

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

Studying the Bible, I'm often struck by the wonder of **God's patience and love for a people that continually turn away from Him.** We know from Ephesians 2 that we were spiritually dead, until God made us alive in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we know that Baptism has replaced Old Testament circumcision, that we become part of God's family by this special washing, through **faith in Christ.** Colossians chapter 2 tells us: *"In Him, you also were circumcised, not by human hands but by putting away the sinful body by the circumcision of Christ since in baptism you were buried with Him and raised with Him through faith produced by the power of God, Who raised Him from the dead"* (AAT, Col 2:11-12).

Titus also tells us the truth about baptism: *"He saved us, not because of any good works we did but because He was merciful. He saved us by the washing in which the Holy Spirit gives us a new birth and a new life"* (AAT, Titus 3:5). There are many other New Testament verses that confirm that something truly amazing happens in baptism: **Those who previously had no faith are brought to faith in Christ.** The "washing" of baptism is, in fact, a renewal of those who were spiritually dead, to a new spiritual life. This was done by God so that man could have a real, tangible gift that we could point to when Satan is trying to convince us that God had not really brought us to salvation. Think of it as an **objective fact** – something that can't be denied since it occurred, as witnessed by a pastor, sponsors and friends (those of you who were baptized as adults can recall it without the need of witnesses). **God promises to work in this way, and in fact, He did for me!**

Now, let's look at a large number of Protestant churches that deny that anything happens at baptism. You may know someone that says that baptism was just a way of man acknowledging their belief in Jesus Christ. It may also be known as a 'commitment to God' to remain His disciple. These churches say that you must decide to follow Christ and this unbiblical teaching changes baptism into **your work.**

Some Protestants state that baptism is God's work (and it is), but then say that there must be a separate working of the Holy Spirit, something that you can sense or feel, that shows that faith is alive in you.

Why the difference between the Lutheran Church and these Protestant churches? The problem is the age-old problem that has plagued man since the beginning of time: Man gets caught up in the question of whether or not it's **reasonable.** God teaches us that **we must learn to live by faith alone, and not be signs and wonders.** And He reinforces this with the way He confers His grace on us: He alone makes it happen. But sinful man can never be happy with the concept of 'blind trust.' "Why can't we witness a real change in someone that is baptized?" "Why can't we make baptism something that *we* can accomplish so that *we* can trust in our own ability to accomplish it, and not have to rely on God?" In essence, baptism is too difficult to reason or understand, or it

can't be verified by the human senses - so sinful man changes it to suit his likes. And the wonderful gift of Baptism (that by the way, if accepted by faith provides us with a *powerful weapon* against Satan's attacks) is changed to an insignificant act of man.

Turn salvation into man's accomplishment, and you will never know if you've achieved it. Simply trust in God's Word, when He clearly teaches us that **He does all the work of Baptism**, of bringing us to salvation, and you can live each day with confidence in your standing before God. More importantly, when Satan tries to tear at you with doubt, we Lutheran's can confidently reply, "Satan can do nothing to me – I'm baptized into Christ Jesus!"

Faith conferred at Baptism, is the very same faith that allows us to trust in God's promise that He will bring us to salvation, and work to keep us in the one true faith. We see the cross of Christ as a place of forgiveness, of redemption, of hope that will never fade. Faith allows us to trust in God's promise of baptism, even though it can't be reasoned or understood outside of faith.

Our review of baptism leads us into **the seasons of Advent and Christmas**. A light comes to shine in a dark world (as a light came to shine in our darkened hearts through water and the Word). Through this child, born in the most humble of settings, comes salvation for mankind. Jesus truly needed to die for our sins, because we certainly don't have the innate power to stop sinning. We were baptized into His death and resurrection (see Romans 6:3-4), something as we said can't be reasoned, only believed. We live as redeemed children of God, but we must never forget that **our** sin led to **His** death. Advent is a time of penitential thought (reflecting on the truth of our sinfulness, and our need for a Savior). God has completed His work of redemption and now we await His return in glory. Advent leads to Christmas, a Season of Light, filled with hope and love. May this time of the Church Year draw you closer to our Savior's eternal love.

Pastor Travis