

EPIPHANY 2
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
LEMMON, SD
JANUARY 23, 2017

**THE ONGOING BENEFITS OF BAPTISM
(Romans 6:1-11)**

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

We begin our meditation today with a bit of a theological test. It's a one point test, so you will either fail it miserably or get 100%. Are you ready? Here we go:

Raise your hand if you were baptized.

If you are raising your hand then you just failed the test. While Roman Catholicism, Reformed, and Baptist theology would all find themselves in agreement with that statement, in the Lutheran Church we don't speak of Baptism in the past tense, but in the present tense – not “I was baptized,” but “I am baptized.” Those other denominations find agreement with that statement because, to one degree or another, they all think of Baptism as an action on their part that is required for entrance into God's kingdom. So they look back and check that “good work” off their list as completed. In the Lutheran Church, we teach and hold to the Bible's version of Baptism that refers to it as a state of being, one into which God Himself places us by grace. Baptism is not just a one time completed action, but it has abiding results, it is a present reality with ongoing benefits.

This day of the church year is the day that the church has set aside for remembering Jesus' baptism and for reviewing the benefits of baptism for His believers. We do so today on the basis of Romans 6:1-11:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? (2) By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (3) Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) 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. (5) For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (6) We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (7) For one who has died has been set free from sin. (8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe

that we will also live with him. (9) We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. (10) For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. (11) So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The first thing we have to understand about Baptism is that Baptism is not just something that's done. Churches and pastors that don't understand or who just outright reject what the Bible says about Baptism see Baptism as simply a reminder of what Jesus has done or as nothing more than a symbol of a person making a decision to be a believer. In other words, to them baptism does nothing and really is nothing, so when they baptize they don't think they are doing anything except being obedient to a command of God. The Bible teaches us that Baptism is so much more than that. When someone is baptized into Christ something remarkable and wonderful occurs. Martin Luther in the Small Catechism said of Baptism, "What benefits does Baptism give? Answer: It works the forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare."

Luther didn't just make all that up. Paul says in First Corinthians, "*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.*" Baptism washes away our sins, it takes us, who are born sinful and who have no true love in our hearts, and it changes us. In Baptism we're born again, we're made new people. We're spiritually changed so our relationship with God isn't determined by our sin but by His grace toward us in Christ Jesus. This great change isn't just a one time occurrence, but a daily reality. That's why we Lutherans say we *are* baptized, for Baptism doesn't just occur once and is then over, its benefits extend throughout our lives and into eternity.

In our text, Paul appears to be saying what I say we shouldn't say or think. Our English translation renders his words "*have been baptized,*" as though he is only referring to a past action. However, in the Greek, the verb tense that Paul uses is what's called a perfect tense verb. What the Greek perfect tense conveys is a completed action with abiding results. In other words, the action of being baptized has happened in the past but the result of that completed action is that one is in a state of baptism with all its benefits – completed action with abiding results. And isn't that exactly what Paul is saying in the rest of our text?

Three times in our text, Paul stresses the fact that when you're baptized, you're baptized into Christ's death. What this means is that Baptism frees us

from our sin by making us part of Christ's death. Through His death Jesus became our substitute as He stood condemned in our place. We're born enemies of God because of sin in us and therefore we should be cast into eternal suffering. Yet, God spares us of His wrath. Why would God spare His enemies? He spares us because of His great love toward us in His Son and He pours that great love into our hearts through Holy Baptism.

In baptism, everything Jesus did for us is applied through this simple water and the Word of God. The blessings that Jesus earned for us on the cross, the forgiveness, the peace, the renewed relationship with God, are given to us when we're baptized. We're declared right with God just as Jesus was, and we're transformed from enemies of God to children of God. As Paul says in Galatians, "*You are all sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" We have put on His forgiveness and God's love. Through the very faith the Holy Spirit works through the gracious waters of Baptism He causes us to take hold of these blessings and makes them our own. Paul says that through Baptism we actually "*put on Christ*;" we are bonded to Him in a way that only occurs through faith and you are made one with Him in a mysterious way that guarantees your sins, not once were, but continually are forgiven. Through the faith that baptism grants, we live in a constant state of forgiveness.

Yet, that's not the only ongoing benefit of baptism. Paul also says of Baptism: *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 takes us from the font through this life to beyond the grave as we are made children of God who live with Him day by day until we reach the eternal day. Christ's life becomes our life and this is one of the greatest things that we learn about our relationship with God, as Paul says in I Corinthians, "*He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him.*"

There is, of course, a danger that we must be aware of in connection with this special means of grace. Wherever and whenever people hear about the forgiveness of sins in Christ, the sinful flesh takes that as opportunity to commit more sin. In fact, there are many who throw that in the face of Lutherans when talking about Baptism. "You Lutherans think that so long as a person is baptized he can just live how he wants and he will still be saved," they say. That certainly is not true. Paul addresses that false claim right off the bat in this chapter of his letter to the Roman Christians. He asks the ultimate silly question: *Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?* But he goes on to give the solid answer: *By no means! How can we who*

died to sin still live in it? Having been baptized into Christ's death means that we are to consider ourselves dead to sin.

We all know though that this isn't an easy thing; in fact, it's an impossible thing for us. In the New Testament, Paul repeatedly refers to his sin and his inability to do God's will. We can all understand and do share in his frustrations. Sin continues to live on in us so that we often do not do the right things we want to do and don't avoid doing the wrong things we don't want to do. Does that sin, though, invalidate the words and promises of God? Certainly not! So, rather than turning away from the true teaching of Baptism, we ought to embrace it all the more for it assures us that when we repent of our sin we have a God who is faithful and just who has forgiven and keeps on forgiving our sins for Jesus' sake.

What this means is that we live with baptism always on our minds. When we get up in the mornings we should remind ourselves that we are baptized into Christ's death and are thereby dead to sin. When we make our decisions during the course of each day we are to call to mind our baptisms and remember that we walk in newness of life. Yet, before we go to sleep at night, we should also remember that we are baptized into Christ's death and thereby have God's forgiveness for the sins we committed that day. Again, Luther describes the ongoing significance of Baptism this way, "[Baptism] indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

It's really amazing when you think about it; everything we need to have an eternal relationship with the Lord is given to us over and over again in our baptisms. That's why we say we are baptized, because the benefits of Baptism are ours every day. In the waters of Holy Baptism, the heavens are opened and the Spirit descends upon you and makes of you a new creation, pleasing to God through the merits of Jesus Christ. You walk in newness of life, and this is life everlasting. You are united with Christ in His death and in His resurrection.

That's also why we remind ourselves every Sunday that we are baptized. We remind ourselves not just by keeping the baptismal font out in plain sight, but especially by joining together in the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed developed as a confession of the faith into which those who were brought or came forward to be baptized made before they were baptized. So, whenever we join in confessing our faith in the Triune God, we are reminding ourselves of the ongoing benefits of Holy Baptism. Those

benefits are the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation to all who believe. AMEN!