the blessings of salvation come, even as Christian baptism is a means of grace. There is, therefore, no essential difference between John’s baptism and Christian baptism.²

But if we say that John’s baptism was a sacrament that brought the forgiveness of sins, how do we explain what happened at Ephesus? On one occasion when Paul came to Ephesus he found some disciples and asked if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. “They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied. Paul said, ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:2-5). Some have concluded from this incident that John’s baptism was merely preparatory and provisional, stressing man’s sinfulness and creating a sense of need for the gospel, that John’s baptism looked forward to Jesus, who by his death would make possible the forgiveness of sins, and that John’s baptism of promise would be superseded by Jesus’ baptism of fulfillment. But this view fails to consider that John’s baptism is described as a baptism “for the remission of sins.” Might we not conclude that the people in Ephesus had not really received John’s baptism of repentance that pointed to Christ, but rather had received a kind of Jewish washing of purification that they thought was John’s baptism?

Why did Jesus Submit to John’s Baptism?

If John’s baptism was for repentance, why did Jesus, the perfect Son of God who needed no repentance, come to John to be baptized? Several reasons for Jesus’ baptism by John can be suggested. When John tried to deter him, saying he needed to be baptized by Jesus, Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). “Righteousness” here probably has the sense of “the redeeming activity of God” as in Jesus’ words, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). Regarding this purpose of Jesus’ baptism by John, Theodore Hartwig writes:

By submitting to John’s baptism at the Jordan as he submitted to the knife of circumcision eight days after birth, Jesus proclaimed his calling and work. He is the Son of Man, the representative and substitute for all people. In his perfect sinlessness he clothed himself with the guilt of all humanity and cancelled it on the cross.³

By his baptism Jesus identified himself with our sin and became our substitute, although he himself needed no repentance or cleansing from sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus’ baptism at the hands of John the Baptist also revealed that Jesus was consecrated to God and that God officially approved him, as shown by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and the words of God the Father spoken from heaven.

² Gaylin R. Schmeling, *The People’s Bible Teachings, Baptism* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 15.

³ Theodore J. Hartwig, *The Picture Catechism Explained*. (New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1994), 83.

In the Old Testament men were installed in the offices of prophet, priest, or king by being anointed with oil. At his baptism Christ was anointed publicly by the Holy Spirit as our Prophet, Priest, and King. All of God's requirements for the promised Savior from sin were fully met in Jesus. As Prophet he would proclaim the message of God's grace and forgiveness. As Priest he would bring the perfect sacrifice for sin and would himself be that sacrifice. As King he would rule in the hearts of his believers and in heaven he would rule eternally.

Luther says that Christ's baptism by John assures us that God has honored baptism. By way of analogy he refers to the parental estate and civil authority. He says that if we look at these people in authority over us "they look no different from Turks and heathen." We might wonder why we should honor these people above others. But Luther says God in the Fourth Commandment has commanded that we honor them. This commandment, he says, is like "a golden chain about his neck" or "a crown on his head" that shows me why I should honor this particular person. Regarding baptism Luther then says:

In the same manner, and even much more, you should honor and exalt baptism on account of the Word, since God himself has honored it by words and deeds and has confirmed it by wonders from heaven. Do you think it was a jest that the heavens opened when Christ allowed himself to be baptized, that the Holy Spirit descended visibly, and that the divine glory and majesty were manifested everywhere?⁴

Other reasons for Jesus' baptism by John include that John was thereby announcing that the Messiah had arrived and that his ministry was beginning. It can even be suggested that Jesus' baptism was an example for his disciples to follow.⁵

The Central Role Baptism Played in the Early History of the Church

Jesus' earthly ministry began with his baptism by John. It concluded with the Great Commission to baptize all nations. Because of Jesus' command, baptism played a central role in the early history of the Christian Church.

Throughout the book of Acts, beginning with Pentecost, baptism is connected with preaching and is associated with repentance and faith. In chapter 8 Philip preached the good news of the kingdom of God to people who had been amazed by the sorcery of Simon. When the people heard about the name of Jesus "they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized" (Acts 8:12,13). Later, as Philip rode in the chariot with the eunuch of Ethiopia, the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36) and Philip baptized him. After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Saul was baptized by Ananias (Acts 9:18). Later, Paul in speaking to the mob in Jerusalem, adds that Ananias had told him, "Now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). "After the people at the home of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit, Peter ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:48). After the Lord opened the heart of Lydia of Philippi to respond to Paul's message, she and the members of her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). Also in Philippi, Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to the jailer and all the others in his house. After the jailer had washed the wounds of Paul and Silas, he and all his family were baptized (Acts 16:33). In Corinth many people who heard Paul believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8). And as mentioned above, in Ephesus those who had been disciples of John the Baptist were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5).

Clearly, baptism was not just plain water in the minds of the early Christians. They administered it because Christ had commanded it. But they also used it realizing the wonderful blessings it offered.

⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 439:21.

⁵ *Concordia Self-Study Bible*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 1453.

II. The Blessings of Baptism

In the Small Catechism Luther says, “Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.” Luther then identifies this promise in the words of Jesus recorded 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). Those words are of course preceded by Jesus’ command to “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” During his earthly ministry Jesus had worked primarily among the Jews. Now, since he had accomplished the world’s redemption, this wonderful message was to be preached to all people.

Luther says that in baptism God gives to all people the blessings Christ earned by his perfect life and his innocent sufferings and death. These blessings include the forgiveness of sins. To the crowd on Pentecost Peter said, “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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38,39). Baptism actually offers and gives forgiveness of sins. The preposition “for” indicates purpose. Baptism is “for” the forgiveness of sin. Those who are baptized “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit works through baptism to produce faith in the person who receives this forgiveness as a gift. And these blessings of baptism are also for children and for non-Jews living in faraway lands.

The apostle Paul personally experienced these blessings of baptism. In Damascus Ananias told the recently converted Saul, “Get up, be baptized and *wash your sins away*, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16). The water of baptism is not just symbolic of cleansing; it actually washes sins away.

The blessings of Christ’s redemption include deliverance from the power of death and the devil. Paul reminds the Roman Christians that baptism gives them the blessings of Christ’s death on the cross, “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were *baptized into his death?*” (Romans 6:3). The writer to the Hebrews says that the blessings of Christ in baptism include deliverance from the power of death and the devil, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that *by his death* he might *destroy* him who holds the power of death—that is, *the devil*— and *free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death*” (Hebrews 2:14, 15).

Baptism is truly a means of grace for in it God offers and seals to us all the blessings Christ won for us. Christ himself assures us that by being “born again... of water and the Spirit (we will) enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:3,5). The Bible assures us that through “the washing of rebirth... (we have) been justified by his grace.. (and) become heirs... of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7). Baptism comforts us with the assurance that we are born again, that we are justified children of God, and that we are heirs of eternal life in heaven.

In the *Large Catechism* Luther speaks about the benefits baptism brings.

To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of baptism is to save. No one is baptized in order to become a prince, but as the words say, to “be saved.” To be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever.⁶

These benefits, he says are received only by faith.

Since these blessings are offered and promised in the words which accompany the water, they cannot be received unless we believe them whole-heartedly. Without faith baptism is of no use,

⁶ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 439:24,25.

although in itself it is an infinite, divine treasure. So this single expression, “He who believes,” is so potent that it excludes and rejects all works that we may do with the intention of meriting salvation through them. For it is certain that whatever is not faith contributes nothing toward salvation, and receives nothing.⁷

Luther concludes,

Thus you see plainly that baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith.⁸

When Luther in the *Small Catechism* says that “baptism works forgiveness of sin” he means that the guilt of all sin, even original sin, is removed. In its criticism of Article II of the Augsburg Confession, the Roman Confutation charged Luther with saying that original sin remains after baptism. In response Melancthon says,

Our opponents know what Luther meant by this statement that original sin remains after baptism. He has always written that baptism removes the guilt of original sin, even though concupiscence remains.⁹

Regarding this matter, Luther, in a sermon on Luke 11 said,

When the Samaritan in Luke 10 poured oil and wine into the wounds of the injured man, he did not immediately make him well but took him to the inn and let the host take care of him until he should return. So all sins are indeed removed through baptism, but in such a way that God does not impute them. However, they are not gone; one must continue to heal them constantly as one has begun to do. When we die, all will be completely healed.¹⁰

Perhaps Luther wrote as he did because of his acquaintance with the works of St. Augustine. In a sermon on John 6, Augustine condemns those who are unthankful for grace and attribute spiritual powers to man by nature, and then, interpreting the parable of the good Samaritan allegorically, he says:

True it is, when man was created he received great power of freewill; but he lost it by sin. He fell into death, became infirm, was left in the way by the robbers half dead; the Samaritan, which is by interpretation keeper, passing by lifted him up on his own beast; he is still being brought to the inn. Why is he lifted up? He is still in process of curing. “But,” he will say, “it is enough for me that in baptism I received remission of all sins.” Because *iniquity was blotted out*, was therefore infirmity brought to an end? “I received,” says he, “remission of all sins.” It is quite true. *All sins were blotted out in the Sacrament of baptism, all entirely, of words, deeds, thoughts, all were blotted out.* But this is the “oil and wine” which was poured in by the way. Ye remember, beloved Brethren, that man who was wounded by the robbers, and half dead by the way, how he was strengthened, by receiving oil and wine for his wounds. His error indeed was already pardoned, and yet his weakness is in process of healing in the inn. The inn, if ye recognize it, is the Church. In the time present, an inn, because in life we are passing by: it will be a home, whence we shall

⁷ Ibid., LC 440:34.

⁸ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 441:37.

⁹ Ibid., AAC 105:35.

¹⁰ *What Luther Says Volumes I-III*, edited by Ewald M. Plass. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1298:4161.

never remove, when we shall have got in perfect health unto the kingdom of heaven. Meanwhile receive we gladly our treatment in the inn, and weak as we still are, glory we not of sound health: lest through our pride we gain nothing else, but never for all our treatment to be cured.¹¹

In the same sermon Augustine says:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.” What benefits? Tell them, enumerate them, render thanks. What benefits? “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” This took place in baptism.¹²

III. The Power of Baptism

God promises wonderful blessings in baptism, but reason looks at the water, hears the simple words of the baptismal formula, and wonders how God’s power can be present to do such wonderful things. Luther says it is at this point that we need to become like little children.

Reason cannot comprehend the articles of faith, including the doctrine of the Sacrament of baptism. Therefore the order is: You must become a child and say: I do not understand this. I do indeed see nothing but water and how it is being poured over a little child. But I will gladly be a fool and a child, and I will believe him when he says that through the Word, baptism has the power and might of regeneration and forgiveness of sins.¹³

In the *Small Catechism* Luther explains this power of baptism.

It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God’s Word which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God’s Word the water is just plain water and not baptism. But with this Word it is baptism. God’s Word makes it a washing through which God graciously forgives our sin and grants us rebirth and a new life through the Holy Spirit.

Luther says this is based on what

St. Paul says in Titus, chapter 3, “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.”

Baptism has the power to offer such great blessings because the Holy Spirit is in it working through the living Word of God connected with the water. Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water *through the word*” (Ephesians 5:25, 26). In his first epistle Peter says, “For you have been *born again*, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, *through the living and enduring word of God*” (1 Peter 1:23).

Regarding this power of the Word of God in Baptism Luther says,

¹¹ http://www.refugeofsinner.com/sermons/Sermon_LXXXI_St_Augustine.html

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *What Luther Says Volumes I-III*, edited by Ewald M. Plass. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 486:1440.

It is not simply common water, but water comprehended in God's Word and commandment and sanctified by them. It is nothing else than a divine water, not that the water in itself is nobler than other water, but that God's Word and commandment are added to it.¹⁴

The power of baptism lies not in the water but in the Word of God with the water. We speak of baptism as a means of grace because it is not just plain water, but it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word. In a sermon on baptism, Luther likens the Word in the water to a delicious beverage. It consists chiefly of water, he says, but with the water are sweetening agents and delicious herbs. These dominate the water so that one does not taste the water. In baptism, Luther concludes, we have a far more precious water that has been "sugared through and through with God's name."¹⁵

In a sermon for the Sunday after Easter, Luther employs a different imagery to explain the power of baptism.

Hence there is now in baptism this efficacy of the blood of Christ. That is the true caustic soap which not only removes the uncleanness of the outer man, but penetrates to the inner nature, consuming its impurities and cleansing them away, that the heart may become pure in God's sight. Thus, the blood of Christ is so effectively mingled with the baptismal water that we must not regard it as mere water, but water beautifully dyed with the precious crimson blood of our dear Savior, Christ... What makes baptism so precious, so holy and essential is the mingling and union of the water with the blood of Christ; to be baptized into Christ with water is really to be washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ.¹⁶

Scholastic theologians before the Reformation (Thomas Aquinas in particular) proposed that the water of baptism is made a spiritual water that obliterates the sin of the person to whom it is applied. Such an idea did away with the need for God's Word and faith. Our Lutheran confessions, on the other hand, insist that the water remains ordinary water, even as God's Son took on ordinary human flesh and blood. Jesus did not have a deified human nature or a mixture of divine and human natures, but a true human nature, yet without sin. So the water of baptism does not become "holy" water. Rather, God's Word makes it a washing through which God graciously forgives our sin and grants us rebirth and a new life through the Holy Spirit.

We also need to distinguish between the activity of God's Word in the water and faith that trusts this Word in the water. It is true that baptism is of no use without faith, but baptism does not receive its blessing from faith, nor does the blessing of baptism leave if there is no faith. If this were so, baptism would be no sacrament but only an outward ceremony to signify that whoever obeys the command to baptize is a Christian. In his Large Catechism Luther says, "My faith does not constitute baptism but receives it."¹⁷ Then he continues:

Therefore only presumptuous and stupid persons draw the conclusion that where there is no true faith, there also can be no true baptism. Likewise I might argue, "If I have no true faith, then Christ is nothing." Or again, "If I am not obedient, then father, mother, and magistrates are nothing." Is it correct to conclude that when anybody does not do what he should, the thing that he misuses has no existence or value? My friend, rather invert the argument and conclude, precisely because baptism has been wrongly received, it has existence and value. The saying

¹⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 438:14.

¹⁵ Quoted in Theodore J. Hartwig, *The Picture Catechism Explained*. (New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1994), 82.

¹⁶ *The Sermons of Martin Luther Volume VII* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1983), 243.

¹⁷ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 443:53.

goes... “Misuse does not destroy the substance, but confirms its existence.” Gold remains no less gold if a harlot wears it in sin and shame.”¹⁸

In the Smalcald Articles Luther rejects the idea that the water of baptism is somehow spiritualized to become holy water that magically washes away sin. He also rejects the idea of the scholastic Duns Scotus and the Franciscans who, anticipating the Reformed, turned baptism into a symbol. Luther says that the power lies in the Word of God alone.

Baptism is nothing else than the Word of God in water, commanded by the institution of Christ; or as Paul says, “the washing of water with the word” or, again, as Augustine puts it, “The Word is added to the element and it becomes a sacrament.” Therefore we do not agree with Thomas and the Dominicans who forget the Word (God’s institution) and say that God has joined to the water a spiritual power which, through the water, washes away sin. Nor do we agree with Scotus and the Franciscans who teach that baptism washes away sin through the assistance of the divine will, as if the washing takes place only through God’s will and not at all through the Word and the water.¹⁹

New Birth in Baptism

The water of baptism does not become a spiritual water to obliterate sin. Nor does it become a holy water that magically washes away sin. Rather, the powerful Word of God connected with water in baptism brings about a new birth, a miraculous and wonderful spiritual birth. In his epistle to Titus, Paul refers to “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Some have questioned whether this is a reference to baptism, but in response we can say that baptism is the only washing the Lord has instructed his church to use. Paul says, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 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*, 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” (Titus 3:4-7). This washing of rebirth and renewal is poured out on us in Jesus our Savior into whose death and resurrection we are incorporated through this washing. We were dead in sin, but the washing of baptism gives us new life. It washes us clean. It regenerates us.

In a Christmas sermon on Titus 3 Luther says,

How beautifully the apostle in these strong words extols the grace of God bestowed in baptism! He refers to baptism as a washing, whereby not our feet only, not our hands, but our whole bodies are cleansed. Baptism perfectly and instantaneously cleanses and saves.²⁰

In a sermon on the parable of the wedding banquet, Luther speaks about how Christ the bridegroom deals with his bride and in that connection refers to Titus 3.

This is a marriage that is very unequal. But what does the bridegroom do? He is so fastidious that he will not dwell with his bride until he first adorns her in the highest degree. How is that done? ...He instituted a washing; that washing is baptism, with which he washes her. More than this, he has given to her his Word; in that she believes and through her faith she becomes a bride. The

¹⁸ Ibid., LC 444:58,59.

¹⁹ Ibid., SA 310:1-3

²⁰ *The Sermons of Martin Luther Volume VI* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1983), 154.

bridegroom comes with all his treasures; but I come with all my sins, with all my misery and heart-griefs.²¹

Similarly, the Formula of Concord says that regeneration in baptism is the work of God alone, for “to be born anew, to receive inwardly a new heart, mind, and spirit, is solely the work of the Holy Spirit.”²²

It was this powerful regeneration of the Holy Spirit in baptism that Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand. When Nicodemus told Jesus that “no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2), Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (verse 3). Whether the Greek is translated “born again” or “born from above” makes little difference because it is clear that Jesus was insisting that those who are dead in trespasses and sins need a new birth. Jesus emphasized to Nicodemus that as difficult as it is to chart the wind or master it, so impossible is it to harness the Spirit’s power. But the Spirit, Jesus said, comes through the Word. Through the Word, God created all things. So he uses the Word to re-create those who are dead in sin. He combines that Word with water and as Robert Kolb says, “Baptism becomes the watersack from which new life emerges, as those who were dead in sin are born anew, as God gives new life from above.”²³ By referring to baptism as a “new birth” Christ was emphasizing that new life is God’s gift and that just as we had nothing to do with our physical birth so we had nothing to do with our spiritual rebirth in baptism.

Article IV of the Apology refers to these words of Jesus in John 3 to prove that our works do not merit the forgiveness of sins, and that we cannot be accounted righteous before God because of the righteousness of reason. “If we must be born again through the Holy Spirit, then the righteousness of reason does not justify us before God.”²⁴

Baptism Saves

The blessings of Christ in baptism include eternal salvation. Comparing the water of baptism to the waters of the flood, Peter says, “In it (Noah’s ark) only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes *baptism* that now *saves you* also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 3:20,21). As the waters of the flood saved Noah and his family from death by drowning, so the water of baptism saves us from eternal punishment in hell. God acts in baptism and assures us that we are saved. Because we are baptized, we can stand before him with a clear conscience and without fear knowing that all the blessings of Christ’s redemption are ours.

Paul confirms that baptism saves when he tells the Galatians that in baptism they put on Christ’s merits and righteousness through the faith which it creates in the heart: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:16-17). Paul expresses the same truth in Colossians 2:11,12 when he explains that in baptism God puts our sinful flesh to death by burying it with Christ and that we arise to new life by the power of Christ’s resurrection.

Luther often speaks about the power of baptism to save. For example he says,

Christ has saved us once for all, and in a twofold manner: First, he has done all that is necessary for our salvation--conquered and destroyed sin, death and hell, leaving no more there for anyone to do. Secondly, he has conveyed all these blessings unto us in baptism. He who confidently believes Christ has accomplished these things, immediately, in the twinkling of an eye, possesses

²¹ *The Sermons of Martin Luther Volume V* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1983), 233.

²² Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), FC 526:26.

²³ Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 217.

²⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), AAC 111:31.

salvation. All his sins and the reality of death and hell are removed. Nothing more than such faith is necessary to salvation.²⁵

Luther continues by describing life after baptism as an anticipation of heaven.

Take note, God pours out upon us in baptism super-abundant blessings for the purpose of excluding the works whereby men foolishly presume to merit heaven and gain happiness. Yes, dear friend, you must first possess heaven and salvation before you can do good works. Works never merit heaven; heaven is conferred purely of grace. Good works are to be performed without any thought of merit, simply for the benefit of one's neighbor and for the honor of God; until the body, too, shall be released from sin, death and hell. The true Christian's whole life after baptism is but a waiting for the manifestation of the salvation already his. He is certainly in full possession of the eternal life yet concealed in faith.²⁶

Forgiveness in Baptism

The power of baptism is such that in it we receive the complete forgiveness of all our sins. On Pentecost Peter told the crowd, "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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38). In baptism they would receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These blessings would be for their children as well.

Luther says that baptism, together with the Lord's Supper, individualizes the forgiveness of sins.

To preach forgiveness of sins means nothing else than to absolve and to loose from sins. This is done also in baptism and in the Sacrament of the Altar, for these were likewise ordained to exhibit the forgiveness of sin to us and to assure us of it. Therefore being baptized or receiving the Sacrament of the Altar is also an absolution. Here forgiveness is promised and awarded each person in particular in the name and at the command of Christ.²⁷

IV. The Meaning of Baptism For Our Daily Lives

In baptism God gives us new birth, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation in Christ. Since this is so, baptism will necessarily have a profound effect on our daily lives. In the Small Catechism Luther explains what baptizing with water means for us:

It means that our old Adam with his evil deeds and desires should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and die, and that day by day a new man should arise, as from the dead, to live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever.

Luther bases this on what St. Paul says in Romans, chapter 6, "We were buried with Christ 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."

²⁵ *The Sermons of Martin Luther Volume VI* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1983), 151.

²⁶ *The Sermons of Martin Luther Volume VI* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1983), 151.

²⁷ *What Luther Says Volumes I-III*, edited by Ewald M. Plass. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 4:4.

God Kills and Creates New Life in Baptism

Baptism means that in our daily lives we are dead to sin and alive to righteousness. In two of his epistles, Paul links baptism with Christ's death and resurrection. In Romans chapters 3-5, Paul discusses the message of justification in Christ. In Romans 6 he moves to the subject of baptism and demonstrates how God's grace actualizes itself in the lives of believers. Paul had asserted that where sin increased, God's grace in Christ increased all the more (5:20). Paul realized that some might conclude from this that they could go on sinning, thinking that the more they sinned the more God's grace would increase. Paul heads off this perverse logic by telling the Romans in no uncertain terms: "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:2) It does not make sense to go on sinning because *baptism* has changed our identity from sinner to child of God. But, his readers might ask, how did we die to sin? Paul answers that question with another question: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (verse 3) God brings sinners into death by joining them in baptism to Christ's death. As Robert Kolb says, "He buries sinners in Christ's tomb, the only place in his universe where he no longer looks."²⁸ In baptism God crucifies our Old Adam and causes us to die to sin. Baptism isn't just a reminder; it actually does something. It connects us with Christ, with his death and burial. "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" (verse 4). Christ's death and resurrection enable us to lead a new life, and in baptism we are given this power and ability to please God and do his will. In the verses that follow in Romans chapter 6, Paul then describes this new life as becoming an heir with Christ, suffering with Christ, and being glorified with Christ.

The meaning of baptism for our daily lives also occupies a key position in Paul's epistle to the Colossians. In chapters 1:1-10 and 2:9-10 Paul discusses God's action in Christ. In 2:16-4:6 he discusses the new life that those raised in Christ will lead. Between those two sections, in 2:11-15, Paul writes about the new circumcision (baptism) that brings God's elect into his family. "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11,12). The old circumcision had brought the Israelites into God's family, but "the circumcision done by Christ," baptism, has now taken its place, Paul says. The new circumcision, baptism, has resulted in the death of the "sinful nature" because God nailed the indictment against it to Christ's cross. Freed from death by Christ's resurrection, the baptized person now has new life in Christ. Immorality is dead and godliness lives. As Robert Kolb says, "Baptism is a preenactment of Judgment Day, where God puts sinners to death. Baptism is a reenactment of Creation Day, where God brings us to life through Christ's resurrection."²⁹

Made Holy in Baptism

Baptism sanctifies our daily lives. To the Ephesians, Paul says that Christ makes his church holy with the washing of water by the Word. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, *cleansing her by the washing with water through the word*, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-26). For the sake of Christ's sacrifice, God has made us holy; he has declared us righteous. We stand before God completely cleansed. For Christ's sake God sees no stain, wrinkle or any kind of blemish of sin. We are completely holy and blameless before him. All of this is ours in baptism, in "the washing with water through

²⁸ Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 216.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

the word.” The meaning of baptism for our daily lives is that since we have been washed clean will want to stay clean in all they do. We will want to “lead chaste and decent lives in thought, word and deed.”

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul tells his readers that “the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God” (verse 9) and reminds them that some of them had been sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, slanderers, etc. Then he says, “But 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). Like the Corinthians we too were washed clean from the guilt of sin in baptism. Having been cleansed in this washing of regeneration, how can we wallow in sin any longer?

Baptism Makes Disciples

Baptism means that in our daily lives we will want to live as Christ’s disciples. In the Great Commission Jesus says, “Therefore go and make disciples (μαθητεύσατε aorist, active, imperative) of all nations, baptizing (baptizontej present, active, participle; literally ‘by’ baptizing) them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19). Baptism makes us “disciples,” that is, followers of Jesus, pupils who are eager to learn more about what he has done for us and who are determined to do his will in our lives, who are eager to do everything he has commanded.

Baptized into Christ’s Body

In baptism God brings us into his family. To the Corinthians Paul says, “For we were all *baptized* by one Spirit *into one body*—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13). In baptism the Holy Spirit produces faith in people and makes them members of Christ’s body, the church. In Christ there are no racial or cultural distinctions. There are no social distinctions. Through baptism, God gives the Holy Spirit to live in people of all races, cultures, and social classes so that their lives might overflow with the fruits of the Spirit.

By means of one baptism the Holy Spirit has created one body, calling believers to a common hope under a common Lord as Paul writes to the Ephesians, “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 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). In baptism all believers are made members of the body of Christ, the family of God.

Putting on Christ

Those baptized into God’s family have put on Christ as a garment. Paul writes to the Galatians, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were *baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*” (Galatians 3:26-27). Being clothed with Christ means not only being righteous in God’s sight, but it also means daily striving to live a Christ-like life, a life as holy as Jesus is holy, as holy as God has declared us to be for Jesus’ sake.

Paul describes this Christ-like life in his epistle to the Colossians. He says that we who have been buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him, now seek to set our minds on heavenly things (3:2), and to put to death things that belong to our earthly nature: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (verse 5). Clothed in Christ in baptism we seek to “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (verse 10) and to dress ourselves in the garments of “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (verse 12). We seek to bear with each other, forgive as the Lord has

forgiven us, put on love, let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, be thankful, let the word of Christ dwell in us, and in everything to give thanks to God the Father through Jesus (verses 13-17).

Conclusion

Baptism is life, now and eternally. In baptism God gives us all the blessings of Christ's redemption. He establishes a covenant with us, assuring each of us individually that we are born again as his children and that he is our Father now and forever. Realizing what God does for us in baptism we surely want to "live it large." We want to rejoice in the salvation baptism brings us, to live the new life baptism gives us, to be the new people baptism makes us, to clothe ourselves in Christ, to realize the joy of living a life cleansed of sin, and to appreciate the family of believers into which God brings us.

Living our baptisms "large" can keep us fully occupied every day for the rest of our lives. In the *Large Catechism* Luther wrote:

In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what baptism promises and brings – victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts.³⁰

Too often, perhaps, there are those who tend to think of baptism as simply a church ritual that publicly introduces a new child to the congregation and offers an opportunity for family and friends to gather. In the *Large Catechism* Luther warns against thus disregarding the true meaning and purpose of baptism:

It is solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we shall not be saved. We are not to regard it as an indifferent matter like putting on a new red coat. It is of the greatest importance that we regard baptism as excellent, glorious, and exalted... No matter how external it may be, here stand God's Word and command which have instituted, established, and confirmed baptism. What God institutes and commands cannot be useless. It is a most precious thing, even though to all appearances it may not be worth a straw.³¹

May it be our prayer that we, and those we serve, not think of baptism as simply a church ritual or even worse as something useless, but increasingly learn to treasure baptism. In a lecture on God's appearance to Abraham in Genesis 17, Luther said,

I would not want God to speak to me from heaven or to appear to me. But I would want – and this is my daily prayer – that I might duly honor and truly esteem the gift of my baptism and thank God for it... Alas, proud and secure spirits despise these things. And we, too, do not accord these common appearances of God in the Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper the place of importance which we should accord them.³²

Surely we do not want to be "indifferent" regarding baptism, or think of it as "not worth a straw." Surely we do not want to be like those who "despise these things." Rather with Luther we want to regard baptism as "excellent, glorious, and exalted." We want to think of baptism as "a most precious thing." We want to treasure baptism, to "duly honor and truly esteem" this wonderful gift from God and always "thank God for it."

³⁰ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 441:41.

³¹ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 437:6-8.

³² *What Luther Says Volumes I-III*, edited by Ewald M. Plass. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 919:2875.

Questions for Discussion

1. In speaking about the rich gift of God baptism truly is, Luther writes, “Alas, proud and secure spirits despise these things. And we, too, do not accord these common appearances of God in the Word, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper the place of importance which we should accord them.”³³ List any evidence in our lives (individually and corporately as a church body) of this tendency to despise God’s simple and yet powerful means.
2. List as many blessings of baptism as you can.
3. Compose and be prepared to share a list of at least five ways by which the significance and importance of baptism can be emphasized in the church, school and home.
4. When we do teach or preach on baptism, we seem more often to speak of the “justification” blessings of baptism and not so much about the “sanctification” blessings of baptism. What practical benefits in our daily lives and ministries come from stressing also the “sanctification” blessings of baptism?
5. God has not told us why water is the visible element in baptism. Based on such Scripture verses as 1 Corinthians 1:27-29; Ezekiel 36:25,26; and Romans 6:4, what might be some reasons? Can you suggest any more?
6. In a “spiritual” postmodern world, ancient ritual and mystery seem to have an appeal to many people. Discuss the opportunities and/or dangers this presents us in ministry.
7. How do Old Testament allusions to baptism (the flood, the exodus, circumcision, and ceremonial washings) provide us with further insights into baptism?
8. Luther once wrote, “A Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever continued.”³⁴ Discuss what Luther meant.

³³ *What Luther Says Volumes I-III*, edited by Ewald M. Plass (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 919, #2875

³⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), LC 445:65

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