

# Holy Baptism

by Martin Luther



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**A**s the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.

**First**  
*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: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

**Second**  
*What benefits does Baptism give?*

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

*Which are these words and promises of God?*

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

**Third**  
*How can water do such great things?*

Certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without God's Word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously

through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying" (Titus 3:5-8).

**Fourth**  
*What does such baptizing with water indicate?*

It 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. Where is this written?

St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "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" (Romans 6:4).

# Baptized into Christ

by Edward G. Kettner

As Luther continued to consider the need for a catechism, he initially focused on what would become the first three parts: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. But he soon realized that more work was needed to help people understand what was necessary to be a Christian. Therefore, he went on to add sections on Baptism, Confession (to which was later added the Office of the Keys), and the Sacrament of the Altar. Since both Rome on the one hand and other Protestants on the other had confused some important points and thus missed out on the comfort and sweetness of the Scriptural understanding, Luther discussed these issues simply and directly, showing how they deliver God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation to us redeemed sinners.

Rome understands baptism as an act performed by the church which imparted power to people to begin to work out their salvation in them. In Rome's understanding, baptism does its work simply by the performance of the act. Many Protestants on the other hand believe that baptism is simply an ordinance given by God that must be obeyed—a demonstration of one's commitment to Christ.

Luther rightly recognized that baptism is an ordinance, but it is not something that we do merely because God requires it. Rather, God requires it because He actually does something through it, something for our benefit. The imperative attached to baptism is an invitation, and as Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet shows us, spurning God's invitation is

a serious matter. To spurn the invitation is to spurn the blessings that God attaches to baptism. Christ commissioned the apostles to make disciples by baptizing; when we are baptized, it is in fact God Himself who is doing the baptizing, making us His children.

Luther reminds us that baptism is a means by which God gives us the gift of the forgiveness of sins—and therefore life and salvation. Baptism is not simply water, but



Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River. Woodcut from the 1558 edition of Luther's Small Catechism.

water attached to the Word and promise of God. Through baptism we are made members of Christ's body. We are buried with Christ into His death and raised with Him to new life.

When we talk about our baptisms, we often say that we "have been baptized." This points to the one baptism for the remission of sins—an event not to be repeated. By this

we are born anew, born from above, born of water and the Spirit, as Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:3,5). Peter tells us that just as Noah and his family were saved through water when the rest of humanity was destroyed, so also baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:18-21).

We can also say "I am baptized." Once the act has taken place, we exist in the state of being baptized people. Because of that, we daily die to sin and are raised to newness of life. (To see the beauty of this, look to hymn 594 in the *Lutheran Service Book*: "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It.")

Baptism is a word of Gospel to the troubled sinner. It is not an excuse for continuing in sin, an attitude which needs to be addressed with a call to repentance. As St. Paul says, "How can we who have died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). But Paul adds to this admonition, noting that in baptism we are actually united to Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:4-11). Indeed, baptism brings us into a relationship with Christ which is as intimate as the relationship between a bridegroom and his bride (Ephesians 5:25-27). We are made members of His bride, the Church. (This is brought out in hymn 644 of the *Lutheran Service Book*: "The Church's One Foundation." See especially stanza 1).

It is clear, simple, and wonderful. Baptism unites us to Christ by water and Word, delivers us from sin, death, and the devil, and gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation. What a comfort this is, and what joy it is to know this!

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