

Epiphany 1 / The Baptism of our Lord, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you, in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

In order to keep you on your toes this morning, and lest any should doze, I offer you today a two part sermon. We begin with Baptism, a Sunday morning point of view, and then after the hymn we continue with Baptism, a Monday morning point of view.

So, Baptism, a Sunday morning point of view, #1. Baptism is, forgiveness of sin. Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 are both explicit on this point, and Titus 3 is often quoted here as well. Really, the whole New Testament assumes this to be the case, and rejoices in it! Trusting in Jesus who died and rose again, washed in the name of the Triune God Father Son and Holy Spirit—this is Baptism, forgiveness for everything you've ever been and done, that's #1.

And a sub-point to #1. It doesn't matter how wet you get. In Baptism it doesn't matter how wet you get, it's not the size of the splash that matters. It's the size of your God, and we do indeed have a great and a mighty God. In Baptism, you can be dunked, dipped, or dabbed. Jesus Himself—and I would say your bulletin cover is actually a pretty accurate depiction—Jesus Himself probably stood waist deep in water, and had it poured over His head; but whatever. Whatever! The New Testament does not insist on form, it does not say there is any sort of special technique for baptizing. It simply says, be baptized. Trust in the Word of this great and mighty God of ours, trust Him when He says that with this water, in whatever amount, your sins are washed away! And rejoice in it. Baptism is forgiveness of sin, and sub point A, it does not matter how wet you get.

Sub point B? You do have to get wet. You do: Baptism is not optional, it is commanded. Humble as it appears, simple as it sounds, Baptism is presented in Scripture as THE way God has, of bringing it all home to you. You don't have to go looking for God, out there. He said He'd be here, waiting for you in the water—come and see.

Moving on, #2. If Baptism was only about the forgiveness of sin, then Jesus could have simply carried on with the ministry of John the Baptist. We could all be disciples of John today—if Baptism was only about forgiving sins. There's more.

Christian Baptism not only forgives you the past, it gives new life in the present—right here, right now. Christian Baptism joins you to the death and resurrection of Jesus, meaning that in Christian Baptism, you die! Meaning that in Christian Baptism, you come to life, a whole new being, what we see in you now each day is a new person, animated always and only, by the Spirit of Christ.

Christian Baptism empties you, that you may be filled up, filled up with the Holy Spirit this time, see Romans 6 and Romans 8 and for that matter the lesson from Acts today. Christian Baptism calls you out of this present evil age, into the fellowship of the Body of Christ—commonly called the Church, but let's call it the Body of Christ to remind ourselves that it means more than the carpet and pews you happen to see here each week. Christian Baptism means therefore, you are here, to be the hands and feet of Christ.

So, what you do matters; right? What you do matters, it's not enough to say I believe in Jesus, I've been baptized in His name therefore I can live any old way I want to. No. No, you cannot live any OLD way at all—not when you're called to the new. You cannot live any OLD way at all—not unless you despise the grace of God, and have no use for heaven.

Speaking of heaven though; #3. More than forgiveness for the past, more than new life in the present, Christian Baptism is also an awakening, to the promise of the future. The Kingdom of Heaven will be ours! We who have been washed are here, waiting, waiting for that Kingdom to dawn at last. God is not done with us yet. God is not done with the world! Christ will return, to take us home, and when He does we shall be His completely, and totally, and forever.

May that great day come quickly, in the name of Jesus Christ AMEN.

What I just gave you was Baptism from a Sunday point of view. It's the sort of lesson from the catechism I teach in greater detail in confirmation class, but we go over it here from time to time, since it's generally assumed most confirmands aren't listening that closely.

Now a quick word about Baptism, from a Monday point of view.

In Mark chapter 1, *immediately after Jesus is done being baptized in verse 11*, He is led into the wilderness to be tested by Satan. In the Gospel, immediately after this pious Sunday morning experience, Jesus is thrown into the middle of Monday morning world. Theology and lofty spiritual insight seem a long way away. The Devil is close at hand.

We know that kind of a world. We live in that kind of a wilderness. We live in a Monday morning wilderness and we don't always see how it connects, to Sunday morning catechism.

But it does. It has to.

If God was only with us in this building at this hour, God wouldn't be worth very much. If faith only guided our thoughts here, and not our words and deeds there, *faith* wouldn't be worth very much. If Baptism was only Sunday morning's water, why bother. But we cling to the hope that in Jesus Christ, God proved He was stronger than death—not even death on a cross could keep Him down. And if God is stronger than death, you know He's also stronger than life. If the Devil can't beat Jesus, neither can your Monday morning. If God is strong enough and loving enough to see you through the gate of death, He can certainly guide you through the wilderness of life. And He will. Open your eyes, open your heart, trust and believe.

Baptism is a big deal on Sunday, but it's real importance is seen when God takes you by the hand on Monday, and leads you through the week; through life. Hold His hand, fear not, just remember. Your forehead is wet. You've been washed, you've been redeemed, you belong to Him. And you will forever, in a world where Monday—is no more.

We pray as always in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.