



*A Bible Study and Discussion Guide for*

# *An Inexpressible Treasure*

**THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF HOLY BAPTISM**

**THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD**

This discussion guide and Bible study is based on the 2018 report, *An Inexpressible Treasure: The Theology and Practice of Holy Baptism*, produced by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, available at [lcms.org/ctcr](http://lcms.org/ctcr).

Abbreviations used:

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AC    | Augsburg Confession  |
| AE    | <i>Luther's Works</i> , American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann and Christopher Boyd Brown, 75 vols. (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Augsburg and Concordia Publishing House, 1955–). |
| Ap    | Apology of the Augsburg Confession   |
| FC SD | Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration  |
| KW    | Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. <i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).   |
| LC    | Large Catechism  |
| LSB   | <i>Lutheran Service Book</i> (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).  |
| LSCwE | <i>Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation</i> (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).  |
| SA    | Smalcald Articles  |
| SC    | Small Catechism  |

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## INTRODUCTION

**E**arly on the first day of the week, breath entered the body of a man who had been crucified three days earlier. As He inhaled the stale air of the tomb, everything in the universe and human history changed. His body awakened to a new life. He sat up, stood up and left the tomb, appointed as Lord of God's entire creation.

*Read Matt. 28:18, Acts 17:30–31 and Heb. 1:1–2. What do these verses say about the resurrection, exaltation and lordship of Jesus Christ? What tasks and authority have been given to the Son?*

The crucified and risen Lord Jesus established Baptism as the entry into our new life under God's reign. Through Baptism, we are invited to participate in the Lord's Supper, to read and study the Scriptures and to care for one another as members of the Christian community. We have Jesus' promise that He will raise us from the dead on the Last Day to receive our eternal inheritance in the new heavens and the new earth.

*Read Acts 2:36–47. On the day of Pentecost, "about three thousand souls" received the Word and were baptized. How did these newly baptized believers express their new life under God's reign?*

The CTCR report and this discussion guide are organized in four parts:

**Part 1: Baptism and the Story of Jesus:** Set within the story of Jesus, the importance of Baptism for our lives flows out of the life of Christ. The first section tells that story as found in the Gospels and the book of Acts.

**Part 2: Baptism: A New Beginning:** The second section discusses the meaning and benefits of Baptism as taught in Scripture and the way in which Baptism places us within the context of God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament.

**Part 3: The Gifts and Benefits of Baptism:** The third section examines our privileges and responsibilities as members of God's kingdom, exploring those teachings in Scripture and in our catechisms. Baptism gives us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, delivers us from death and the devil and brings us safely through the final judgment.

**Part 4: The Baptismal Commission:** This section addresses theological and practical questions and discusses essential elements necessary for a Christian Baptism. The section also addresses certain matters that are not essential but are useful and beneficial for teaching.

**Additional Questions about Baptism:** A final section answers questions that people may raise about the theology and practice of Baptism.

## 1. BAPTISM AND THE STORY OF JESUS

**C**hristians live according to a story — a true account, history, His Story — about God and His creation that finds its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> We will consider Baptism within that story. Baptized, we live as God intends, daily receiving His rich and undeserved gifts, living in service to others and sharing God’s delight for His creation.

We can see that the world is far from perfect. This is true for our lives as well, but we live according to the scriptural story in which Jesus came to put things right — to restore them to the way that God intended them to be. In Jesus’ words and actions, we see human life as God intended it to be lived.

**Read Eph. 1:7–10 and Col. 1:19–23.** What do these verses say about God’s plan in Christ for all things on earth and in heaven?

### Jesus’ Baptism and the Reign of God

The story of Jesus begins before the creation of the world. Jesus is the Word who was with God and who

was God, the Word through whom all things were made (JOHN 1:1–4). This Word, for us and for our salvation, “became flesh and dwelt among us” (JOHN 1:14). Echoing the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist announced the coming of the Word. God was sending His own Son, the Lamb of God, to reclaim His world and restore it to His gracious reign.

**Read Luke 3:7–14.** How does John call the people to repentance in preparation for the coming of God’s reign?

John performed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to re-orient God’s chosen people to His purposes. John warned the spiritual leaders not to think that their bloodlines exempted them from the need to repent and produce the fruits of faith. “Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (MATT. 3:9–10).

Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized. Why would Jesus, who had no sin, want — much less need — to be baptized? But Jesus said that He and John needed to “fulfill all righteousness” (MATT. 3:15). In His baptism, Jesus aligned Himself with His sinful people (Is. 53:12; JOHN 1:29). As He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove and the Father’s voice from heaven declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (MATT. 3:16–17).

Jesus’ baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry. As John did before Him, Jesus also proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, every reference to “God’s story” or “the story of Christ” assumes that we are talking about events that actually happened and are recorded for us with complete reliability by the Holy Scriptures. The word “story” is used to communicate that God’s salvation is the true account of events that our God actually performed in history, especially in the deeds and words of the Lord Jesus. God did not save us by communicating a series of ideas; He saved us by actually doing things in Christ and promising saving gifts on the basis of what He did. In that important sense, the Gospel is a narrative, a *story*, His story.

repent and believe in the gospel” (MARK 1:15). With Jesus’ ministry, the restored reign of God had arrived.

**Read Luke 4:16–30.** *When Jesus speaks at the synagogue in Nazareth, what does He say about the ministry He has now begun? What will He do as He restores the reign of God?*

In His parables, Jesus painted a picture of what it means to enter the kingdom of God.

**Read Matt. 22:1–14 and Luke 14:16–24.** *Who is initially invited to the banquets in these parables? Why don’t the first invitees attend? In the end, who is invited to enjoy the banquets? What happens to those who reject the invitation?*

These parables speak of people in Israel who reject the Son. Yet God continues to invite all — even outsiders like the Gentiles — to sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These parables look forward to an invitation to come: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (REV. 19:9).

Jesus re-established God’s reign, freeing people from demon possession, healing their illnesses, feeding the hungry, raising the dead and forgiving sins. He associated with the outcasts of society. These things provide a glimpse of the reign of God and what it will look like on the day when He sets everything right once and for all.

“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (JOHN 1:11). Organized opposition arose among the religious leaders (MATT. 21:45–46). They looked for a way to have Jesus put to death — an outcome Jesus Himself anticipated: “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” (LUKE 12:49–50). The religious leaders conspired to have Jesus crucified by the Roman authorities. On the third day after His death, Jesus arose from the grave. Over the next 40 days He showed Himself to more than 500 people (ACTS 1:3; 1 COR. 15:5–8).

**Read Acts 2:32–36, Rom. 1:1–6 and Phil. 2:8–11.** *How has God exalted His crucified and risen Son? How is Jesus’ identity confirmed through His resurrection?*

## Baptism: God’s Invitation into the Kingdom of God

Before ascending to take up His reign at the right hand of God, Jesus gathered His disciples and spoke to them about His future plans.

**Read Matt. 28:16–20 and Acts 1:6–8.** *What is the extent of Jesus’ authority and kingdom? How will His reign be expanded “to the end of the earth?”*

There is no authority that Jesus does not have. Under His reign, the entire earth will be renewed and refreshed as foretold (IS. 49:6; IS. 11:1–10). The crucified and risen Lord gave His disciples the task of participating in the re-establishment of God’s reign by making people followers of Jesus. He sends His disciples out to bring all nations back to their Creator.

Jesus’ commission looks forward to the day when God will be worshiped as Creator and Lord by all nations (IS. 2:1–5; MAL. 1:11). Jesus invites all people to follow Him into the kingdom of God through Baptism and to enjoy all the benefits and privileges of living under God’s gracious reign. On the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed God’s reign to a large crowd gathered in Jerusalem.

**Read Acts 2:32–41.** *Why are the people alarmed when they hear Peter’s announcement of the lordship of Jesus Christ? How does Peter respond to their fear? To whom does the Kingdom belong?*

The disciples took this news about Jesus’ resurrection and His lordship out into the world.

**Read Acts 10:34–43 and Acts 17:24–31.** *According to these proclamations of the Gospel by Peter and Paul, how has the Creator made Himself known? What is said about the authority and power of the risen Lord Jesus?*

The disciples took the Gospel to the ends of the known world. Everywhere they went people were made followers of Jesus and citizens of God’s kingdom through Baptism, learning all that Jesus commanded (MATT. 28:20).

**Read Acts 8:26–39; Acts 10:1–2 44–48; Acts 16:14–15, 25–33; and Acts 18:8.** *In each account, who is brought into the Kingdom through Baptism? How do these individuals represent “all nations?”*

The apostles continued to teach God's people through visits and personal letters. These Spirit-inspired texts of Scripture continue to shape and guide us today as we share the Gospel with the world. We are part of the ongoing story. Over the past 2,000 years, Jesus' followers have continued to carry out His commission to bring all nations into the kingdom of God. Today, most of us who are baptized are the descendants of those who belonged to "the nations," that is, those who were not part of God's chosen people of Israel. Now we *are* God's chosen people through Baptism.

We will not arrive at the end of the story until the risen Lord Jesus returns to cleanse His creation of sin and evil: "Behold, I am making all things new" (REV. 21:5). When He returns, we will be raised from the dead to live as coheirs and co-rulers with Him in the new creation, for the glory of God (REV. 5:9-10).

## 2. BAPTISM: A NEW BEGINNING

**J**esus' baptism marked a new beginning for the world as He began His ministry to rescue and renew God's creation. Following His "baptism" of death on the cross (LUKE 12:50), His resurrection marked a new beginning for Him as He took up the full exercise of His authority as the Lord of God's creation (MATT. 28:18).

Baptism brings about a new beginning in which a person confesses that "Jesus Christ ... is my Lord, who has redeemed me ... that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."<sup>2</sup> This new beginning is described in Scripture in terms of a new birth, a new identity and a new life within a new community — the Body of Christ.

**Read 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 2:19–20, 1 Cor. 12:13 and 1 Peter 1:3–5.** What do these verses tell us about our newness of life in Christ Jesus?

### New Birth and Life

Many in Jesus' day took pride in being direct descendants of Abraham, citizens of Israel by birth, often believing their status as God's chosen people to be a *right* rather than a *gift*. John the Baptist warned the religious leaders that they dare not think their bloodlines absolved them from accountability to their Creator (LUKE 3:8).

They, too, must repent and receive God's merciful promise of forgiveness.

**Read John 3:3–5 and Gal. 3:27–29.** What does Jesus tell Nicodemus about water and rebirth? According to the apostle Paul, into whose family line are we born through Baptism?

Jesus connects water and the Spirit with the imagery of birth. This reminds us of the process in which a mother's water breaks and a child enters the world. The first thing the child must do is take in a breath of air. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit (referred to in the Nicene Creed as the "Lord and giver of life") gives us the breath of eternal life. The Spirit who once hovered over the waters of creation (GEN. 1:2) now hovers over the waters of the new creation in the baptismal font out of which will arise a new creature, a baptized child of God.

**Read Titus 3:4–7.** What language of new birth does the apostle Paul use in this passage?

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 COR. 5:17). Paul's language, "in Christ," points us to Jesus, the second or last Adam, the head of a new human community (1 COR. 15:45). By His conception and birth, Jesus entered the world as the second Adam who came to undo the damage caused by the first Adam's rebellion. As the last Adam, Jesus reveals what it means to be a human creature living in total dependence upon the Creator and in complete accordance with His will.

<sup>2</sup> The Apostles' Creed, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 17.



Just as our birthdays celebrate our entrance into life in this world, Baptism marks our entrance into a new life, an eternal life in God's promised new creation. Christian parents are often encouraged to celebrate the baptismal birthdays of their children.

**What are some ways in which you might celebrate children's baptismal birthdays? How might you celebrate your own baptismal birthday?**

## We Are Made Children of Abraham through Baptism

We need to locate Baptism within the wider story of God and Israel. We become members of God's kingdom by becoming *members of His chosen people of Israel*. Through His chosen people God would rescue His creation. For this reason, the ancestry of Jesus is important.

**Read Matt. 1:1 and Luke 3:38.** *According to the first verse of Matthew's Gospel, from whom is Jesus descended? How far back does Luke trace Jesus' ancestry?*

Jesus is Israel's promised Messiah from the line of King David. Luke traces the Savior's genealogy through Adam to God. Luke's account of Jesus' lineage is given immediately after His Baptism, when God declared, "You are my beloved Son."

In Jesus' genealogies we see how the Creator remained faithful to His beloved (and unfaithful!) people even after Adam and Eve rejected His will for them. God would make His creation good again and do so through the human creatures who ruined it. To that end, God chose Abraham.

**Read Gen. 12:1–3, Gen. 15:5–6 and Gen. 17:9–12.** *What promises did God make to Abraham? At what age were males to be identified as God's covenant people through circumcision?*

God ultimately carried out His promise to Abraham through one particular descendant. Jesus is that promised offspring (Gal. 3:16).

**Read Rom. 4:13–17, Gal. 3:26–29 and Col. 2:11–12.** *How does the apostle Paul connect us to Abraham's story, showing that we are children of Abraham? How is circumcision compared to Baptism?*

God's promise to Abraham now extends from Jesus to all those who were not blood descendants of Abraham. In other words, through Baptism we "outsiders" (the nations, Is. 49:6) have become the children of Abraham — and thus children of God.

## We Are Adopted as Children of God through Baptism

**Read Ex. 4:22–23, Hos. 11:1–2 and Matt. 2:13–15.** *In Moses' message for Pharaoh, how does God refer to Israel? When was God's Son called out of Egypt?*

Baptism makes us children of God by giving us a share in Jesus' own sonship. In Baptism, we become God's beloved children, just as He called Jesus His "beloved Son."

**Read Gal. 4:4–7.** *What does the apostle say about our sonship in Christ Jesus?*

Through Baptism we are given the blessings and inheritance of the children of God. Baptism brings with it an invitation to join God for the family meal. After many were baptized at Pentecost, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). We, the baptized, come together to hear the apostles' teachings and gather at the Lord's Supper.

Baptism also entitles us to approach and address our Creator as Father. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He taught them to build on His relationship with the Father by praying: "Our Father who art in heaven." With these words, "God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father."<sup>3</sup>

We now approach God in confident prayer through His Son Jesus and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us to pray in Jesus' name. Jesus reconciles us to God so that we can see the love in the Father's heart for us and for His beloved creation.

<sup>3</sup> The Lord's Prayer, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, 19–20, emphasis added.

## Baptism Makes Us Members of a New Community

In Baptism we begin a new life as members of God's family. We become numbered among the (innumerable!) offspring that God promised to Abraham (GEN. 15:5-6). These descendants of Abraham include not only the Israelites who lived by faith in God's promise but also *all* believers scattered throughout the world. Baptism incorporates us into a community that reaches back thousands of years and extends around the entire world. We know that community today as the Church, the new Israel, the Body of Christ.

**Read Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 1 Cor. 10:17 and Eph. 4:4-5.** *What do these verses say about the one Body into which we are baptized?*

In Baptism we are united with Christ and with every other baptized Christian. We share the same promises and the same hope in the unbreakable unity of the Body of Christ. As members of God's family, we are called to look after each other — even if we do not always like each other very much or know each other personally! Love for one another guides our use of God's gifts (1 COR. 12:7).

**Read Acts 11:27-30 and Gal. 6:9-10.** *How do the Gentile Christians of Antioch put their love into action for the sake of the Jewish Christians in Judea? What does Paul tell the Christians of Galatia about their love for others?*

Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (JOHN 13:35). Love was a distinguishing mark for Christians within the ancient world, prompting pagans to exclaim, "See ... how they love one another!"<sup>4</sup> That is what life under the restored reign of God looks like in practice.

Baptism's formation of Christians into a new community has significant implications for our practice of Baptism. Ordinarily it is most fitting to perform Baptism within the context of the entire assembled congregation. This highlights the rite as an act of adoption by which we are welcomed into a new family and community.

<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, "Apology," ch. XXXIX, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 46.

### 3. THE GIFTS AND BENEFITS OF BAPTISM

**M**artin Luther asks, “What benefits does Baptism give?” He answers: “It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”<sup>5</sup> We will use Luther’s response to discuss the gifts and benefits promised and delivered to us in Baptism.

#### Baptism Promises the Forgiveness of Sins

When we forgive someone, we promise that we will not allow the past to determine our future relationship. When God forgives us, He promises us that He will not allow our sin to determine or affect life together with Him. Our relationships with God and with each other are given a fresh start.

**Read Micah 7:19, Is. 38:17, Is. 43:25 and Ps. 103:10–12.**  
*What does God say concerning His forgiveness and our sins?*

Time and time again, Israel failed to live as God’s chosen people. Each time they turned their backs upon God, they fractured their relationship with Him. The relationship could only be repaired by God Himself. He forgave His people and gave them a new start. The New Testament speaks about Baptism as being administered for the forgiveness of sins.

**Read Acts 2:36–39 and Col. 2:11–13.** *In his response to the people on Pentecost, how does Peter highlight the*

*connection between Baptism and the forgiveness of sins? What does the apostle Paul say in these verses from Colossians concerning Baptism and forgiveness?*

The Nicene Creed emphasizes the connection between Baptism and forgiveness in the words, “one Baptism for the remission of sins.” God will never dredge up the past and throw it into our faces. His forgiveness gives us a clear conscience, enabling us to feel clean again, based on His sure and certain Word and promise (1 PETER 3:21). We need not feel shame before God and try to hide from Him as Adam and Eve did (GEN. 3:8–10).

The gift of forgiveness in Baptism is highlighted by the vivid image of washing. In its literal sense, the New Testament word baptize indicates cleansing, normally by washing with water — whether washing tables, dishes or people.<sup>6</sup> The washing of Baptism often comes with the reminder that it is good to be — and stay — clean.

**Read Acts 22:12–16, Eph. 5:25–27 and 1 Cor. 6:9–20.**  
*How is the imagery of washing in Baptism used in these verses? What does the apostle Paul say to the Corinthians about their earlier, unwashed lives? How does he then encourage them to remain clean?*

The gift of forgiveness promised in Baptism brings us into an intimate relationship with God our Father. We may always run to Him for forgiveness. Confession and absolution is an important way in which we live out our baptismal relationship with God. When we fail to live as

<sup>5</sup> Baptism, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> In Mark 7:4, the Greek word *baptismos* is used for “the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.”

the new people of God (and that does and will happen!), we confess our sins and request: “Please take these sins and get them out of my sight. I don’t want them anymore!” In response to our plea, God speaks His word of forgiveness within the Church. This is most commonly done in public in the worship service, but it can also take place in private confession and absolution.<sup>7</sup>

## Baptism Promises Freedom from Death and the Devil

Nothing marks the dramatic break with our past life more decisively than death. Nothing marks the dramatic beginning of a new life more than the resurrection of the body.

**Read Rom. 5:12–17 and 1 Cor. 15:21–22.** How does Paul speak of death and new life as he compares Adam’s disobedience with Christ’s obedience?

Christ’s death marks the beginning of the end of death that ruled the world from the time of Satan’s deception and the rebellion of Adam and Eve. Christ’s resurrection marks the beginning of a bright new future resulting from His obedience and His reign as Lord (Eph. 1:19–21). As Martin Luther says, “[We] are presently in the dawn of the age to come.”<sup>8</sup> The dawn is not yet the full light of the noonday sun. The sun still lies below the horizon, but its light is beginning to illumine the land. The full light of day is coming.

**Read Rom. 6:3–11.** What happens to us in Baptism? What happens to our “old self?” How must we now think of ourselves?

Baptism weaves our story into the story of Christ. Our “old self” was crucified with Christ. We are no longer enslaved to sin. We are set free from the tyranny of death that ruled the world since Adam. Baptism also unites us with Christ’s resurrection. Dying and rising with Christ in Baptism serves as the basis for many of Paul’s exhortations about what it means for baptized Christians to live a new life under the lordship of Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> See Confession, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 25, and Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “Individual Confession and Absolution,” in *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 292–93. See also the 2018 CTCR report, *Confession and Absolution* and the accompanying study guide, accessed March 9, 2019, [lcms.org/ctcr](http://lcms.org/ctcr).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 108.

**Read Rom. 6:12–14, Gal. 2:19–20 and Col. 3:1–4.** How does Baptism shape our lives through our connection with Christ’s death and resurrection? What does it mean to set our minds “on things that are above?”

Burial and resurrection in Baptism should be a daily pattern for the Christian life. Our old, self-centered life “should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”<sup>9</sup> This takes place through confessing our sins (in which we die to sin) and receiving forgiveness (in which we are given a new and fresh life).

**Read Col. 2:13–15.** How was the record of our sins cancelled? How did God disarm and shame “the rulers and authorities?”

In His resurrection from the dead, Christ laid waste Satan’s power to accuse and destroy us, leading captive all evil spiritual powers. We participate in this triumph because we have been joined to Christ in Baptism. Satan continues to tempt us with his lies, but he cannot overcome the power of God’s baptismal promise. Baptism also anticipates and prefigures our bodily resurrection on that great day when Christ will return to gather our bodies from the dust, fashion them anew and breathe new life — eternal life — into them.

**Read 1 Cor. 15:42–58.** How does the apostle describe our resurrection bodies? What will it mean to “bear the image of the man of heaven?” What mocking questions are asked of death, the defeated enemy? How does the hope of the bodily resurrection impact our lives right now?

The final victory over death will emerge on the Last Day in all its glory, and the defeat of Satan will be complete and final (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:10).

**Rom. 8:18–25 and 31–39.** How will creation share in the glory of Christ’s return? Why can we be certain that “God is for us?”

On the Last Day, Christ’s work of new creation will be complete. All who are baptized and live by faith under His lordship will be set free from death and the devil forever. God’s work of death and resurrection,

<sup>9</sup> Baptism, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 24.

accomplished in Jesus and granted to us by faith in Baptism, will reach its final goal.

This accent on Baptism as new creation has found expression symbolically within the church. Baptismal fonts, for example, are often fashioned with eight sides. This reflects the ancient tradition of seeing Easter as the eighth day of creation — the first day of the new creation that was ushered in by Christ's resurrection.<sup>10</sup>

## Baptism Promises Safe Passage through the Final Judgment

The ministry of Jesus began with the announcement that the kingdom of God was at hand (MARK 1:15). Christ would “clean house” and sweep out all sin and evil from His creation, restoring it and making all things new. These two dimensions of the same event — cleansing destruction and restoration — are expressed by Peter with reference to the flood and Noah's ark as a comparison to Baptism. God uses the power of water both to destroy and to save.

*Read 1 Peter 3:18–22 and 2 Peter 3:5–7. How did the waters of the flood both destroy and save? How is the destruction of the flood compared to events of the Last Day?*

What happened to us in Baptism will ultimately happen to the heavens and the earth. Just as the flood swept the earth clean of sin and evil in Noah's day, fire will purge the earth of sin and evil on the day of Christ's return. The new and glorious heavens and new earth will emerge.

This theme of destruction and rescue recalls the Exodus. The armies of Egypt were destroyed in the waters of the Red Sea after the people of Israel passed safely through on dry land. The passage through the water formed the transition from their old life under slavery to their new identity as those who were “free to be people of God.”<sup>11</sup> Paul connects this event with Baptism.

*Read 1 Cor. 10:1–4, Matt. 3:7 and 1 Thess. 1:9–10. How were the Israelites “baptized” during the Exodus? How are we saved from “the wrath to come?”*

In Baptism we are rescued from God's wrathful judgment against sin. Jesus promises to lead us into the “promised land” of the new creation and share His reign with us. As the second Adam, Jesus exercises the dominion that the First Adam abdicated through his sinful rebellion.

*Read Eph. 2:4–6, 2 Tim. 2:11–12 and Rev. 5:9–10. When we were “dead in our trespasses,” what did God do for us? What is said in these verses about reigning with Christ?*

But over what will we rule with Christ? With our restoration as creatures made in the image of God and the restoration of the world as God's good creation, we will receive over the new earth the benevolent dominion for which the entire creation longs as it groans in travail (ROM. 8:20–23). Creation eagerly awaits the day when it will be set free from the tyrannical, domineering rule of sin, death and Satan, and come under the benevolent rule of God's children. We who are baptized into our crucified and risen Lord will inherit the earth (MATT. 5:5).

<sup>10</sup> The writer of the Epistle of Barnabas (about AD 100) comments that God will, on the eighth day, make “a beginning of another world.” Then the writer explains, “Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose from the dead.” “The Epistle of Barnabas,” chap. XV, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 146.

<sup>11</sup> *Lutheran Service Book*, 155.

## 4. THE BAPTISMAL COMMISSION

**Read Matt. 28:18–20.** *What instructions does Jesus give concerning Baptism?*

**J**esus' Great Commission to His followers in Matthew 28 provides the basis for the Church's teaching and practice of Baptism. A baptism is a Christian Baptism only when it is carried out in accordance with Jesus' words. With the authority vested in Him by His resurrection, Jesus sends His disciples into the world to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They are to teach Jesus' followers everything that He has commanded.

### Who Is to Be Baptized?

**Read 1 Cor. 1:14–16, Acts 16:14–15 and Acts 16:29–34.** *In these verses, whose families and households were baptized?*

In the early years of the Church's growth, since so many adults were being converted to the faith, most Baptisms were of adults who brought with them their entire households. This normally consisted not only of parents and children but also those who were dependent on the household for their income and livelihood. Our baptismal rites today (in *LSB*) still reflect that early church missionary context of reaching out to adults, particularly with respect to the questions that are asked of the one being baptized. As Christianity grew and spread, and since more and more children were born into Christian families, Baptisms of infants and young children became

more common (for the promise belongs to them as well). That, therefore, has been the norm in Lutheran churches until recently, as demographic and cultural shifts are moving the church back into a more "missionary" posture in many ways and places. As we were brought to Jesus in Baptism, we now bring our infants, children and families to Jesus that they might also become His followers and citizens in God's realm.

**Read Acts 2:36–41.** *To whom do the blessings and promise of Baptism belong?*

### How Is the Water to Be Applied in Baptism?

The normal, literal sense of the word "baptize" means to "wash with water," by immersing, pouring, splashing or sprinkling. The Bible does not say how much water one must use or how it should be applied. It simply says "baptize" or "apply water."

The practice of immersing a person beneath the water symbolizes being buried and raised with Christ (*ROM. 6:1–4*). Pouring water indicates a "washing" (*1 COR. 6:11*). The Bible does not command a certain method, which is sufficient reason for the church not to insist on a particular method of using the water in Baptism. Ordinarily in the Lutheran church, Baptisms are done by sprinkling or pouring water over the head of the person being baptized.

The way in which the water is applied, or the amount of water used, is not a matter of central importance for

the practice of Baptism and has no impact on its blessings and benefits. Water *alone* does not make a baptism a Christian Baptism. Baptism is not *simply* a washing with water.

## What Is the Significance of God's Name in Baptism?

The application of water is a *Christian Baptism* when it is performed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus instructed. Baptized into the name of the Triune God, we are brought into salvation accomplished only in Christ.

**Read Num. 6:22–27, 2 Chron. 7:13–14 and Is. 43:5–7.** Although these verses do not speak of Baptism, what is said about bearing the name of God?

In Baptism, God places His name upon us, claiming us as His own. One might say that with His command to baptize, Jesus takes hold of the earthly element of water and embeds into it the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The water and the name cannot be considered apart from one another. Luther writes that Baptism is “water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.”<sup>12</sup> Faith “trusts this *word of God in the water*.”<sup>13</sup>

## What Is the Purpose of God's Promises to Us in Baptism?

The promises of God in Baptism make this washing of water and the Word a joyous Gospel event! The four Gospels tell the story of Christ *for the specific purpose of conveying God's promise to us*. The Gospel is a story that comes with a promise: Gospel = Story + Promise. The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus, who died and rose from the dead, *promises* that we are His forgiven people and that we one day will rise bodily from the dead to live in His new creation.

**Read Rom. 1:16–17, 1 Cor. 15:1–2, Eph. 3:6, 1 Thess. 1:4–5 and 1 Peter 1:23–25.** What do these verses say about the power and promise of the Gospel?

The promise of Christ calls for faith — faith which trusts that Christ will keep His promises to us just as He

kept His promise to rise from the dead (JOHN 2:19–22). This is what makes the Christian faith unique and distinctive from every other religion or form of spirituality in the world. We believe the promise of a man who rose from the dead. Because He has risen from the dead just as He promised, we trust Him to keep His promise to us! John writes in his Gospel, “[T]hese [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (JOHN 20:31). The key to understanding the nature of faith thus lies with understanding the nature of a promise.

**Read Gen. 15:5–6 and Rom. 4:18–22.** What was God’s promise to Abraham? What does the apostle Paul say about God’s promise and Abraham’s faith in that promise?

We can identify four characteristics of God’s promise to Abraham:

1. A promise depends upon the reliability and trustworthiness of the one making it. Abraham believed “that God was able to do what he had promised” (ROM. 4:21). We can count on Jesus to keep His promises because He rose from the dead just as He had promised to do (MATT. 16:21; MATT. 28:6; LUKE 24:6–8).
2. The promise is personal. God made a promise directly to Abraham. In the Gospel, God personally addresses each of us. “I baptize *you*.” I forgive *you*.” “The body and blood given for *you*.”
3. A promise calls for and gives rise to faith. “No unbelief made [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God” (ROM. 4:20). The whole point of making a promise is to create or strengthen someone’s faith and thus give them hope and joy about their future. Isn’t that why we make promises to one another? To reassure? To give confidence?
4. The promise opens a new future. God made an astounding promise to Abraham (given the advanced ages of Abraham and Sarah) — that he would have more descendants than the number of stars in the sky (GEN. 15:5–6). Jesus promises that we will be given a place within the new creation among all the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

Here we might consider one of Martin Luther’s favorite analogies for faith. When a bride and groom make their vows or promises, they create a new future

<sup>12</sup> Baptism, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Baptism, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 24, emphasis added.

together: “I will be with you from here till we die . . . in sickness and in health.” They speak these promises to each other to call forth and strengthen the faith of their beloved: “You will not go through life alone.” Promise and faith belong together.

**Read Eph. 5:25–33.** *In this discussion of Christian marriage, what has Christ the Bridegroom done for His Bride, the Church?*

Christ commits Himself to us and binds Himself to us with His promise; we bind ourselves to Christ by believing that He will keep that promise. Christ says: “You are mine.” The Christian says: “I am yours.” Promise and faith unite us to Christ. His promise opens up a new future for us. We will rise from the grave one day with a restored body that will never again see corruption and we will live in the new creation.

Like marriage, Christian discipleship (living by faith in Christ) is a lifelong endeavor. We live by faith in the promise of God, not knowing what the future may hold for us regarding things here on earth — our health, relationships, family, children, jobs or country. There is no empirical evidence or proof within the world for the promise. Our faith in God’s promise will only be vindicated on the Last Day when Jesus returns and raises us from the dead.

**Read John 20:26–29, 2 Cor. 5:6–7 and Heb. 11:1–3.** *What do these verses say concerning faith and earthly evidence?*

Even though Christ’s promises in Baptism call for and create faith, faith does *not make* this washing with water a Baptism. Only God’s name and promise do that. Faith may precede Baptism (as with adult converts); faith may be created in and through Baptism; faith may be sustained through the promise after Baptism. But it is the promise of God that is central in each case. Here Martin Luther draws the parallel between going to the Lord’s Supper and going to be baptized:

I myself, and all who are baptized, must say before God: “I come here in my faith and in the faith of others, nevertheless I cannot build on the fact that I believe and many people are praying for me. Instead, I build on this, that it is your Word and command.” In the same way I go to the Sacrament [of the Altar] not on the strength of my own faith, but on the strength of Christ’s Word. I may be strong or weak; I leave that for God to decide.

This I know, however — that he has commanded me to go, eat, and drink, etc., and that he gives me his body and blood; he will not lie or deceive me.

Thus we do the same with infant baptism. We bring the child with the intent and hope that it may believe, and we pray God to grant it faith. But we do not baptize on this basis, but solely on the command of God. Why? Because we know that God does not lie. My neighbor and I — in short, all people — may deceive and mislead, but God’s Word cannot deceive.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to Baptism, God conveys His promises to us in several other ways. He speaks them through His Word spoken by others, for example, in witnessing, preaching, absolution and Scripture-based Christian encouragement. He embeds His promises in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. He grants His promises in prophetic and apostolic testimony of the Scriptures.

**Read Matt. 26:27–28, 1 Thess. 4:16–18, 2 Tim. 3:14–15 and James 5:16.** *What are some of the promises of God that we have in His Word?*

## Who Performs the Baptism within the Service?

When Christ gave His disciples the commission to baptize, He gave it by extension to all Christians. A statement adopted by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1932 says,

Christ Himself commits to all believers the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 16:13–19, 18:17–20, John 20:22, 23, and *commissions all believers to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments*, Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23–25.<sup>15</sup>

When the pastor baptizes, he does so on behalf of the congregation.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, all Christians, as members of the priesthood of all believers, have been given the

<sup>14</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *Large Catechism IV, The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 463–64.56–57.

<sup>15</sup> *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, adopted 1932 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 8, emphasis added, accessed March 9, 2019, [lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/brief-statement-of-lcms-doctrinal-position](https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/brief-statement-of-lcms-doctrinal-position).

<sup>16</sup> “The officers of the Church publicly administer their offices only by virtue of *delegated powers*, and such administration remains under the supervision of the latter, Col. 4:7.” *A Brief Statement*, 8, emphasis added.



command and authority to baptize, meaning that they have the authority to baptize in an emergency or when there is the imminent danger of death.<sup>17</sup>

When someone performs the Baptism in God's name and according to His command, we should regard it as if God Himself is baptizing. "To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act."<sup>18</sup>

**Read Eph. 5:25–27, Col. 2:11–13 and Titus 3:4–7. How do these verses describe Baptism as an act of God?**

### How Is Teaching Carried Out in Connection with Baptism?

Jesus commissioned His disciples to teach all that He had commanded them (MATT. 28:20). It is clear from the Lord's command and the entire New Testament that baptizing and teaching belong together. The Church holds together Christ's command to baptize *and* teach in various ways and, at times, with different sequences.

In the early church's missionary setting most Baptisms were adult Baptisms. In this situation, teaching often came first and was then followed by Baptism. Sometimes that Baptism took place immediately after hearing the Gospel and other times it took place a year or three years after a person had been attending the service of the Word. As the Baptism of infants within Christian families became more common (and eventually the norm), the order shifted so that Baptism was done first and instruction followed.

**Read Acts 2:40–42, Acts 16:14–15 and Acts 16:29–34. Who is baptized in these accounts? What is the order of Baptism and instruction in these accounts?**

The church summarized biblical teaching in the catechism. Instruction was given in the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments. The church came to mark and celebrate the fulfillment of the two tasks of baptizing and teaching with a public rite known as Confirmation. This practice goes back to the time of the early church when Baptisms were often performed on the frontier of the Roman

Empire where no pastor or bishop was available. Later, a bishop or pastor would visit to "confirm" that the Baptism had taken place.

Today, Lutherans typically regard Confirmation as a ceremony by which the church publicly announces that the tasks of baptizing and teaching have been carried out for children, young adults or adults. Young people who are confirmed confess publicly the faith in which they have been baptized and instructed.<sup>19</sup> The church affirms that these young adults are now ready to continue with more in-depth study of the Scriptures and to continue learning, as an adult, what it means to live as a baptized Christian.

### What Other Elements Might Be Present in the Service?

Throughout history, the church has often included other elements in the baptismal service to express the richness of the Bible's teaching about Baptism. These are not essential to Baptism but can serve an important teaching function.

**The Naming of the Child:** Some may wonder why the pastor sometimes asks in the baptismal service how the child is to be named when, in most cases today, the child has already been given a name. In baptismal rites of the early church, children and adults were often named (or renamed) after a biblical character or other noteworthy Christian. This highlighted Baptism as an event of rebirth. The name given in Baptism came to be known as one's "Christian name."

**The Sign of the Cross:** In the rite of Baptism, the pastor makes the sign of the cross upon the forehead and heart of the one to be baptized. This identifies the individual as one who has been redeemed by Christ and now belongs to Christ. When we make the sign of the cross in prayer or at other times within the worship service, it is a reminder of our baptismal identity in Christ.

**The Presence and Role of Sponsors:** In the early church, sponsors were responsible for instructing adult candidates and then attesting to their readiness for Baptism. Today, when infants too young to speak are baptized, sponsors confess the faith of the Christian Church, speaking on the child's behalf, renouncing Satan and expressing the faith in which the child is to be raised. The questions are asked: "Do you believe in God

<sup>17</sup> See the "Holy Baptism in Cases of Emergency," *Lutheran Service Book*, 1023, and on the inside back cover of *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*.

<sup>18</sup> Large Catechism IV, *The Book of Concord*, 457.10.

<sup>19</sup> "Confirmation," *Lutheran Service Book*, 272–74.

the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord ... ? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit ... ?”<sup>20</sup>

The sponsors (sometimes called godparents) also pledge to help the newly baptized child to live as a Christian. They support and help the parents nurture the child as he or she grows so that the child may grasp and hold firmly to the promises of God. The sponsors bear witness to the fact that the child belongs to God’s family, the Church, and not only to the parents and immediate family. It may be appropriate to have someone present simply as a witness to the Baptism. A witness attests that the child was indeed baptized, should questions someday arise about this. A baptismal certificate also attests to the child’s Baptism so there is no doubt as to whether the child was properly baptized.

***Renunciation of Satan and Confession of Christ:***

The early church marked this new beginning as citizens in God’s kingdom by renouncing *former* citizenship. In the renunciation, one turns one’s back upon life under Satan’s rule and confesses that he or she now belongs to Jesus Christ.

***Read Eph. 5:8, Col. 1:12–14 and 1 Peter 2:9. What is said in these verses about our transfer of citizenship?***

***Baptismal Gown:*** Parents sometimes dress the infant in a baptismal gown to symbolize that the child is now clothed with Christ’s righteousness, or a baptismal garment is placed on the newly baptized infant (or adult).

***Read Is. 61:10, Zech. 3:1–6 and Gal. 3:27. What do these verses say concerning the “robe” we receive by faith?***

***Baptismal Candle:*** During the baptismal service, a candle, often lit from the Christ candle, may be presented as a gift to the baptized person or to the parents or sponsors. The burning candle symbolizes the fact that Christ, the Light of the world (JOHN 8:12), now lives within the person who was baptized. The candle may be lit to celebrate baptismal anniversaries throughout the life of the one who was baptized.

***Read Eph. 5:6–21 and 1 Thess. 5:1–11. How are we to live as children of light?***

<sup>20</sup> “Holy Baptism,” *Lutheran Service Book*, 270.

## CONCLUSION: JESUS' BAPTISMAL PROMISE TO US

**B**aptism brings us under the reign of Christ. This transition into God's kingdom is often described in the New Testament in dramatic terms of new birth, death and resurrection and rescue from the devil. In the Kingdom we are brought under the care and protection of God.

**Read John 3:3, Rom. 6:4, Rom. 6:11, 1 Cor. 6:9–11 and Col. 1:13–14.** How is the transition into God's kingdom described in these verses?

The life of a baptized Christian is not an easy life, at least not on this side of heaven. God does not promise that we will prosper financially or always be healthy or that our relationships will work out as we intend. Christians, like their non-Christian neighbors, live in a broken world, a world infected by sin.

**Read Gen. 3:16–19, Rom. 8:20–23, 2 Peter 3:11–13 and Rev. 21:1–8.** What do these verses say about the present creation and about the new heavens and earth to come?

At times our lives are filled with success, joy and hope as we reap the benefits of living in God's creation, which He blesses and for which He still graciously cares.

**Read Ps. 104:10–23, Matt. 5:45, Matt. 6:26 and Acts 14:16–17.** How does God continue to care for the world He created?

At times our lives may be characterized by disappointments, setbacks and tragedies. It may be difficult to believe that God will keep His promises to us. We

want Him to give us clear and immediate answers to our questions and good, sensible reasons for His actions (or His apparent inaction). We may, at times, be tempted to reject God entirely.

**Read John 14:27 and John 16:33.** What does the Lord Jesus say about our troubles in this world and about His care for us? **Read 2 Cor. 5:4–8 and 1 Peter 5:6–7.** Why can we have courage in the face of worldly troubles?

Baptized and believing Christians live by faith in Christ's promises and not by the proof of our eyes. We trust Christ to keep His promises, no matter what we see, feel or experience. The Christian life is a journey of living out that venture of faith day by day. One who lives by faith can live without having every question answered or every puzzle in life resolved. Such God-given baptismal faith enables us to navigate the tragedies of life and not be crushed by the unexpected events of life or threats to our faith that inevitably come our way. When we fall by failing to trust God, we repent by renouncing our desire for control and embracing God's baptismal promises again. When tragedies occur, we lament (as God's people have always done) and take our complaints to Him. We can live with the circumstances of life, both good and bad, because we live by faith that will be vindicated when we are raised from the dead on the Last Day.

The devil strives with rage and spite against those baptized into Christ. For this reason, Luther urged pastors and people to approach Baptism with the utmost seriousness: "Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to

take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child [in Baptism], but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, the Christian is able to confess all sins and failures, receive the assurance of God in the absolution and to say with confidence, “I am baptized.”<sup>22</sup>

*“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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20).*

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, “Order of Baptism,” *Luther’s Works, vol. 53: Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 102.

<sup>22</sup> Luther, commenting on Genesis 35:2, writes, “But if we believed that God is speaking to us through parents, pastors, and ministers of the Word, we should feel our hearts inflamed by a wonderful joy. For we should glory as follows, saying: ‘I am baptized.’ By whom? Was it not by a pastor? By no means, but by the Holy Spirit. I have been absolved by the Holy Spirit, by God Himself. Why, then, should I be afraid? Before whom should I be alarmed? Why should I be troubled about my sin?” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, vol. 6: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31–37*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 225.

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

### 1. Is it acceptable to use different Trinitarian formulas when baptizing?

No, it is not acceptable. In recent decades, some churches have decided to use baptismal language that is considered gender inclusive. For that reason (or perhaps others), they may perform a Baptism by saying, “I baptize you in the name of the creator, redeemer and sanctifier.”

While those terms (and others that may sometimes be used) may be trinitarian in their pattern, they are more titles or descriptions of God than they are names of God. Moreover, they could easily lead one to speak in a modalistic manner that denies the three persons (according to modalism, God is only one person but plays three roles much as one actor might play three different characters in a play).

Even if the intention is to reference the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, such formulas raise unnecessary questions, concerns and doubts for the one being baptized by departing from the words given us by our Lord. As Christ’s followers, we are bound to remain with the words that Christ gave us to use. We therefore baptize using those words in which the pastor repeats the very words of Christ: “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

### 2. Why are Baptisms normally conducted in the church?

Baptism is normally conducted as a public act when the church gathers in worship rather than in private ceremonies restricted to the immediate family of the one

baptized. The public ceremony reminds us that Baptism makes us members of the Church, the Body of Christ, members of God’s own family as His adopted children. A person’s entry into this new, eternal family is a cause for celebration for the whole people of God, not just the for parents and other relatives. Baptism may occasionally be performed in a private setting for various reasons, and Baptism administered in cases of emergency will, by necessity, take place outside of a regular service.

*Read 1 Cor. 12:12–13, 26–27 and Eph. 4:4–6. What is said in these verses about the unity of the Body of Christ? Review the service of Holy Baptism on pages 268–271 of the Lutheran Service Book. How is our Christian unity expressed in the baptismal ceremony?*

### 3. What is the relationship between Baptism and faith?

In Baptism God gives us His Word, the Word that bestows the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection. The promises of God’s Word seek faith, and faith is the means by which we receive and embrace God’s promises. The Lutheran Confessions say: “[F]aith is the desire for and the reception of the promise of Christ.”<sup>23</sup> The activity of believing or trusting, however, is not, in and of itself, the cause of our salvation. As Luther says, “Everything depends upon the Word and commandment of God ... For my faith does not make baptism; rather, it receives baptism.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, *The Book of Concord*, 165.

<sup>24</sup> Large Catechism IV, *The Book of Concord*, 463.53.

*Read Rom. 3:23–25, Gal. 3:2 and Eph. 2:8–9. What do these verses say about faith as the means by which we receive the promises of God?*

#### 4. When and how does Baptism create faith?

*Read John 3:5–8. How does Jesus speak of the Spirit’s work in Baptism?*

The Augsburg Confession notes that the Holy Spirit creates faith “where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel.”<sup>25</sup> That includes Baptism, where God has connected His Gospel Word to water.

God does not force a person to believe, and He does not leave it to our decision because our will is bound by sin. “Although God does not force human beings in such a way that they must become godly [believers] ... nonetheless God the Lord draws those people whom he wants to convert and does so in such a way that an enlightened understanding is fashioned out of a darkened understanding and an obedient will is fashioned out of a rebellious will. Scripture calls this creating a new heart [Ps. 51:12].”<sup>26</sup>

#### 5. Why does an adult need to be baptized if he or she is already a believer?

A person who asks this question likely needs to be (gently) helped to see that this is the wrong question to ask. Baptism is not something that “we have to do.” Rather, our Lord is rich and generous in His gifts. He gives us His promises in the spoken Word (preaching, absolution), in the visible and tangible word (Baptism, Lord’s Supper) and in the written Word (the texts of Scripture). Therefore, we baptize on the basis of Christ’s command and promise. Baptism’s promises are rich: not only are our sins forgiven (Acts 2:38), but we receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38–39), and we are made members of His Body, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13).

*Read Acts 2:38–39 and 1 Peter 1:3–5. What rich gifts do we receive from our Lord in Baptism?*

#### 6. When can or should adult converts be baptized?

Those who are able to receive instruction are normally baptized after being taught the main articles of the

<sup>25</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article V, *The Book of Concord*, 41.3.

<sup>26</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, *The Book of Concord*, 555.60.

Christian faith.<sup>27</sup> However, we must not turn faith into an intellectual achievement with Baptism as its reward. God’s promise seeks faith, and faith, in turn, desires and receives God’s promise.<sup>28</sup> God’s promise spoken to an individual may create faith. Faith, in turn, embraces the promise wherever it is offered and given, including in Baptism. Therefore, it may be appropriate, in response to the individual’s request for immediate Baptism, to baptize an adult who has only recently come to faith.

*Read Acts 8:26–38. What prompted the Baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch?*

Why do we normally instruct adults more fully before baptizing them? Our Lord combines Baptism and teaching as He explains how we are to make disciples (Matt. 28:19–20). We should never separate what He joins together. The teaching of new adult converts should not be viewed primarily as an intellectual process, but instead as one in which baptismal faith and life are summarized for the newly converted by explaining the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, Baptism, Absolution and the Lord’s Supper.

*Read Acts 20:17–27. In what Christian teachings did the apostle Paul instruct the believers in Ephesus?*

#### 7. What are the biblical and theological reasons for baptizing infants?

Jesus died and rose to be the gracious Lord of infants as well as of adults. Through Baptism infants are taken out of their previous life as outsiders and brought under Jesus’ protection and blessing. Infants have great need of such rescue.

*Read Ps. 51:5, Eph. 2:1–3 and Col. 1:13–14. What do these verses say about our need, even as infants, for rescue from sin, death and the devil?*

<sup>27</sup> “Those who are able to receive instruction are normally baptized after being taught the main articles of the Christian faith. ... Infants and young children should be brought to Baptism as soon as possible and then instructed in the Christian faith as they are able to receive instruction.” Answer to Question 305, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 290.

<sup>28</sup> “But the faith that justifies is not only a knowledge of history; it is to assent to the promise of God, in which forgiveness of sins and justification are bestowed freely on account of Christ. To avoid the suspicion that it is merely knowledge, we will add further that to have faith is to desire and to receive the offered promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification.” The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, *The Book of Concord*, 128.48.

In our baptismal service we say, “The Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation.”<sup>29</sup> Jesus commanded: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them” (MAT. 28:19–20). His all-encompassing command excludes no age group.

When considering infant Baptism, the key questions are: What is Baptism, according to Scripture? What does Baptism actually do?

**Read Titus 3:5–6 and 1 Peter 3:21.** According to these verses, what is Baptism and what does it do?

The central question of the entire debate concerning infant Baptism is this: Is Baptism primarily God’s promise to us or is Baptism primarily our promise to God? If Baptism is God’s promise to adopt us, then He can make that promise to an infant as well as to an adult. When parents adopt an infant child, they promise to care for the child apart from that child’s ability to agree to their care. However, if Baptism is our promise to God, our promise to be faithful to Him, then it would make sense (according to human reason) not to baptize until the individual is capable of making such a promise. Such a view of Baptism (as our promise to God) fundamentally alters its character from that of grace and gift (Gospel) to that of human assent, effort and responsibility (Law).

Luther explains, “Further, we say, we do not put the main emphasis on whether the person baptized believes or not, for in the latter case baptism does not become invalid. Everything depends upon the Word and commandment of God.”<sup>30</sup> Luther also writes, “Baptism does not become invalid if it is not properly received or used, as I have said, for it is not bound to our faith but to the Word”<sup>31</sup>

### 8. Are infants or people who have mental or emotional limitations capable of believing the promises of Baptism?

Yes, they are capable of believing the promises. When raising such a question, we must be careful not to shift our focus away from what God does in Baptism to the

<sup>29</sup> “Holy Baptism,” *Lutheran Service Book*, 268.

<sup>30</sup> Large Catechism IV, *The Book of Concord*, 463.52.

<sup>31</sup> Large Catechism IV, *The Book of Concord*, 463.53.

question of whether we (as adults or children) are intellectually or emotionally capable of believing. We must keep God’s command and promise front and center in Baptism.

It may be helpful to distinguish between two aspects of faith — faith as saving faith, characterized by trust and confidence, and faith as a knowledge and awareness of God’s work and agreement with His words and promises.

Faith is saving faith, in which we receive and live from God’s gifts — whether we are conscious of them or not. This is a faith or confidence that creates a direct dependence or reliance upon God just as infants depend upon their parents (MAT. 18:3).<sup>32</sup>

**Read Ps. 22:9.** Who created the psalmist’s faith?

Yet we can also reflect on our faith and study our experience of faith, describing it in intellectual and emotional terms. We may experience growth in our faith over time so that our knowledge about God’s promises, although not understood intellectually when we were young, is now more fully grasped.

**Read Eph. 4:15–16, 2 Thess. 1:3, 2 Tim 3:14–16 and 2 Peter 3:18.** What do these verses say concerning our growth in faith?

To state that infants are given faith in Baptism does not imply that they intellectually grasp everything involved (knowledge) or of their own will acknowledge it as true (assent). They trust the one who holds them. As they grow, they gradually become more mindful of all that comes with the promises of God. Luther notes, “We bring the child with the intent and hope that it may believe, and we pray God to grant it faith. But we do not baptize on this basis, but solely on the command of God.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “It is true, a believer may not always be *conscious of his faith*. Saving faith (*fides directa, fides actualis*) need not always be *conscious faith (fides reflexa)*, or faith which is perceived by the believer. . . . Thus Christian adults, while asleep or engrossed with their daily occupation, indeed possess direct faith, which truly apprehends the grace of God in Christ Jesus, yet not reflex and discursive faith. That is to say, they meditate neither on their act of faith nor on their state of faith. . . . In all such cases saving faith truly exists, though the believer is not conscious of it.” John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 330–31.

<sup>33</sup> Large Catechism IV, *The Book of Concord*, 464.57.

## 9. What if the baby of Christian parents dies before it is baptized?

When a baby dies before Baptism, Christian parents have wonderful reasons to hope for the salvation of their child. They know that God sent His Son to die on the cross to redeem little children, no less than others (MATT. 18:14). God loves their little one! This loving God did not institute Baptism as something one has to do to be saved (a work of the Law); rather He gave Baptism as a means of salvation (a gift of the Gospel).

Christian parents bring their babies for Baptism as soon as possible because of the clear promises of God for children (ACTS 2:39), who also need a Savior from sin and death (ROM. 6:23). Yet the absence of Baptism does not cause someone to be lost. We know that God has formed the infant in the womb and truly desires that the child be saved. In fact, the child of Christian parents has very likely heard God's Word of Christ — even while still in the womb — and the Holy Spirit uses the Word to create saving faith.

**Read Luke 1:15, 39–45.** *What is said in these verses concerning the faith of the prophet John while he was still in his mother's womb?*

Christian parents have surely prayed for their child long before the baby's birth, and we know that for Jesus' sake God answers prayer.

**Read Luke 11:13, John 15:16 and John 16:23.** *What does the Lord Jesus say about our prayers to our heavenly Father?*

When a child dies before Baptism, the pastor seeks to bring to grieving parents comfort and care from the Lord. He will be ready to assure Christian parents with the hope that their child is in the loving care of their gracious God, the Father of our Savior Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> This answer applies to parents who earnestly desired to baptize their children and did not despise the saving promises of Baptism. It should therefore not be misunderstood as a denial of either the efficacy or general necessity of infant Baptism or of the concerns raised in Article XII of the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration (*The Book of Concord*, 657.11–13). In condemning Anabaptist errors, three of the errors listed in the Formula (points 2, 3 and 4) have to do with infant Baptism:

First, we reject and condemn the Anabaptists' erroneous, heretical teaching ... For they teach: ...  
2. That unbaptized children are not sinners in God's sight but instead are righteous and innocent and therefore in their innocence are saved without baptism, which they do not need. They thus deny and reject the entire teaching of original sin and everything connected with it.

*And Peter said to them, "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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (ACTS 2:38–39).*

3. That children should not be baptized until they attain the use of their reason and can confess their faith themselves.

4. That the children of Christians, because they are born to Christian and believing parents, are holy and God's children without and before baptism. Therefore they do not regard infant baptism as very important nor do they advocate it, against the expressed words of God's promise, which only extends to those who keep his covenant and do not despise it (Gen. 17[:4–8, 19–21]).