

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, September 2023

In this month's Topical Bulletin, we will continue from where we ended last month. Thus, our topic is: **Holy Baptism (part two).**

We've already considered the nature of baptism, who instituted baptism, who administers baptism, and who is to be baptized. We will proceed with the subject in the order put forth in Luther's Small Catechism.

The 1943 C.P.H. edition of Luther's Small Catechism says: [II. THE BLESSINGS OF BAPTISM] *"What does Baptism give or profit? It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. Which are such words and promises of God? Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Mark: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."*

**"Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."
(Mark 16:14-16)**

Comment: Observe that Holy Baptism, as instituted and commanded by Christ, is NOT an empty ceremony! Baptism saves sinners because it is a means of God's grace by which the merits of Jesus Christ – the Savior – are applied to an individual sinner. The individual sinner is, "Buried" with Christ "in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." (Colossians 2:12-13) Baptism gives life— spiritual life and eternal life!

**"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."
(Acts 2:38-39)**

"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16)

Comment: Holy Baptism, when administered in accord with the command of Jesus Christ, works forgiveness of sins! Sins are washed away!

**"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?"
(Romans 6:3)**

Comment: Holy Baptism delivers folks from the devil and from never-ending death in hell, because Jesus Christ our Lord suffered the torments of hell for all people while He was nailed to the cross of Calvary, for, “about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) Think about it: being forsaken by God is truly suffering the excruciatingly painful death of hell!

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.” (1 Peter 3:18-22)

Comment: Jesus’ preaching to the spirits in prison took place when He, after His bodily resurrection, descended into hell to proclaim His victory to the souls of the unbelievers suffering in hell— folks who had failed to repent and believe on the promised Messiah, the Christ, in the days of Noah. God patiently waited while Noah was building the ark; but, people failed to sincerely repent. Hence, only Noah and his wife, and his sons and their wives, were saved from being drowned in the world-wide flood. Thus, God used water to save Noah and his family by removing the evil persons which surrounded them, thereby cleansing the world. Likewise, Holy Baptism saves by water since God’s Word is attached thereto. Baptism is not a mere cleansing of the flesh, like that which takes place with a regular bath or shower. Rather, baptism is the cleansing away of one’s personal sins, the baptized individual being thereby given eternal salvation, as the words and promises of God declare: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16)

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2)

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:26-27)

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Comment: Note well that Jesus Christ is the “propitiation” – the slaughter-sacrifice – for the sins of the whole world! However, the individual sinner can only benefit from Christ’s atoning work by personally receiving the forgiveness of sins and salvation which Christ has earned for all. Hence, the Holy Ghost,

working through God's Word which is attached to the waters of Holy Baptism, makes the blessings of faith, the forgiveness of sins and salvation, the individual sinner's own blessings! HOLY BAPTISM IS A MEANS OF GRACE! Yes, baptism gives the blessings of the forgiveness of sins and salvation to ALL WHO BELIEVE, ALL WHO HAVE FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6)

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16)

Comment: Notice that it is only one's unbelief that brings damnation upon a person; and, though saving faith cannot exist in the heart of a person who refuses to be baptized, it can exist when for some reason baptism cannot be obtained. For example, consider the penitent thief on the cross next to Jesus— the man could not under such circumstances obtain Holy Baptism; and yet, he was saved. Luke 23:39-43 reports: "one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." However, those who have the opportunity to be baptized and yet refuse Holy Baptism, thereby show their unbelief and rejection of God. For instance, when John was baptizing, "the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." (Luke 7:30) Holy Baptism is NOT to be despised!

The 1943 C.P.H. edition of Luther's Small Catechism says: [III. THE POWER OF BAPTISM] "*How can water do such great things? It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and no baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says, Titus, chapter third: [According to His mercy He saved us] By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying.*"

"For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:3-7)

Comment: We are by nature sinful and unclean, and therefore we are totally dependent on the kindness and love of God our Savior to supply us with the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Observe that we are saved by God's grace and mercy, and NOT by our own works! Accordingly, Holy Baptism – the washing of regeneration – is NOT a work of righteousness which we have done, but is rather God's

gracious work in us as He applies the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior to us individually. The Holy Ghost enters the individual as His Word is attached to the waters of Holy Baptism, renewing the individual by His power. Thus, the Holy Ghost grants the very faith which personally receives the forgiveness of sins and salvation! “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Corinthians 12:3)

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Comment: Notice that Holy Baptism – as instituted and commanded by Christ – is the “washing of water by the word”; that is, the word of God places the great blessings of the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation into baptism. Then, the faith which God gives to the individual, trusts that very word of God’s promise; and, the person thereby accepts the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation offered in baptism, and makes these blessings his (or her) own. It is written, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16) Take it to heart that in baptism, the Holy Ghost works faith and thus creates, in us, new spiritual life! Hence, Holy Baptism is truly, “the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” (Titus 3:5)

The 1943 C.P.H. edition of Luther’s Small Catechism says: [IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTIZING WITH WATER] *“What does such baptizing with water signify? It signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Where is this written? St. Paul writes, Romans, chapter sixth: We are buried with Christ by Baptism into death, that, like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”*

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:1-4)

Comment: Note well that we baptized Christians are to walk in newness of life, no longer serving our sinful flesh in the lusts thereof. We must fight against the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh! My friends, Jesus Christ “died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” (2 Corinthians 5:15) Therefore, “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” (Romans 13:13-14) Yes, let us strive to walk in newness of life, as our Lord would have us do!

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Comment: Our “old Adam” – or “old man” – is our sinful nature, which came upon us by the fall of Adam and is ours by natural birth. On the other hand, our “new man” is the new spiritual life created in us by the washing of regeneration, Holy Baptism; for, “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) Realize that the “new man” comes forth and arises in us as we daily overcome sin and live in true godliness— that is, righteousness and holiness. The “old Adam” is to be drowned in us by daily contrition (sorrow for sins) and repentance (faith), by which we also resist evil desires and suppress them. Yes, for, “they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:24-25) “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7) “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9) Therefore, let us daily battle against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, as God would have us do!

Take it to heart that baptizing with water signifies the daily drowning of the old man and the coming forth of the new man, because by Holy Baptism, we are made partakers of Christ; “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27) Hence, we, who are baptized, should daily repent of all our sins, shun everything that is evil, and walk in newness of life.

Realize that at our baptism we renounce – we cast off and reject – the devil and all his works and all his ways. At our baptism we promise – or vow – to serve the true God – the Triune God – and Him only!

Fellow Christians, we should renew our baptismal vow daily, turning anew to the one true God in repentance and faith. Let us never forget: “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:5-10)

m.e.l.