

“Live out your baptism!” Matthew 3:14-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Today for our meditations we have the account of Jesus’ Baptism. It will help us to reflect on our Baptism as well, and once more to review and rejoice in the wonderful, divine gifts that our Lord gives to us in our Baptism.

But first the question – where was our salvation won? And the answer is – of course, on the cross. But then the second question – how can we today receive what Jesus won on the cross two millennia ago?

And the answer is – the Holy Spirit uses certain means to deliver these gifts to us. These are often called the means of the Holy Spirit, or the means of grace, for what they deliver to us is God’s grace. What are these means?

The Word of God and the Sacraments – our Baptism and the Holy Communion. This is how we receive today what Jesus won for us on that Friday at Golgotha. This is how the Triune God builds, protects and strengthens His Kingdom.

And that explains why these means of the Holy Spirit are under continuous attacks from the evil one. He fights against the Gospel, he tries to twist the clear Word of God: “You can’t possibly understand it, there are so many different interpretations.”

He tries to undermine its authority: “How can you believe all those stories that were written such a long time ago?!” He tries to turn our attention somewhere else away from God’s Word: “There is so much on TV, on Internet, on Netflix, watch that, it’s so much more entertaining!”

He tries to make us busy and complacent so that we don’t listen, read, study discuss and meditate upon the Word of God. And if he succeeds, and sadly he does too often, then Christians are left vulnerable as naïve children “carried about by every wind of [false] doctrine and by human cunning.” (Eph 4:14)

The same is true about the Sacraments, about Baptism and Lord’s Supper. The evil one does whatever he can to take them away from us. To deceive us and to depriving us from these great sources of comfort and strength.

This explains why so many divisions in the Church’s history have been over ... yes, over how to understand these means of the Holy Spirit, our Baptism and the Holy Communion. And even today, this would be one of the main differences between many and many churches – what they believe and teach about Baptism

and the Lord's Supper. We won't discuss today the Lord's Supper, but we will reflect a little bit on what false teaching there are about Baptism.

If we tried to really simplify all the misunderstandings then we could probably summarize them in two main trends. According to one of them, Baptism is our activity and our activity alone, nothing else, nothing more. According to the other Baptism is some sort of Christian magic. What do these mean?

Many and many churches these days teach that Baptism is something that we do, our work. According to their teaching Baptism is about us choosing to become Christians. That it is the act of our choice, the ritual where we publicly affirm that we want to give our lives to Jesus.

There is something commendable, if we could say so, even despite this false teaching. That new Christians are ready to commit with their whole heart to follow their Lord Jesus Christ; this is what we could learn. This zeal and passion to follow Jesus. How often do we see it among us?!

What is sad, that with this false teaching they have lost most of the comfort and joy and awe and indescribable wonder that that Lord blesses us with, if only we listen to Him carefully, and truly understand what Baptism gives us. We will talk about it more in a minute.

The other false trend is to make Baptism into some sort of a magic. How does that work? You just perform a magical ritual, or say a magical formula, right magical words and something magical happens just by doing it.

Nothing else is needed from us. This sounds very similar to pagan spirituality, where you go to some sort of spiritual practitioner, some shaman or witch and then ask them to give you a spiritual blessing, a spiritual power or protection.

Then they perform their magical ritual, say their magical words and you are good to go. It's a done deal. You got what you wanted and no strings attached. It seems that this second false teaching has made its way among those people who used to belong to Lutheran churches.

Perhaps they still remember that Baptism was something important, but having wandered away from the body of Christ, the Church, this high regard towards Baptism seems to have turned into this somehow magic misunderstanding.

And thus, we can meet people who have this idea that Baptism is this magical thing, which you can come and get in the Church, and then you are good for the rest of life. No strings attached. Go and do whatever you want.

How could we help them? What could we do to bring them back into this fellowship with the Father and the Son? You know how the true faith comes? The true faith comes through ... hearing the Gospel. That's it! The most that we can possibly do for such people, the most Christian thing, the most loving thing that we can do for them is to be generous with our time, teaching, explaining,

proclaiming what Jesus has done for them, what the Triune God has prepared for them, and how to receive it properly.

If we could teach them what it means to be a Christian, what Baptism is and how to receive and live it out properly, that probably is the greatest gift that we can give them. And, of course, we need to pray for them, so that the Holy Spirit would remove all the obstacles and they would be willing to receive the Gospel.

Now, Jesus' own Baptism reminds us about what great a gift our Baptism is and prompts us to consider carefully how to receive it properly. Our Baptism isn't a magical trick that makes you healthy, or wealthy, or happy, and it isn't simply our activity either, instead, it is God's work that gives us something truly great.

About some of these gifts we can learn reading the account of Jesus' Baptism. Others we can find explained elsewhere in the Scriptures. **“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.””**

Yes, in your Baptism you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descends from the Father and rests on you. Or you can say that you are sealed with the seal of the Spirit. Then there is this voice, the voice of God the Father.

“You are my beloved child!” Yes, in your Baptism you are adopted as God's child, you are made a member of God's family. This is you of whom God the Father says: “You are my beloved child!” Which means that you are made an heir of God's Kingdom and co-heir with the only-begotten Son Jesus.

It means that whatever the Father has prepared for His chosen people in the age to come, in New Heavens and New Earth, you are His heir, and the seal of the Spirit confirms His promise. But that's not all. The Scripture goes on and on describing the gifts we receive in our Baptism.

You are united with Jesus. Both, in His death and in His resurrection. If you die with Jesus to your old self, you will be raised with Him, as He was raised in new glorified body, fit for eternal life.

You are sanctified by washing with the Holy Spirit, the old man in us is stripped away and you have put on the new man. You are clothed with Christ, in His holiness, His purity and beauty. This is how your Father now sees you. Perfect, complete, wonderfully made.

Once we reflect on what gifts are given to us in Baptism, it becomes so clear that this is not, this cannot be our activity, we cannot possibly get something so great and not from this world done on our own. No way! It is God's gift to us.

There is one more misunderstanding about Baptism, that even committed Christians may be sometimes guilty of. That is this idea that our Baptism is something that happened with us in the past. That event a long time ago.

No! Your Baptism is not about your past. It is about your present and about your future. We don't say: "I was baptized." What we say as Christians is: "I am baptized." Your Baptism is not simply about the ritual that took place back then, it is about your new identity.

About the most important identity, about the identity of children of God, of brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ, of heirs of God's Kingdom where we will reign with Him forever and ever.

It means that every day, day by day we need to live out this our new identity of God's children. As Luther puts it wonderfully in the Small Catechism: "What does such baptizing with water signify? –

It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever." It means that every day turn away from our selfish ways, and with the help of the Holy Spirit do our best to follow our Lord Jesus.

As we can see our Baptism is something truly great, truly divine, something that changes everything in our lives, that fills and covers every day of our lives. Our entire Christian lives are about living out our baptismal identity. Growing to be who God has intended and made us to be.

And it is by no means an easy walk. Every day we encounter adversity from our own flesh, from the old Adam in us. Every day we are tempted by the world and the devil, and we need all the help that there is to remain in our Baptism until we see our Lord Jesus face to face.

And blessed we are, for our Father provides it for us abundantly. His all-powerful and life-giving Word. He speaks it to us in the Divine Service. We have it available at our homes. We have it explained to us in our Bibles Studies, and there are multitudes of great and faithful books available.

He has also blessed us with this new family. His family. His people. Our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our caring and faithful Father has given all these people you see here, and countless others to help you to live out your Baptism.

He has given you pastors, He has given you wise brothers and sisters, who can give you good advice. He has given you supportive brothers and sisters with whom you can discuss and explore the beauty of God's wisdom.

He has given you brothers and sisters who need your care and your prayers, so that you could practice your new identity. And He has made you to be all these things to others. This is how the body of Christ works.

And on top of that, He Himself gathers us every week, to be with us, and to bless us. To feed us with His forgiveness and fill with His Spirit. All of that, to help you to live out your Baptism. Remember, you are baptized, live it out. Amen.