

“The forgotten baptism” Luke 3:15-18, 21-22

“As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today two of our readings speak about baptism. Therefore, the gift of baptism and the gifts that we receive in our baptism and what it means to be baptized will be the focus of our meditations.

Who are you? I am baptized. I. Am. Baptized. So, what a big deal?! So many are baptized, what about it?!

We are so used to ordinary things which we encounter in our lives. The birth of a child. A new life. Or being baptized. Being baptized into the Christ Church. A new life in Christ. We are so used to such things. They may seem so ordinary.

What is your baptism for you? What does it mean, what does it do to you? Reflect on it! For some it may be just a past event which you don't even remember, if you were baptized as a child. For some, when they think about baptism, they think about a church rite, which is kind of nice, which may bring family together.

Or for some it may be a thing on their Christian “to do” list, to get children and grand-children baptized, and then we are good. What is baptism for you? What is your baptism for you? Does it matter on a daily basis? How and why does it matter? Do we value it? Do we rejoice in it? Are we thankful for it? Do we live it out?

Let's briefly review how the Scripture speaks about our baptism.

Jesus said to them: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”** (Mat 28:18-20)

This is how disciples of Jesus are made, when we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and when we are taught to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. This is God's mission in the World. This is what He

does through us, this is the Church's Great Commission. This is how the Triune God brings us into His holy community, when He baptizes us into the Church.

By means of baptism we are united with the Church of Christ, with the body of Christ. That is how God expands His Kingdom. That is how the Triune God Himself makes us His own. You too.

Further... **"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."** (Romans 6:3-4)

Did you hear this! In your baptism, you were so intimately joined with Jesus, that what happened to him, essentially has happened with you too. You are a member in Christ's body. You were buried with Jesus into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead you too might walk in the newness of life.

Get this, in your baptism you have been united with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, He has gone through death and has come out on the other side victorious, triumphant over death, overflowing with eternal life, and what He has done, will happen with you too. You will be victorious over death. Because you are baptized.

Peter said: **"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."** (Acts 2:38) Yes, this is what our God gives to you in your baptism. Forgiveness of all your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is not a small thing.

Forgiveness... that is about the Last Day, when we all will stand before the throne of God and His books will be open and we will have to give account for how we have lived this life. And because you are baptized, expect to hear these words: "You are forgiven, enter into my joy, you faithful servant!" Because you are baptized.

Further... **"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."** (Tit 3:5-7)

Your baptism, it is not just a ritual. In your baptism the Triune God makes you His children, and His heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Or as Paul the apostle writes elsewhere: **"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."** (2 Cor 5:17)

Yes, and also, those who are baptized have **"fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."** (1 John 1:3) These are great, this time and age transcending realities, which are yours already now.

The Triune God has begun His new creation in you. He has given you the gift of the Holy Spirit, He has united you with Himself with the bond of His own Spirit. This bond will last forever if we do not neglect or reject it. This is the invisible but sure

reality of your life. Wonderful, blessed and joyful reality. Because you are baptized. How do we appreciate and cherish our baptism? Do we?

This is how Dr Luther summarized Biblical teaching on Baptism.

“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 with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

So, how do we appreciate and cherish our baptism? How are we to live in our baptism? Dr Luther says it boils down to two main things. Daily repentance and new life. We need to notice they are not optional. Get baptized and done. No! We should daily drown the Old Adam with all sins and evil desires, and a new man should emerge and arise daily to live before God. But what does that mean?

Let's see. First, what about daily repentance? Daily repentance... but what do we need to daily repent of? Surely, we are not that bad that we would be sinning every day! What to repent of? What do you think?

As we grow as Christians, as we continue as Jesus' disciples, two things happen at the same time. On the one hand, surely, the Word of God shares and moulds us to be more and more like Jesus. It happens as the Word never returns without accomplishing its purpose.

As we learn and meditate on God's attitude towards us, we learn to fear to disappoint Him, to displease Him for everything that God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit has done for us. We genuinely strive to lead a holy life. We do.

At the same time, as the Spirit gradually restores and reshapes us, and we draw closer and closer to our Lord, something else happens. Something very different. We become more and more acutely aware of our sinfulness. It's not about outward actions. We may appear perfect towards others.

It is about the very state of our heart, of our inner being, of our thoughts, desires, passions. They all are soiled with sin. There is nothing pure. Our old self finds every crack in our soul and like a water under pressure forces itself in.

Old Adam wants to be number one. He doesn't want to hear about loving God or loving our neighbour. He wants to occupy all our thoughts, he wants his desires and cravings to be priority, he demands our attention and takes captive our focus. As Jeremiah the prophet put it: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9) Who can... we certainly can't.

The closer we draw to God, the more His light shines on us, the more aware we are of this inner struggle, of the deceitfulness and twistedness of our old self. The clearer we see how much there is to repent from. Daily. For each one of us.

And what a wonderful gift our Lord has given us in the form of private confession, where we can open up before Him, about all our struggles that taunt us, and were

we can tangibly experience His grace and liberation, when after our confession we hear the life-transforming words “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Please, use this gift. It is here for you.

So, one thing was daily repentance, and another was new life in Christ. How to go about it? On the one hand, we shall learn how to love our Lord and how to please Him. And there certainly are abundant instructions given to us.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:3) This is a clear message repeated numerous times. The Commandments should shape our new life for they give it a God-pleasing and neighbor-blessings form.

But this is not primarily about external, outwardly actions. It is about life that proceeds from a renewed heart. “Create in me a new heart, O God!” Make a tree good, and its fruits will be good. And what is the best way to make our hearts good? It is by means of God’s grace, God’s Spirit, God’s Word which we take in.

When that happens, when God’s Words and His Spirit fill us, we have His divine energy bubbling in us and then we desire to please our God, to serve Him, to bring Him joy. Then we don’t look at ourselves anymore, we don’t even worry about how good we are, that’s a habit of our old self, to look into the mirror of self and to make sure we look good. Our new self is free to look elsewhere.

Where exactly? We look at our God, thanking Him for His abundant grace. For His abundant forgiveness. And we look at our neighbours, that is, at all people in our lives and we seek for opportunities to serve them, to care for them and to bless them as we are cared for and blessed by our God.

This is how our baptism helps us daily to emerge and arise for our new life in Christ. Your baptism. It does all of this. It is such a heavenly gift. New identity. Baptised child of God; welcomed into God’s family. New power, new motivation, new attitude, new energy and true wisdom to live this new life.

As we see from these brief reflections, our baptism is something so special that we struggle even to comprehend its grandeur. It is by no means only a past event, it is our today’s reality, it shapes our entire life.

Who are you? I am baptized. I am a baptized child of God. I am a new creation. Yes, you are. You are! May the Triune God who baptized you into His name keep blessing you richly so that we succeed in daily drowning our old self and emerging and arising to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

May you succeed by His grace.

Amen.