

What You Should Know About



Baptism

PREFACE

CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU!

All of us share the joy and excitement of the new life that has been entrusted to you or that soon will come into your life. Whether by birth or by adoption, one of the most exciting events in our lives is a child entering the family. Whether it is your first or last child or one in-between, as Christians we look upon the gift of life as coming from God. God has given life for a particular purpose and we rejoice in God's love and mercy for us. Life does not belong to us, nor are we to possess the new life entrusted to our care. Rather, we are to be good stewards and responsible parents. Our objective as parents is to nurture life in order that it may develop and grow into responsible adulthood. In accomplishing this, take time to fondle, play and nurture this precious life and share in all the joys of parenthood.

As God's people, there are added responsibilities to our parenting. We belong to the community of faith and we are eager that your child also becomes a part of this community through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

This pamphlet is designed to help you think and pray about this important event. It will also answer questions and share information you might wish to consider.

We hope that the joy occasioned by a new member of the family may increase in the days and months to come and that the total Christian family, the Church, will share this joy.

WHY BAPTISM?

Why baptize a child at all? That's a good question! Often children are baptized because it is the custom to do so. Perhaps we baptize at the urging of a parent, relative, or friend. We may sense that it is important, but have never considered in our own minds why. It is not good to do something simply out of habit or tradition. Baptism should be a meaningful experience for you and not something we "should get done," as if it were a burden or detail which may inconvenience us.

The New Testament gives us evidence of the importance of baptism. Re-call the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. 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 lo, I am with you, even to the close of the age." The words of our Lord in John 3:5 say, "Truly, truly I say unto you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

These and other passages, as well as the account of Jesus' own baptism, (Matthew 3:13-17) indicate the importance of this Sacrament. The Book of Acts indicates that the typical response to the Gospel message was faith and baptism. God's Word and baptism go together. As parents we desire that our children share in these blessings and promises of God. Let us look at some of these blessings.

“COVENANT COMMUNITY”

When your child was born or adopted, s/he became a member of your family. From birth, s/he was already a child of God. Baptism is the way God has designated for us to be incorporated into the covenant community, the Church. A “covenant” is a relationship established by God with an individual or a group of people. Baptism is the Sacrament which concretely incorporates us into this covenant community we call the Church or the Body of Christ. We belong together and there is unity in this community through baptism. We are one in Christ as Paul says in Corinthians 12:12-13. We can see this act of God occurring in baptism.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the rite of circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant agreement. (Read Genesis 17:1-14) In the Christian Scriptures, baptism is the Sacrament of identification and blessing in the new covenant community established in Jesus Christ. The writer of Colossians 2:9-13 discusses baptism as the Christian counterpart of circumcision.

In baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:37-39 and Ephesians 4:4-7 indicate that we are baptized only once and that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to us. Rebaptism or a so-called “baptism of the “Spirit” is not necessary, for the gift of the Spirit is already ours without qualification when we are baptized.

All of us like to belong and sense acceptance. Baptism provides the answer to those needs. Because of baptism you are a part of this community of faith as your child will be also.. Like the human family, s/he comes to know, love, and trust others in this community relationship. As your child grows, s/he will learn through worship, study, fellowship, and love that s/he is not only part of a human family, but also part of the family of God.

“GOD’S CHILDREN”

Baptism is more than an initiation rite into the church. It is a commitment of life to Christ. What Christ accomplished for us in His death and resurrection, we now have as a gift for our lives.

St Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of Life.” (Romans 6:3-4) Paul also says in Galatians 3:27, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

As Christians we believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central to faith. It is Christ’s life, which determines our life. His forgiveness, strength, and power free us from the fear of death and the power of sin. It is one thing to say it; it is another to see and experience it. God makes provision for our need to see and experience His grace and promises by His Word and the use of water as a visible assurance of His love. In baptism we dedicate our child to God, but we also realize that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ will determine his/her life. Baptism is a joyous occasion, which prepares us for life in Christ.

Baptism is a Sacrament of life. Often dying infants receive emergency baptism. If an infant is not baptized before death, the parents need not be fearful or sense guilt, for God is a loving and gracious God. Baptism is not magic, but rather a Sacrament of life for a particular lifestyle.

“GOD’S GIFT”

Baptism is a gift! It is not our gift to God that we bring our child, but God’s gift to us as God comes into our lives. In baptism God places a stamp of approval and acceptance on us and seals us for a life of discipleship and servanthood. We do not qualify for this gift; rather it is given to us freely in love and by grace.

An infant usually is lavished with love and gifts. We do not expect any thing in return. Even if an infant could respond s/he could not repay parents for life, love, or any other gifts. We know that apart from this loving care, the child would die both emotionally and physically.

So it is with God. We cannot repay God for gifts and blessings given to us. Apart from God, we too would die as persons. We accept God’s gifts for us with great gratitude. We enjoy these gifts and take heart in the promises. Our baptism reminds us we are God’s and that God’s promises will always be a blessing for us.

As a reminder of this great gift it might be well to celebrate your child’s baptism as well as his/her birthday. A birthday commemorates physical birth; a baptism commemorates spiritual birth. Such a celebration would give your child and others in the family an opportunity to recall and remember this significant event.

In our daily prayers we do well to thank God for our own baptism and for the love and grace shown to our children through this great Sacrament of love and grace freely given to us.

“ETERNAL LIFE”

Baptism seals us not only for time but also for eternity. We are God’s own. God has adopted us as people and heirs of the Kingdom. It is a kingdom which exists not only now, but in glory for eternity.

Eternal salvation is one of God’s great gifts for us as children. This promise frees us from the fear of death and its power. It is normal for us to fear death. St. Paul states that death is the enemy of God and humans. (Read 1 Corinthians 15). Death has two dimensions. There is physical death, which constantly haunts and threatens us. There is also death in our person and in our relationships even though we may be physically alive. Only God can make us alive when we are dead in sin and in our relationships. Likewise when we die physically it is only God who in power can resurrect us to eternal life.

The Gospel of John says that eternal life is something which begins here and now as we come alive in Christ. Baptism starts us on the journey of life towards eternal life, sustaining us on the way and undergirding us in the hour of death.

This truth is beyond our understanding. We accept it by faith which God grants to us by His Spirit. Paul says, “...as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Christ’s death on the cross puts an end to death and His resurrection on Easter is our assurance of victory of life over death, both physical and spiritual.

Joy and gratitude are the only appropriate responses we can make to a God who so wondrously loves us. We rejoice that our baptism promises us an abundant life now and eternal life with God.

“GRADUAL GROWTH”

We have discussed some of the blessings of baptism for our children and us. You might ask, “Isn’t there something we must do?” But there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy of this gift. God gives it to us through grace.

Our Lord looks for a response in terms of our growth in this baptismal grace. We are to grow in relationship to God and one another in our baptismal covenant. Growth requires that we be fed and nurtured.

The pastor in the baptismal service charges parents and sponsors with the primary responsibility for this growth. “As you present your *children* for baptism, you are entrusted with gifts and responsibilities: to live with *them* among God’s faithful people, bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper, and nurture *them* in faith and prayer, so that *they* may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace among all people.”

Our commitment is that we will nurture a gradual growth in grace in our child. This occurs in our home life through prayer and family devotions. Children reflect the attitudes and values of their parents. A good example in your home is the most powerful educational tool to aid the child in growth. Exposure to worship, and later Sunday School, helps in creating a climate of Christian growth and love. Select for your child good literature, to aid in understanding as s/he grows. You may wish to give the child a Bible when s/he is old enough to read. Traditions in the family, which center on the Christian faith, are important. Explain Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost to your child when these festivals are celebrated. Many opportunities are available for the growth of your child as well as your own growth.

Later confirmation classes, high school study groups and adult classes are provided. Opportunities for this gradual growth in grace are really unlimited if we choose to use them. It is important, as we grow older, to be able to speak of and share our faith with others.

Martin Luther said we are always in the process of “becoming.” We never arrive. As baptized believers we continue our growth from birth until death.

Thank God each day in prayer for baptism and its blessings for our children and us. Any way in which you as parents can aid your child in understanding baptism and growth as a child of God is to be commended.

Much more could be written about baptism, but hopefully this will give you some material to reflect upon as you consider having your child baptized. May the Holy Spirit bless you with strength and wisdom as you continue with the important task of making real for yourself and your children the meaning of Holy Baptism.

“LUTHER ON BAPTISM”

In the year 1531 Dr. Martin Luther wrote a small handbook dealing with Christian doctrine. It was called the *Small Catechism*, which today still serves as a brief outline of Christian doctrine in simplified

form. The catechism was really designed to be taught in the home. Luther had this to say about baptism, which is now quoted for your consideration as you bring your child to baptism.

I

What is baptism?

Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's Word.

What is this Word?

In Matthew 28 our Lord Jesus Christ says: "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.

II

What gifts or benefits does God give in baptism?

In baptism God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe as the Word and promise of God declare.

What is this Word and promise of God?

In Mark 16 our Lord Jesus Christ says: "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned."

III

How can water do such great things?

Clearly the water does not do it, but the Word of God—which is with, in, and among the water—and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit." As it was in Titus 3:5-8, "He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This saying is sure."

IV

What does baptism mean for daily living?

It signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires, is to be drowned through daily sorrow for sin and repentance; and that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

*St. Paul writes in Romans 6:3-4 "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Luther: *The Small Catechism*, in contemporary English, Augsburg 1996)*

This fourth chief part of Luther's *Small Catechism* represents his concerns and view on Holy Baptism. It is this, which we as Lutherans confess and believe about Baptism.

“PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS”

In view of our beliefs about baptism, there are a few practical matters, which we would like to share with you as you plan and prepare for this joyous event in your family.

PLAN TO HAVE THE BAPTISMAL SERVICE DURING WORSHIP! The child is becoming a part of this worshipping community so it is well that believers are present. Baptism means that parents and sponsors as well as the whole Christian community are responsible for this child. Baptism during worship reminds us all of our responsibility. Only under unusual circumstances should the child be baptized privately. Please consult with the pastor on this matter if necessary.

MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE BAPTISM WELL IN ADVANCE. Please make arrangements for the baptism at least a month in advance of the date. When making arrangements, give the full name of the child, the full name of the father and mother, the date and place of birth, and names of the sponsors.

TWO OR MORE SPONSORS SHOULD BE CHOSEN for this important occasion. Historically sponsors were chosen carefully because they became the legal guardians of the child in the event of the parents' death. This may be a consideration for you. Ask people whom you are confident will pray for and be concerned about your child. Sponsorship is more than a nice gesture or favor; it is a serious responsibility.

NO PAYMENTS ARE EXPECTED, REQUIRED OR ACCEPTED for Holy Baptism. Baptism is a free gift of God administered as part of a pastor's responsibility. Like Holy Communion, baptism is a Sacrament to be celebrated not purchased. If in celebration of the day you wish to give a special offering to the Lord that is most appropriate.

KEEP THE BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE in a safe place. The certificate can be an important legal document as well as a reminder of the day of baptism. The baptismal certificate, candle, napkin and rose are gifts of the congregation to the child and the parents. The rose is a symbolic reminder of the words of the prophet Isaiah that "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose." This flower symbolizes the Kingdom of God, love, victory and rejoicing. Certainly all of those thoughts and feelings characterize the mood of the day.

ON THE DAY OF BAPTISM, GATHER IN THE APPOINTED PLACE at least thirty minutes in advance of the service. You will either be ushered into church or you may be part of the procession at the beginning of the service. At the appropriate time the pastor will ask you to come forward. You will be given directions with regard to responses. When the baby is baptized, please hold her/his head over the font so that water may be applied without difficulty. Obviously, nothing should be covering the head at this time. The pastor will wipe the head dry after baptism and bless the child. The pastor will then give you the napkin for a keepsake. A baptismal candle will be lit from the Christ candle. This, likewise, is yours to keep and light for your child on the anniversary date of her or his baptism. The pastor will make the sign of the cross on the child's forehead by using a bit of oil. Anointing has been an important action in the life of God's people marking important occasions. The anointing at baptism is a sign that the child has been "sealed" by the Holy Spirit of God. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

WE PREFER THAT PICTURES NOT be taken during the worship service. If you wish to take pictures prior to or following worship, please feel free to do so.

AS A PASTORAL STAFF we are here to meet your needs and deal pastorally with your concerns. Please do not hesitate to call us for assistance. Our prayer for you is that this may be an important and memorable day for you and your family as we share together in this Sacrament.

God bless you and the expected or new member of your family. May God in mercy and grace keep us all faithful to our baptismal promises, as God is faithful in keeping God's promises to us.



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