

The Nature of Baptism

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word.

Which is that Word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." [Matt. 28:19]

THE CENTRAL THOUGHT

Our Lord Jesus Himself instituted Baptism (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is not a human work or ritual, but it is the work of the triune God Himself, who joins His life-giving Word to the water. Baptized into the Lord's name, we belong to Him and are taught His Word. This is how God makes disciples of all nations. In Baptism, God places His name on us, adopting and claiming us as His children, members of His family, the Church. Therefore, as His baptized children we live and die in the confidence that He has redeemed us and we are His own.

Read Matthew 3:13-17

How are all three persons of the Trinity present and active in Jesus' Baptism? How does this account of Jesus' Baptism help us to understand the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our Baptism?

People spend much of their lives seeking an identity for themselves. How does Baptism give us identity in our daily life in the world?

A CLOSER READING OF THE SMALL CATECHISM

239. What does the word “baptize” mean?

The word “baptize” means to apply water by immersing, pouring, sprinkling, and such. Christian Baptism refers to a particular washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, according to the institution of Christ.

- 832 **Mark 7:4** And when they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash [literally “baptize”]. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing [literally “baptizing”] of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.
- 833 **Matthew 28:19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

240. What is different about the water of baptism?

“It is nothing other than a divine water. Not that the water in itself is nobler than other water, but that God’s Word and command are added to it.” (LC IV :14)

834 **Ephesians 5:26** Christ sanctifies the church, “having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”

241. Who instituted Holy Baptism?

God Himself instituted Baptism. After His death and resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His Church to baptize all nations.

835 **Matthew 28:19-20** “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

242. What does it mean to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”?

“To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men, but by God Himself. Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is still truly God’s own work.” (LC IV: 10). In Baptism, the triune God puts His saving name on us to bless us with all His gifts as His children and heirs. Where God puts His name, He is truly present there to bless us.

836 **Numbers 6:23-27** Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.

837 **Exodus 20:24** An altar of earth you shall make for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your

peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.

Bible narrative: Read 1 Kings 8:27-30; 9:3. Where is the LORD placing His name? For what purpose?

243. Who is to baptize?

Normally pastors, as the called ministers of Christ, are to baptize, but in the case of an emergency when no pastor is available, any Christian should baptize.

838 **1 Corinthians 4:1** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Note: For a short form of Baptism in cases of emergency, see the end of this section or Lutheran Service Book, p. 1023.

244. To whom does Jesus refer when he says that “all nations” are to be baptized?

Jesus’ words, “all nations,” refer to all people outside of the Church regardless of factors such as age, race, or ethnicity.

CONNECTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

245. Why are babies to be baptized?

Babies are to be baptized because

A. Babies are included in the words “all nations”;

839 **Matthew 28:19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

- 840 **Acts 2:38-39** “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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.”

Read Acts 16:13-15, 25-34; 1 Corinthians 1:16. The apostles baptized whole households, which very likely included children.

B. Babies are also sinful and therefore need what Baptism promises, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- 841 **Psalm 51:5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

- 842 **Romans 5:12, 18-19** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned,... Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

- 843 **John 3:5-6** Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

- 844 **Eph. 2:1-3** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of

the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

C. The Holy Spirit is able to work faith in babies;

845 **Matt. 18:6** Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

846 Psalm 22:9-10 Yet You are He who took me from the womb; You made me trust you at my mother's breasts. On You was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb You have been my God.

*Bible narrative: Read **Luke 1:13-17, 39-45**. When was John the Baptist filled with the Holy Spirit?*

D. Jesus invites children, even infants, to come to Him, and He blesses them.

847 **Luke 18:15-17** Now they were bringing even infants to Him that He might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him, saying, ‘Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Those who reject the Baptism of infants generally do so

because they maintain that: (1) infants have not committed specific sinful acts; (2) God does not hold people accountable until an age of moral awareness; (3) faith is an act of self-commitment of which infants are not capable; and (4) Baptism is primarily our promise to God rather than God's promise to us.

The same principles that apply to infant Baptism apply also to those with intellectual disabilities. Faith is not to be confused with intellectual ability.

246. What is the connection between Baptism and teaching?

A. In the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, Baptism and teaching are inseparably connected.

848 **Matthew 28:19-20** “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

B. Those who are able to receive instruction are normally baptized after they have been instructed in the main articles of the Christian faith.

849 **Acts 2:38-39** 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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.

850 **Acts 2:41** So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Bible narratives: The Ethiopian man was instructed before he was baptized (Acts 8:26–39) as was the jailer in Acts 16:25–33.

C. Infants and young children should be brought to Baptism as soon as possible and then instructed in the Christian faith as they are able to receive it.

851 **Mark 10:13–15** And they were bringing children to Him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

247. Why does the church encourage the use of sponsors at Baptism?

The church’s baptismal liturgy says “From ancient times the Church has observed the custom of appointing sponsors for baptismal candidates and catechumens. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church sponsors are to confess the faith expressed in the Apostles’ Creed and taught in the Small Catechism. They are, whenever possible, to witness the Baptism of those they sponsor. They are to pray for them, support them in their ongoing instruction and nurture in the Christian faith, and encourage them toward the faithful reception of the Lord’s Supper. They are at all times to be examples to them of the holy life of faith in Christ and love for the neighbor” (Lutheran Service Book, p. 269).

248. Are all “baptisms” to be recognized in the Christian Church?

Christ has entrusted the gift of Baptism only to His Church. In every Christian church where Baptism is administered according to Christ’s institution (using water and His words “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”), there Christ fulfills His promise. All such Baptisms are to be recognized. In faithfulness to Christ’s command and to avoid any element of uncertainty, no other names or titles are to be substituted for the name and words which Christ has given us (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Groups that do not confess faith in the one triune God cannot be recognized as Christian and as such they do not possess Baptism, no matter what words they use in baptizing.

Gracious Father, we give You thanks for the gift of Baptism which Your Son has established by His Word and promise. Teach us, O Lord, to treasure all that Jesus has done for us in His cross and resurrection, to live in the confidence that through our Baptism we bear Your holy name and so are Your holy children for time and eternity; through the same, Jesus Christ, our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

*Baptized into Your name most holy,
O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
I claim a place, though weak and lowly,
Among Your saints, Your chosen host.
Buried with Christ and dead to sin,
Your Spirit now shall live within.*

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