

## **Theme: Baptism Saves!**

- 1. Not by Our Act of Obedience**
- 2. But by What Jesus has Done for Us**

### **Text: 1 Peter 3:18-22 (EHV)**

<sup>18</sup> Because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison. <sup>20</sup> These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God's patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. <sup>21</sup> And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

*Dear fellow Children of God,*

Whenever we witness a baptism we should ask the question, “What happened here?” Was it some ceremony and tradition that the church has developed over the years to help make us feel good about the eternal welfare of our infants and children? Was this baptism just a sign or symbol of God's forgiveness for our and our children's sins? Or is baptism something more: Something much more than just a tradition or symbolic act performed in obedience to Christ's command?

When you witness a baptism you witness something miraculous, and it has happened to every one of us who has been baptized—whether it was when we were an infant, like Aiden here today, or when we were older. The Apostle Peter's words in our text remind us of the importance of this baptism for infants—and its importance for us—when he writes in **v. 21** that **“baptism now saves you!”** By taking a closer look at our text, and some other key passages in Scripture we will see how **Baptism Saves!**

First of all, the sacrament of holy baptism is more than just a church tradition. It was instituted and commanded by Christ Himself when He told His disciples, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19)**. In obedience to Christ's command we perform baptisms. However, the saving power of baptism is **1. not found in our act of obedience**. Nothing we could do for ourselves, or for each other, by itself, could save anyone. Baptism, then, is not a “sacrifice” on our part, that is, something we do in obedience to God. No, it is a “sacrament,” a “sacred act” in which God does something miraculous for us. Remember those words we read earlier from **Titus** chapter 3? The Apostle Paul didn't use the word “baptism” there, but he described it and its saving power in these verses: **“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us—not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:4-6 EHV)**.

Baptism's power is not found in the water itself either. This was not some sort of magic holy water that was used in Aiden's baptism today. It came right from the sink! The water is simply the earthly element that Christ chose to use in this sacrament of baptism. It's plain to see why He chose water as the earthly element in baptism. Think of the properties of water: it is life-giving and life-sustaining. Water is absolutely necessary for us to sustain our physical lives. It is also a cleansing agent. We wash things with it. We wash *ourselves* with it. These properties are powerful visual images and pictures of what happens in baptism. But the sacrament of baptism is more than just a powerful image or picture of Christ cleansing us from our sins. That is why the other part of this sacrament is the Word of God used in connection with the water.

This powerful, life-giving, life-sustaining Word is why Peter can say in our text, **“baptism now saves you!”** Its power and its saving properties are **2. Because of what Jesus has done for us.** Take a look again at the words of our text and notice just how interconnected baptism is with Christ’s redemptive work. The Gospel message is very clearly spelled out in these verses. We have in this text the events of Christ’s work for our salvation listed almost exactly how we have them in the Apostle’s Creed:

- ✚ Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection are mentioned in **v. 18: “Because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit.”**
- ✚ His descent into hell is mentioned in **v. 19: “in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison.”** What **“announcement”** did He make to the **“spirits in prison”** during His descent into hell? He was proclaiming His victory over death and Satan. This means that His descent into hell wasn’t part of His suffering, but rather like a parading, conquering general Jesus was proclaiming His absolute victory over His defeated enemies!
- ✚ Finally, **“the resurrection of Jesus Christ”** is mentioned again in **v. 21** and His ascension into heaven is mentioned in **v. 22: “He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.”**

This isn’t the only place in the Bible where this connection between Christ’s work of redemption and our baptism is also clearly made. Think of the words we read earlier in our service from **Romans** chapter 6:

**“Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.**

**<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin” (Romans 6:3-6 EHV).**

We also read in **Galatians** chapter 3, **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).** Should this connection of baptism to the Gospel of Christ’s saving work surprise us? No. After all baptism is the Gospel! It is God’s Word used according to Christ’s command in connection with the water.

It is what we Lutherans call, one of the “Means of Grace.” In other words, it is one of the “Ways in which God gives us His grace.” Baptism is one of those “ways,” the Word and the Lord’s Supper are the other two—but the common denominator with all three is the Word of God—the Gospel!

To illustrate this I like to use the example of a water tower: Think of how a water tower holds the water for a town or city. How does that water get to the citizens? Through pipes that connect to your home and eventually to your faucet where you turn it on and get water. Think of the cross of Christ like a huge water tower or storage tank where all the forgiveness for all the sins of the world for all time was won. That grace of God and His full and free forgiveness is there for all at the cross. How does that grace and forgiveness come to us personally? Through the Word of God, and through the Word of God in connection with Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Think of them like three water pipes coming off of the water tower. They may be three pipes, but they all bring that life-saving, life-giving “water” of the Gospel!

Speaking of water, in our text, Peter uses a very unusual and unique example to illustrate the role of baptism in God’s plan of salvation. He writes in **v. 20-21 “...in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. <sup>21</sup> And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** The very waters that destroyed the whole earth in the great flood recorded in **Genesis** at the same time, in a sense, “saved” Noah and his family by keeping the ark afloat. In the same way the “saving” waters of the flood symbolize, or **“correspond to”** the saving waters of baptism, which **“now saves you” (v. 21).** Now, let’s make sure that I am not misunderstood: the waters of the flood *symbolize* baptism, the floodwaters themselves

actually saved Noah and his family and were not just symbolic. In the same way, baptism does not simply “symbolize” our salvation and forgiveness, but actually gives it to us by connecting us with the death and resurrection of Christ. Not in removing dirt from the body, but by giving us a clean conscience by removing the “dirt” of sin from our souls. Again, as Peter puts it plainly in v. 21, **“baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”**

This all may be fine and true according to the Bible, but what about infants? These blessings cannot possibly be given to a little baby, like Aiden, can they? Well, what does the Bible say?

- The Bible tells us that we are all born sinful—even at the time of our conception—and are therefore in need of forgiveness, even as infants. King David wrote in **Psalm 51**, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).**
- Jesus Himself gave the command to baptize all nations (**Matthew 28:19**). Infants are included in “all nations” (in fact, everyone is! Old people, young people, middle-aged people—everyone!)
- Listen to Peter’s words to the thousands who were in the crowd at Pentecost, and listen to how all-inclusive baptism is and the fact that it does, in fact bring us Christ’s forgiveness: **“And Peter said to them, “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.”<sup>39</sup> 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.”**
- Also Jesus specifically invited infants and young children to come to Him, **“People were bringing even their babies to Jesus, so that he would touch them. When the disciples saw this, they began to rebuke them.”<sup>16</sup> But Jesus invited them, saying, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” (Luke 18:15-16).**
- Finally, Jesus also tells us that these “little ones” can believe in Him, **“Whoever receives one little child [Greek: παιδίον (paidion) a newborn child *infant, babe*; a small or young child (Friberg’s Greek Lexicon)] like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:5-6).**

Now, this obviously makes no sense whatsoever to our human reason. How saving faith is created in the heart of a young infant who can’t confess or express his or her faith, or even understand what we are saying, is a mystery to our minds. But is a comfort to our hearts of faith! This baptism is nothing short of the miraculous working of God’s Holy Spirit.

Let’s make sure that we don’t go too far, however, and treat baptism like it’s some sort of “magic bullet.” “Well, my kid’s been baptized. Nothing to worry about now. No need to read Bible stories to them, or tell them about Jesus, or bring them to church or Sunday School or do anything more!” An infant that is born into this world needs to have nourishment and care in order to sustain his or her life and good health. If the instant a baby was born they were left to themselves and not nursed and cared for, they would not live very long. In the same way if an infant is spiritually reborn through baptism, and has saving faith created in their heart by the water and Word, but is never again nourished with the life-giving message of the Gospel, their faith will not live very long either. That is why our Lord urges parents to **“bring [their children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 4:6)**. It is also why our Savior’s invitation to **“Let the little children come to Me”** is an ongoing invitation, not limited to baptism. Baptism for an infant is the *beginning* of a blessed life of faith.

Before today, when was the last time you thought about baptism? When was the last time you thought about your baptism? I pray that today's baptism and these reminders from God's Word remind all of us just how important and blessed our baptism is. As the Apostle Peter said in our text, "**baptism now saves you!**" (v. 21). That was the day the Lord made us His child and sealed us with His Holy Spirit, just like He did today with Aiden. We were given the personal assurance of our salvation through the water and the word. We have been baptized into the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, and have had all our sins washed away. Therefore, we can daily say with the hymn writer:

*God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ!  
He because I could not pay it, Gave my full redemption price.  
Do I need earth's treasures many?  
I have one worth more than any That brought my salvation free  
Lasting to eternity! Amen.  
(Hymn 594 v. 1 LSB)*