

In the liturgical year, we call today the Baptism of our Lord. Baptism is one of the two sacraments in the Lutheran church and there are two main thoughts when it comes to when we baptize. Most mainline, traditional churches celebrate infant baptism which means there are no age restrictions for when we baptize. We emphasize that it is God who chooses us to be baptized and adopted into God's family. Then there are the Baptist and fundamentalist churches who only baptize an individual when they are old enough to say that they want to be baptized. These churches do not recognize the baptisms of those who were baptized as babies.

I have baptized well over 100 people since 1995 from days old to a 94 year old man. I even baptized a stillborn baby who was premature a year or two ago. Now there was a time when the church said that in order to be saved and enter heaven, you must be baptized. That is why the parents of that premature baby wanted him baptized. Was the baptism necessary? Yes and no. It was necessary for the parents. It helped them in their grief knowing that their baby was baptized. It was not necessary for that baby because Jesus took care of that little boy.

So if baptism is not necessary for eternal life, then why do we do them? What is the purpose of baptism? For that answer, I would like you to open your hymnals up to page 1164 in the back of your hymnal which is Martin Luther's Small Catechism.

According to Martin Luther, baptism is not just plain water but is it water that is use according to God's command and connected with HIS Word. The Word that Martin Luther is referring to is from Matthew 28 where Jesus says, "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."

Through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, there are some promises that we receive. For those who believe, they receive forgiveness, redemption from death and the devil and a promise of eternal life. As we look at these promises, they are all pretty straight forward with the exception of one: redemption. Not everyone knows what redemption means so in this instance, its meaning is "buys back". So this is saying that Jesus has bought us back from death and the devil through his death and resurrection. We have the promise of eternal life because Jesus bought us back.

Eternal life is an awesome gift but are we worthy to receive it. No. We are not worthy nor do we deserve it. But God promises it to all who believe in what Christ Jesus did for us. In Mark 16, Jesus said, "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who

does not believe will be condemned." It is this statement that tells us that our salvation is dependent upon our belief.

Since we receive forgiveness and eternal life, it is pretty obvious that just water does not do this. But the water that I use for baptisms is nothing special because it comes straight from the sink faucet. There are two more ingredients that are alongside the water that makes this water special. First there is the Word of God. This word includes all of the promises and the command to baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The other ingredient is faith which allows us to believe and trust in what God accomplishes in baptism.

So what exactly does God accomplish in baptism? We have already said that baptism does not save you because that is done through belief. Baptism is a means of grace or a way in which God comes to us.

Through our baptism, we are claimed by God. It is like God adopts us as HIS own children. Our baptism is like a dedication because we are set apart as belonging to God. As infants, our parents are promising to raise their children in a relationship with God. And then when they are confirmed, that service is called Affirmation of Baptism and the confirmand will stand before God and affirm the promises from their baptism.

For adults who are baptized, they are promising to live their lives according to the promises they make at their baptism.

Baptism is a covenant between God and us. God makes promises to us and we make promises to God. Live in your covenant trusting that God will never break HIS promises even when we break ours.