

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Midweek Lent III
6 March 2013
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

If I went around saying, “I was married,” I’d be in a whole lot of trouble.

While it’s certainly true—

on July 12th 2004 Nikki and I stood before the altar and exchanged our vows,
and the pastor declared us husband and wife—

we don’t talk about marriage as something past and done,
we joyfully say, “we *are* married.”

St. Paul, in his famous Ephesians 5 passage, speaks of what marriage really is:

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.”*

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

(Eph 5:31-32)

We are united to Christ as a husband is to his wife, and then some more!

How does this union come about?

What’s the ceremony?

It’s holy Baptism.

At that font we are baptized.

And while it happens once in time, just like the marriage ceremony,
we shouldn’t go around saying, “I was baptized,” but “I *am* baptized.”

Baptism endures, it lasts, it marks who we are in Christ.

As our Catechism teaches us,

*“Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water
included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.”*

Baptism is instituted, that means, it’s established, set in place by our Lord.

*“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.’”*

Baptism is where we are named.

[Like little Kane this evening, our names are given at the font.]

Here, just as at Sinai, God Himself stoops down and etches His Word onto us,
just like a couple tablets of stone.

He tattoos us with His name.

And receiving His name, we are His.
We're joined to the Father as a spotless bride through the wedding ceremony with the Son.

Here, as St. Paul says to Titus,

"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5)

He washes us, clothes us, and weds us to Himself.
And it's Holy Baptism that does all this.

Now, we shouldn't shy away from the fact that Baptism is one of those divisive topics in conversation with other Christians.

It ultimately comes down to whether Baptism does something or not.
Is God acting in and with the water or not?
Is it just a symbolic washing? A symbolic naming? A symbolic saving?

Symbols are nice and helpful, and they shouldn't be done away with,
but they're certainly not essential.
And if Baptism is a symbol, then take it or leave it, and don't make a big fuss about it.

But if God actually does something in and with this water by His Word, if He actually
works forgiveness of sins,
rescues from death and the devil,
and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this,
then Baptism isn't some add-on, or periphery nicety.
It's not a symbol or a nice picture of something bigger and better.

Baptism then actually saves.

*"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)

And St. Peter, while discussing Noah's flood, says the same in his epistle,
"Baptism, of which the flood was a type, now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21).

Now of course, the conversation always turns to say,

"Yes, but, if Baptism is necessary for salvation, then what about the thief on the cross?"

To which I always respond, *"what about him?"*

When Jesus speaks His promises of life and salvation, you can always be sure you have them.

And that's where Baptism comes in.

The thief on the cross had the distinct privilege of hearing Jesus promise,

"Today you will be with me in paradise."

Unfortunately, only so many could sit at Jesus' right and left.
One scorned Him. The other pleaded for mercy. And none of us was there!

And if you weren't there, how do you get what He gives?
 Where do you hear the voice of Jesus today?
 Where do you run to in order to hear those promises?

Well we just heard that Jesus promises such salvation at the font—
 not because the water is any sort of magical water,
 but because that's where the Word is—
 and wherever the Word is, you know the Holy Spirit is at work.

And that Word and Spirit got you all covered over in your baptism.

St. Peter, in his Pentecost sermon says,

*“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.
 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.”* (Acts 2:38-39)

In Baptism, all of this comes to you.

There you are saved.

There your sins are forgiven.

There you are rescued from the grave and that old evil foe.

There the cross is given to you, and with it life everlasting!

Baptism is a drowning and dying of our sinful nature, that Old Adam.

And it's also a rising again of the new Man, Jesus Christ, *in us*.

There we're clothed with the wedding garments of salvation.

There we put on His righteousness as our own.

And there we are a new creation, born again, born from above, and receive the Holy Spirit.

There, *we are baptized*.

And as the Baptized, as those named by God, wedded to His Son, and inheritors of all that's His,
 we can be just as sure and certain as the thief on the cross that paradise is ours.

With such promises being ours in Christ,

we are free to pray that God would give us all He promised—
 both here in time, and there in eternity.

So when Satan rears his ugly face, and when your sin accuses you,
 remember, you *are* baptized!

And as the baptized, you belong to God.

And no one can snatch you out of His hand.

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