

January 12, 2025

Texts: Isaiah 43: 1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Title: "I Am Baptized!"

Most pastors of a church that baptize people by immersion have plenty of stories to tell. I remember a pastor years ago telling me a story about him coming in to the church early one Sunday morning, a day when he was to baptize nine young persons—eight girls and one 13-year-old boy. Well, the pastor discovered that the baptistery was bone dry. He had three hours to get it filled when it usually took much longer for this was a big day for their families. There was no way to cancel the baptisms for lack of water. The pastor literally ran to the parsonage next door, grabbed a garden hose, ran it across the driveway, up the front steps, down the center aisle and into the baptistery. In one hour, the baptistery was full of water, right out of their deep limestone well. And it was cold, really cold. It was probably around 50 degrees, which might as well have been freezing for the young people who were being baptized.

He says he himself was shaking as he looked up at the baptismal candidates gathered in their thin, little white robes at the top of the ladder. They were excited. He warned them that the water wasn't all that warm. Later, he says, as each descended into the pool, their little eyes bugged out, they became stiff as boards. He had a hard time getting them to bend enough to get them under the water. The girls took it well, but the boy was more difficult. The moment his bare foot hit the water,

he let out a scream. Getting him under the water turned into a wrestling match. Water sloshed over the glass at the front of the baptistery, soaking the basses in the last row of the choir loft. As he emerged from the water the young man shouted loudly, “Oh GOD, that’s cold!!!” By this time the entire congregation was rocking with laughter. Later, the chairman of the deacons, who was one of the basses on the back row of the choir loft said, “Well pastor, that’s one baptism we all participated in!” Well you know what friends, he had it right. We all do participate in the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism is a sacrament of the church. That is the first thing we need to see. It belongs to the church. No matter how it’s performed, it’s at the heart of our faith. Every religious tradition has its own approach to baptism, but we all recognize the importance of it. It’s a celebration of the entire church.

And it’s a sacrament, a means through which we can connect with God. Jesus, in submitting to baptism was setting an example for us. He was also identifying with the message of repentance that John preached. And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus was baptized as a sign that we should do the same.

Baptism is a sign that we belong to Christ. In a sense there’s a voice that comes from heaven whenever anyone is baptized that says: “You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” It doesn’t matter that we’re not sinless as Christ

was, but because of what God has done in Christ, we are accepted as if we were. We are God's beloved. No matter how the water is applied, baptism is sign and seal that we are no longer our own. We belong to Christ.

It's said that whenever Martin Luther found himself ready to give up, whenever worry for his own life and the life of the Church he loved overwhelmed him, he'd touch his forehead and say to himself: "Remember Martin, you have been baptized."

Baptism is a sacrament. It's a sign that we belong to God and it's **a statement of where our ultimate allegiance lies**. The reason we present ourselves and our kids for baptism is that we are making a statement about what really matters in our lives.

Robert McAfee Brown tells of a time in 1960, when he participated in a Lutheran worship service in East Berlin, only a short time before the Berlin Wall was built. Very few people went to church at that time because the communists viewed it with suspicion. Nonetheless, a young couple came to the worship service and presented their child for baptism. Brown was amazed, and wondered why this couple would jeopardize their future and that of their child by insisting on baptism?

This couple wanted to make a statement: our child belongs to God, and nothing--even the power of the state--was going to keep them from making that statement. Now that's commitment. Baptism isn't something you have to rush into as soon as your child is born. It's not an item to check off the baby checklist. It's a major commitment on the part of parents and the church and it results in a commitment by

the child being baptized as well in good time; a commitment to follow Christ, to learn and be a person of faith, hope, and love.

When we live out our baptism (promises that are made for us at an early age but are confirmed later on) we live out Christ's purpose for our life. Baptism is a sacrament of the church. It is sign and seal that we belong to God. It is a statement of where our ultimate allegiance lies.

Renewal of vows:

Vows of Renewal

Do you renew and affirm the promises made at your baptism?

I do.

Do you recognize the call of God to be God's people always?

I do.

Do you embrace the way of Jesus in faith and ministry?

I do

Do you accept the nurture of the Holy Spirit who renews your spirit each day?

I do.

Do you accept and embrace others who seek a liberating faith in God?

I do.

In renewing your baptismal vows, remember your baptism as a mark of acceptance and welcome into the care of Christ's church where you may begin again your Christian faith and life.