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Midweek Lent III
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Praying the Faith: Holy Baptism

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The church has been severely harmed by how we go about Baptism.

Today, Baptism is cute:

a cute little baby,
dressed in a cute, little, white dress,
with a cute little family, all dressed up, and all in church,
ready to go out to celebrate over brunch.

Pictures are taken.

A candle and a certificate get stored in a cupboard—only to be found years later.

And only if you're lucky, will you go back and look at the pictures and say: *how cute!*

For this, the church must repent.

We've made common what the Lord has called holy.

We've tamed what is the fiercest battle we'll ever face.

We've domesticated the wild and mocked the Lord to His face.

Repent.

There are three main OT stories that the NT uses to teach Baptism.

First is the death of Adam.

Second is the death of the World in a massive flood—the likes of which haven't been seen since.

And third is the death of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.

We tend to forget about this.

Perhaps it's because it's not 'til the fourth question in the Catechism:

“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;*

*and that a new Man should daily emerge and arise
to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”*

Baptism indicates a death.

And no one leaves a funeral saying: *“that was cute.”*

The Old Adam in us is our sinful nature.

It's who we are as a result of the fall—from that first Adam's disobedience we've all fallen.

Baptism indicates the murder of this Old Adam.

It indicates a war, a battle with sin, a life of struggle, carrying the cross with all its shame.

Sadly, for many of us, life isn't such a battle.

I know, I know: *“Pastor, don't you want to help make life easier?”*

No. I don't.

But I do want to make sure that this difficult life of war against the flesh isn't all there is *for you*.
If the battle is raging within, then it's not victory that's been won, but defeat.

That's how it was for the Israelites of Old.

We love telling our kids about how the water stood like walls
and the people of God walked through on dry ground.

But do we realize that it didn't stand up for the Egyptians?
Do we realize that thousands died that day?
And do we believe that this horrendous death is part of Baptism?

And then, do we go on to realize what the reality of this Exodus was?
The Israelites were in bondage to Pharaoh.
They could not worship God without fear.
Then Moses led them out of captivity, through the wall of water, and into the wilderness.
Then, the people grumbled, and quarreled, and longed for the safety they had in Egypt.

We look at them and shake our heads.
And then we grumble about saying prayers as a family;
we quarrel with one another about what's a sin and what's the big deal?

We too have been set free from the captivity of sin—
but that doesn't mean we like it.

We long for the sins of our youth.
We trivialize the battle going on within our world and within our own flesh.
We think the call to repentance is for the really big sinners.

Repent.
Fight against your flesh!
It's not easy!
The Christian life isn't easy.
And Baptism is what marks the Christian life.

It isn't something you get past.
It's not a distant memory, or a cute celebration.
Baptism is a *daily* event: a daily drowning.

And that brings us to the third OT image of Baptism, brought up in our Epistle today: the Flood.
Baptism is a daily flood.

It's always funny to see pictures of Noah's ark in pediatricians' offices.
I admit, we have a few pictures at home as well in the kids' rooms.
But I'll never forget what Ana asked while reading the Children's Bible story of the flood:
"Daddy, why are all those people sad?"

The Story Bible showed those who *didn't* get in the ark;
 those who didn't repent of their sin and trust in God.

If there's ever an image of *weeping and gnashing of teeth*, it's that.
 Clawing—tooth and nail—as hard as they might, they were drowned.

The earth became a watery-cemetery.
 And St. Peter says that all of this is a symbol of Baptism, *which now saves you*.

“*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;
 and that a new Man should daily emerge and arise
 to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*”

Baptism is death and resurrection.
 It's a war against the flesh, the sinful desires, the thinking of this world, and the devil himself.

So are you at war, or are you at peace?
 It should be war.

The peace we have isn't the peace of an easy life;
 but a peace that surpasses all understanding.
 It's a peace that exists in the midst of war.

And the peace we have is that in our Baptism the war has its end.
 We don't see or experience the end quite yet;
 but it's there.

The pronouncement from the cross: *It is finished!*
 is pronounced on us at our watery grave.

There we die and there we rise.
 Adam is put to rest and Christ now emerges and arises to live in us!

And that's repentance: death and life, confession and absolution.

So do not give up your fight—not yet.
 Peace will come as it's already yours.
 But for now you've been sealed with the holy cross,
 both upon your forehead and upon your heart,
 to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

You are His and He is yours.
 The battle is won, and yet now we fight.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit