

Background Information

I would like to begin our discussion of Baptism by discussing what baptism is NOT.

- Baptism is NOT protection from sin or death. Everyone who is baptized was a sinner before they were baptized and will remain so after they are baptized. Baptism will not somehow become a shield against sin. Similarly, baptism is NOT protection from death. Everyone will die at some point. Baptism will NOT fend off death.
- Baptism is NOT a private matter between God and the baptized. Actually, the opposite of that is true. Baptism is to take place within the community of faith (the church) since the church is needed to fulfill the "covenant of baptism."
- Baptism is not something that parents do for their child. What the church teaches is that the Holy Spirit of the living God inspires the parents to bring their child to God for the rite where God formally claims the child and adopts it as God's own.
- Baptism is NOT foundational to salvation. I have two stories from the Bible that will help illustrate this. The first is from Luke 19:1-10, and it is the story of Zacchaeus, the Jewish tax collector who was also short in stature. Because of his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus had a radical conversion. As a result, Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." So Zacchaeus received salvation because of his heartfelt change hastened by his faith in Jesus. The second story is from the crucifixion of Jesus. In Luke 23:39-43, Jesus was crucified on a cross between two thieves. The one thief, whom we shall call the unrepentant thief, chided Jesus to save himself and the two thieves as well. The other thief, whom we shall call the repentant thief,

reminded the unrepentant thief that they were getting what they deserved, but Jesus was innocent. He asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, to which Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." In neither story were the subjects baptized and yet were promised salvation by Jesus.

Now I will tell you what baptism is.

- Baptism IS commanded by Jesus. After his death and resurrection and at his ascension, Jesus gave his disciples their final marching orders that we call, "The Great Commission" recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. Here Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize. The church is the extension of the disciples.
- Baptism IS an expression of their parent's faith. Presumably, the parents are faithful people and want a life of faith for their child. The rite of baptism requires the parents and sponsors or godparents to promise to raise their child in the Christian faith and life.
- Baptism IS the initiation rite into the church. Like many organizations that require some kind of initiation, the church requires baptism to become a member. When one is baptized, they become Christian.
- Baptism IS dying to sin and rising into the risen Christ. In Romans 6:1-14, the apostle Paul wrote that we share a human life and death with Jesus, but because of our baptisms, we will also share his resurrection and eternal life.
- Baptism is a rite in which the church claims some responsibility. Baptism is more concerned with the disciple's life after baptism than before. So the church provides discipleship classes and activities to welcome the newly baptized into the fellowship more fully.

Into the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)

We will not find baptism specifically taught in the Bible. However, the roots of Christian baptism is found in the baptism of John the Baptist. Mark 1:2-8 tells the story of the baptism performed by John the Baptist and Jesus being baptized by John. There are a couple of other mentions of baptism in the gospels, but the only other significant mention of baptism is at Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

Into Luther's Small Catechism

In Lutheranism, baptism is a very important ritual about which theology has been developed to understand what it means. Luther's explanation begins on page 28 in his Small Catechism.

What you need to know

In the Lutheran Church, most baptisms are performed on babies. However, occasionally adults are also baptized. There is no difference in the rite, although the older child or adult will likely remember the event better. But remembering the event is not what is important. What is important is that we remember that we are baptized. And the church provides several ways to be reminded.

Baptism is affirmed through individual and corporate confession and through life passages such as confirmation, reception into membership, the making of the sign of the cross, the profession of the creeds, and participation in Holy Communion.

Essay Questions

In 150 of your own words, briefly answer the following questions below:

1. You have undoubtedly seen many baptisms already. Name as many elements of baptism as you can.
2. The Covenant of Baptism includes the following words:
As you bring *your children* to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

to live with *them* among God's faithful people,

bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper,
teach *them* the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
place in *their* hands the holy scriptures,
and nurture *them* in faith and prayer,
so that *your children* 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.

Do you promise to help *your children* grow in the Christian faith and life?

Explain any three of the responsibilities above.

3. I deliberately did not go into a lot of detail about the mechanics of baptism (i.e., what the vessels are called, chrismation, the giving of a candle, etc.). That is because we often say that "the meaning of baptism is found in Christ's presence, not in the details of our practice." Can you explain what I mean above?
4. Lutherans believe that we are to be baptized only once, and once is good enough. In Ephesians 4:4-5, Paul wrote, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Why is one baptism good enough? Why would one choose to be baptized again? Can you foresee a problem being baptized again?

Email your answers back to Pastor Jesse by email at pastor@zionohio.org no later than next Sunday, February 7.