

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, dear friends,
Listen to the words of 1 Peter 3:21:

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.

Perhaps we get a better sense of the way God actually had it recorded if we use the translation in your worship folder:

And this water (the saving water of the flood) is representative of what saves you now—baptism! It is not a removal of filth from the flesh, but the offer of a good conscience in regard to God by means of Jesus Christ's resurrection.

You may already know this, but in case you don't, I'll tell you. When it comes to Baptism, there are really two basic beliefs out there in the Christian Church.

One is that Baptism is something that an individual does because God tells them to and because they want to show God that they want to follow him. When that is the belief, baptism is obviously not done for a baby or young child, but must wait until a person is ready to make that commitment to God. Baptism then is considered to be something a person does for God. Your Baptist friends, for instance, view baptism this way.

The other belief about baptism is that with water and the Word, the Holy Spirit gives to a person the gifts of forgiveness of sins, a new life and relationship with God, and eternal life in heaven. Baptism then is considered something that God does for individuals. This is what Lutheran Christians believe because that's how the Bible explains baptism.

Before us this morning is just one verse of Scripture, but what a powerful and instructive verse it is! Here in these words, God declares

BAPTISM SAVES YOU!

- 1. We all need saving**
- 2. We witness a miracle of new life**
- 3. We are reminded to live our new life**

If we're going to consider how baptism saves us, I suppose we ought to consider whether we—or anyone else for that matter—needs saving. Some people, I'm sure, don't think they do. Since most of you or very possibly all of you here this morning are Christians, there is probably an overall understanding in the room that you did need saving, but it is valuable to review why. That way we can truly appreciate what God has done for us.

When God talks about “sin,” he means anything that goes against his will. We find out about the perfect and holy God and learn about his expectations in the Bible. We also learn about our own sin. We find things like this: **Every inclination of a person’s heart is evil from childhood (Genesis 8:21)**. and **The sinful mind is hostile to God (Romans 8:7)**. That’s tough to swallow. We don’t want to believe that we are so bad that our default position as human beings is sin and opposition to God. We certainly don’t want to believe that little babies are sinful either. They look so cute and seem so innocent and they don’t know much yet either. “How can they be sinful?” we wonder. But the truth is borne out in King David’s words of confession to the Lord: **Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5)**. Sadly, we are just like him—sinful to the core since conception. Even a moment spent considering our personal sins will tell the tale that we not only have that sinful nature, we actually *commit* sins of all kinds.

When God says **The soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezekiel 18:4)**, he’s talking to every one of us. We are **dead in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1)**. The Bible says that people who are, in effect, dead to God even as they stand upon this earth will also die eternally in hell. And that is everyone—every baby, every boy, every girl, every man, every woman. Each and every person is headed to eternal death in hell because of their sin. And there is nothing anyone can do about it because dead people can’t raise themselves from death—not physically and not spiritually. So yes, whether people recognize it or not, every single person needs to be saved!

The good news is that BAPTISM SAVES YOU! That is exactly what God says here in 1 Peter 3—BAPTISM SAVES YOU! You heard in the second Scripture lesson today how in the verses before this one, Peter is speaking about the waters of the Great Flood and he talks about how those waters—though they were waters of judgment from God that killed everyone else in the world—actually saved Noah and his family because they lifted the ark above the annihilation that took place. Peter says that water, in a way, makes us think of the saving that occurs in the waters of baptism.

To be honest, it was very difficult to choose a text for this morning. There are many wonderful passages about baptism, each revealing something comforting, amazing, incredible about this gift of God. When you put them all together, you see the beauty of baptism. You find that when ordinary water is combined with the Word of God—specifically the command given by Jesus to baptize **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)**—that God gives forgiveness of sins, a new and joyful relationship with God, and the sure promise of eternal life in heaven. Baptism is a gift from God to us. Through baptism God saves us! We were hopeless and helpless because of sin and God provided a means by which we are saved from sin and its eternal punishment. Baptism is the grace of God in action!

We witness a miracle of new life every time we have the privilege of seeing someone baptized. And I know some of you, like me, treasure that every time—and well we should. If you know what God is doing for that little baby in its parents’ arms or that young boy or girl or adult who stands at the baptismal font, how can you not be moved

by it? Some of us are moved to tears by such love from God, so you might see some not-so-dry eyes at a baptism. Others may not have tears in their eyes, but in their hearts they treasure and appreciate what the gracious Lord is doing at that miraculous moment.

A baptism can be done anywhere—in our Scripture lessons today we heard about the Ethiopian’s roadside baptism and Jesus’ baptism in a river. Perhaps some of you were baptized in a hospital or even at your home. But what a blessing it is when God’s people can witness a baptism in worship like we have today! As we witness that miracle of faith and know that the person’s sins are washed away, we can thank and praise the Lord for his amazing grace that has reached down from heaven and, with simple water and the name of the Triune God, made them a child of his. It is humbling, really, and awesome.

If you have never given your full attention to a baptism or truly considered God’s love and blessing poured out on that individual, don’t ever let it happen again. A baptism in worship is a special, special thing because you are witnessing the touch of God and a true miracle.

As if you needed another reason to treasure a baptism in worship, I’ll give you one more. You and I are reminded to live our new life every time we witness a baptism. You may have noticed that normally a baptism in church follows the confession of sins and absolution. Very often, like today in the confession of sins, we will even talk about baptism and the need for it because of sin. We’re reminded that in baptism we are clothed with the robe of righteousness won for us by Jesus. We may even join to speak words based on Luther’s Catechism where he explains “The Meaning of Baptism for our Daily Life”: *Baptism means that the sinful nature in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.* What a shame it would be if we were to not take that opportunity in worship to reflect on how we have not lived as baptized children of God ought to...or not take our sin seriously...or in the face of God’s fantastic forgiveness not intend to change the wrong in our life and live as his baptized child. May we never let this opportunity to focus on the fact that we too are baptized children of God go by as if it were a trivial thing!

No, a baptism in worship is a special thing because it gives us the occasion to review *our* relationship with God. This passage from 1st Peter tells us what baptism did for us. Baptism is not a body cleanser, but a soul cleanser. The translation we commonly use puts it this way: in baptism we have **the pledge of a good conscience toward God**. That word “pledge” can be a little misleading. It almost sounds like we are pledging to God. But in baptism it is not us doing anything for God; it is God doing something for us. And that something is him washing us clean and giving us a conscience that is clear when it comes to our personal relationship with him. We have a clear conscience because our sin is gone! We can go to God without fear because he has adopted us

into his family in the waters of baptism! Peter explains why this is: that clear conscience comes to us by means of Jesus Christ's resurrection from death. In baptism, Christ's sinless life, his death and his resurrection are all credited to us. The Apostle Paul also explained this. He did it in this way: **What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:1-5).**

Did you notice how Paul tied our baptism to the way we live our lives? In baptism God has cleaned us up, made us his children and promised us that we will rise from death to eternal life. All that was his doing. All that came from his grace. All that came through Jesus' work on our behalf and by the Holy Spirit's power in water and Word. A baptism witnessed in church gives you an opportunity to reflect on the fact that you are a baptized child of God. It encourages you to live the new life you have been given as you await the return of Christ your Savior.

May you and I not only treasure the opportunity to witness a baptism in worship, but also consider each day the saving power of baptism and thank God for it—for us and for all who are baptized and who will gather with us around the throne of God one day. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.