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BAPTISM – IT ISN'T A BATH!

Each time I sit through a baptism I relive the baptism of our son, 32 years ago. We baptized him when he was five days old. Our son squirmed as the cold water touched his brow and his eyes were focused on the pastor as he performed the sacrament. Just as his mother and I welcomed him into our family, our son was welcomed, by his baptism, into Christ's family. He had become a child of God.

I'm not sure we all understood the level of commitment we pledged as we focused on lunch arrangements and the sponsors' drive back home. We had pledged to "faithfully bring him to the services of God's house, and teach him the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments . . . place in his hands the Holy Scriptures and provide him instruction in the Christian faith, that, living in the covenant of his Baptism and in communion with the Church, he may lead a godly life until the day of Jesus Christ."

My son's grandmother purchased a "Children's Bible" and we took our son to worship, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and Confirmation classes. Shortly after his Confirmation, our son announced that he was choosing to not regularly attend church. I quickly let him know that this was not an option.

We were not always his friends in our faith formation commitment and we certainly had help from the church and others who aided and supported our initial efforts. As I reflect over the past 32 years, I feel that we fulfilled our commitments in our son's religious life. .

(excerpts from the Lutheran Book of Worship)

Baptism is not simply plain water, but water enclosed in God's command and connected with God's Word. Matthew 28:19 states: "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." Baptism is certainly performed by human beings, but we are baptized by God himself. It is truly God's own act.

A covenant is a means in which God could express His gracious purpose for His people. Mark 16:16 tells us that "the one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned." It is clear that God wants us to believe and be baptized. The power of baptism is that it saves! Baptism brings about forgiveness of sin, and redeems us from death and the devil. We enter into Christ's kingdom and live with Him forever.

At baptism God gives us a rebirth, a renewal; it signifies that the "old creature" desires to be gone. Do we ever sin again? Of course! That is why a Christian life is nothing less than a daily baptism. With sorrow, we constantly realize that we have fallen short in glorifying God. Each time we ask God's forgiveness we assert our dependence on God and His grace.

St. Paul says in Romans 6:4: "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

We become new, again!

(excerpts from The Book of Concord: The Large Catechism)





MORE GOOD NEWS! Reformation teachings and teachings inspired by the Reformation counter three popular misconceptions about baptism:

1. That baptism is mainly an “insurance policy” for life after death. While God promises the “hope of eternal life” in baptism (Titus 3: 4-8), **baptism is much more—the beginning of a relationship with Christ, a way of life, and a lifelong identity as a Christian.**
2. That unbaptized babies who die go somewhere other than into God’s loving embrace—places like “limbo” or “hell.” If death come to an unbaptized infant, we trust the mercy and steadfast love of God. **We believe that God gives the gift of baptism for our salvation, comfort, and assurance.** We do not believe God is limited by our act of baptizing. We commit all who die into God’s tender mercy.
3. That baptism is invalid for infants because the New Testament says believing must accompany baptism (Acts 2: 37-41, 16: 30-33). “Only adults can believe,” some would say. Luther countered this argument with the beautiful argument that **faith is a gift, not a good work, which God gives, even to an infant in baptism.** All is gift!

REMEMBER: baptism is ENTRY into Christ and into the community of Christ, the CHURCH (meaning “the called out people”).



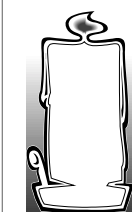
Water, Come Down! The Day You Were Baptized, by Walter Wangerin, Jr. is the perfect gift to make a child feel special—part of the most wonderful family in the world. The graphics in this book are bright and bold. It is an excellent book to give parents on their child’s baptismal day.



SPIRITUAL BIRTHDAY PARTY

As a part of passing on the faith, parents can bless their children by remembering the special gifts for them in Baptism. Just as you celebrate their birth dates, annually celebrate their baptismal dates!

Prepare for the day as you would get ready for a birthday party. Invite the sponsors, grandparents, pastor, baby-sitters, and other special people in the child’s life. Take out any special mementos you have of the day—candle, certificate, shell, photographs, even the special baptismal dress. Other preparations could include a spiritual birthday cake or a special meal.



Have a dish or small bowl with fresh water in it. Everyone dips their fingers in the water three times and makes the sign of the cross on their forehead saying: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Everyone signs a verse of “Jesus Love me.” One of the parents or sponsors can light a candle and say “At your baptism, (say child’s name), we were all asked to let our light so shine before others so they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.” Blow out the candle and continue with your celebration.