

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who fulfilled all righteousness, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

I feel like our timing is off by a week. We had the glorious Baptism of Eleanor last week and the story of the Baptism of Jesus this week. Seems a little like our lectionary is off by a week... I my life I've learned that all things happen on God's time, not ours... So, I get to talk about Baptism two weeks in a row!

The story of the Baptism of Jesus is so well known. What more can be said? I mean remember just last week when little Eleanor was all dressed in her bright white dress and she looked so adorable. Her family was all here and we sprinkled her with some water and the Holy Spirit filled her body with God's own gifts and with power. In our Baptism, we are adopted into God's family and become inheritors of all of God's promises. The chief promise we can cling to our whole lives is that of eternal life. Is that all there is? I hope for a better life after we die? Please tell me there's something more... Please tell me it's not only about what happens after we die... Jesus says he came to be Baptized by John to "Fulfill all Righteousness." So, with Baptism comes also the forgiveness of our sins. I once heard a preacher say in Baptism the old Adam in us dies to Sin. Unfortunately, after the Baptism is over and the family has gone home, the Devil returns and gives CPR to him...

Most of us see Baptism as this beautiful ritual we do in the Church for cute babies. I wonder how many moms and dads would bring their cutie pies to the font if they knew they were going to kill their little bundle of joy in the water of Baptism... Thanks be to God the death isn't the forever kind. The death we experience at the font is a death of our old sinful self and a rising out of the water as a new creature, a child of God, infused with God's own Holy Spirit. Saint Paul put it this way when he wrote to the Church in Rome, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Baptism changes everything for us. We are not the same people after we're Baptized.

Once there was a Lutheran Pastor who served a Church in Eastern Tennessee. As you might know that region is the heart of the Bible Belt and almost exclusively Baptist. Now our Baptist brothers and sisters in Christ, believe that total immersion under the water is the only way for a Baptism to be effective. In that area of the country, even the dogs and cats are Baptist... So, one day a very tall, nearly six foot tall woman came to this Lutheran Pastor asking to be Baptized and to join the Lutheran Church. She told the Pastor that she wanted to be Baptized "all the way," meaning she wanted no part of sprinkling water over her

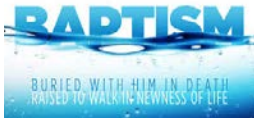
forehead, she wanted total immersion. So, the Pastor agreed and they met at the river in mid-July. At that time of the year the river was at it's lowest and as I said, this woman was very tall. Now, add to her height the fact that she had long hair all



piled up on top of her hear.

(SLIDE) Think Marge Simpson...

(SLIDE) So the Pastor began the Baptism and as he



lowered her into the river she reacted to the cold water by lifting the back of her head. When she did this her beehive hair stayed out of the water.

The Pastor was already heading to the riverbank when she called him back. She said her hair was still dry and she wanted to be Baptized all over. So, the Pastor redid the Baptism. When she was being dunked the second time she reacted in the same way. So, they had to redo the Baptism a third time. This time the pastor put his hand on her forehead and pushed her, hair and all under the water. She was finally fully Baptized from head to toe. The congregation gathered on the riverbank thought this was pretty funny and were all laughing about how it took three times to get her done. I thought this was an interesting story because most of us want to keep some part of ourselves out of the Baptismal waters. For some it's our money. We don't want to give up control of our wallets or purses. For some it's bad habits or our moral superiority. We all have something we hope stayed dry when we were Baptized. What are you holding back from the Baptismal waters?

The witnesses of Jesus Christ tell us Jesus held nothing back. He gave all for you and for me...



**(SLIDE)** Another Baptismal story comes from the country of Tanzania, in Africa. The custom over there is such that when the tribal leader decides to do something, the rest of the tribe follows their leader. So, after many months or probably years of teaching and asking, finally the Tribal leader decided he wanted to be Baptized. After that, the rest of the village followed. They all gathered at the river and when it came time for a young boy to be Baptized he entered the river and the Pastor immersed him in the water. As he was coming out of the water, he yelled, “I’m alive! I’m alive!” When the missionary asked the boy what he was doing, he explained that when the missionary said people were “buried with Christ in the waters of baptism,” he thought people were actually killed through the process. This boy thought he was literally going to be killed, yet he went along with the Baptism anyway... When I first heard this story I chuckled to myself until I realized how haunting the scene really was. Then I wondered how many of us would have wanted to be Baptized if we really thought we would die in the process...



**(SLIDE)** Jesus certainly did not need baptism. He did it to show us the attitude of obedience, faith and willingness God desires for us. Jesus got baptized to identify with us, whom he came to save. It

might come as a surprise to some of you, but Baptism didn't start with John the Baptist. It actually began as a purification ritual for Gentile converts to Judaism.



It symbolized the cleansing of past sins and the rising of a new person of the Jewish faith. When we visited the Holy Land several years ago we saw many Mikvehs or Jewish baptismal fonts. (SLIDE)

Here's what they look like...

Jesus certainly did not need to have any sins forgiven. So why was he Baptized? He did it to fulfill God's promise of redemption for all those who enter the waters of baptism with him. Through the waters of baptism, we are so united with Jesus the Christ, that we share in his righteousness; we share in his death, and we share in the glory of His resurrection. Clearly, Jesus did not enter the waters of John's baptism for his own redemption, but to so identify with us, that we might come to know him, and through his submission to the will of God, receive the grace of God for our own redemption. The Baptism of Jesus was different in one important way from every other baptism performed by John.

(SLIDE) Our Scripture says when Jesus was coming out of the water the Holy Spirit, like a dove rested on him and God spoke from heaven. In Jesus' Baptism the Holy Spirit took over and God's will was made known. This is my



Son, the one I love!

Luther often proclaimed that as Christians, we should always remember our baptism, in the sense of daily dying to self, and rising to do the will of God – daily repenting of our sins, and seeking God’s forgiveness – and so we should. Every time we remember our own Baptism we are reassured of the grace and presence of God in our lives, as we face whatever comes our way. Our baptism assures us that Christ identifies with us and walks with us on our life’s journey. Some of us make



the sign of the cross several times during worship. Others think that’s too Catholic and don’t. Your salvation is assured either way, but I want to tell you why I make the sign of the cross every time I think of it. It’s a remembrance of my Baptism. It’s a reminder to myself that I am Baptized and I’m walking still wet all over from the experience of being named and claimed by God to be God’s child.

**(SLIDE)** May you walk wet from the waters of your own Baptism. May every part of your life be drowned and raised to live with and for the Lord Jesus Christ. May your Baptism be the rock you cling to when the world rains liquid do-do on you and keep you from giving in to temptation or giving up on life. May you rise each day, like that young boy in Tanzania shouting to the mountain tops, I’m Alive! I’m Alive! Thanks be to God we are alive! Amen.