

His Baptism and His Blood

II - *What does such baptising with water indicate?*

What is Baptism? Well, Baptism is not just plain water, that should be obvious; if Baptism were just plain water, why would the Lutheran Church make so much of it? Because Lutheran theologians throughout the ages have all been primitive simpletons? Anybody who would think so must have no idea of the level of education that Lutheran theologians through the ages have had to go through, how they have delved into the depths of Holy Scripture and carried out extensive studies into the complex structures of thought found therein. Well, those who think so, and know so much better, usually they have but very little idea of what education means to begin with, or extensive studies, or complex structures of thought; usually, they themselves have but little experience with either.

A more important question to ask, though, and perhaps even a more interesting one, would be: If Baptism were just plain water, why would Holy Scripture make as much of it as it obviously does? And that Holy Scripture indeed does makes much of Baptism, that will, in fact, be obvious to anyone who bothers to take a look.

Holy Scripture makes it clear that Baptism is not just plain water. Rather, Baptism has its rightful place in that complex reality which is the salvation of God, of God being who He is, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, one God from eternity, holy and whole and complete in His goodness and hatred of evil, and in His love for sinners, so that the Son gave Himself over to the most severe sufferings for our salvation, and whole and complete in His wisdom, so that there is reason rather than randomness to how He deals with reality.

Baptism has its place in the full counsel of God, how He works salvation for sinners, by the cross, and in the method of His mercy, that sinners are saved by grace, through faith.

One might wonder, though, then: why is water involved at all? Well, one thing that is shown in the fact that it is, is that God, who is the Creator of all things, is quite comfortable with what He has created, so as to even use created means for the salvation of His most beloved creatures.

Baptism is a bath. It was foreshadowed by the large bronze basin in which the priests under the old covenant were to wash their hands and feet before entering the Tabernacle and the Temple so as not to die in the presence of the glory of God.

God is holy, that is, He is whole and complete in all that He is, also in His purity; and this means that impurity can have no place in His presence; all impurity must perish before Him. And sin is impurity, and sinners impure. Therefore, those who would be in His presence would have to be purified. And for this purpose, God had established this way for the priests to purify themselves, so that they could come into the presence of His glory to perform their duties, and yet not perish before His holiness on account of their inherent impurity.

The priest had only to wash his hands and feet; but he had to do so in a basin large enough that he could have bathed his whole body in it; similarly, by the way, to the way the Baptismal Font is shaped in churches appropriately equipped, in accordance with their purpose. This signified that by the washing of their hands and feet, the whole person was purified; similarly to what our Lord Jesus would later say: *The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean.*

This is part of the reason why the faithful Church of Christ does not insist that Baptism *must* be done by immersion of the whole body; that, and the fact that Holy Scripture does not actually command that it does. Nevertheless, it is right that the vessel of Baptism is shaped so as to represent the immersion of the whole person; ever so much more, as Holy Scripture uses the imagery of drowning and death and burial and resurrection to teach the meaning of Baptism, along with such imagery as *washing, sprinkling, and pouring out*. As our Catechism reminds us that Holy Scripture teaches with regards to the meaning of water in Baptism: *We were, therefore, buried with Him, that is: with Christ, through Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

The Holy One of God descended into death for us sinners, who were doomed to die on account of the impurity that is the evil of sin. He descended into the deepest depths of death, the judgement and damnation of God against all sin, His righteous wrath against all wrongs and wrongdoings, His holy hatred against evil. All this He did for us, in our stead, on our behalf. For the Holy One of God had had Himself made one with sinners, having Himself baptised with the Baptism of sinners.

And God the Father raised Him from death. For with the death of the Holy One of God for sin, the price and penalty was paid in full for all the sin of all sinners, and in abundance.

So far did His holiness outweigh our impurity, His righteousness our sin, His goodness and innocence our evil. So God the Father raised Him from death, as was right and reasonable according to the Wisdom and goodness of God.

We heard tonight how our Lord Jesus had spoken of this beforehand; or rather, we heard how false witnesses related what He had said in this regard: *I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.* Now, He had not actually said exactly that, and that is why those who said that He had were false witnesses. What He had said was: *Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* And, as He has His holy Apostle John teach it, He was speaking of the Temple of His body, which is the true Temple, as the Apostle also writes it: *The Word became flesh and set up His tent among us,* pointing to the Tabernacle in which the glory of God dwelt with His people while they were wandering in the wilderness. With His resurrection, His body has been raised anew as the true Temple, the true dwelling place of the glory of God in this world. And His body is His Church. In His Church He dwells with His glory, in the Word and worship of His salvation, and shares His glory with His Christians, that is: with all who believe in Him and His salvation. As He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, *God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and gave Him as Head over all things to the Church, which is His body and His fullness, who fills all in all.*

Although those who testified to this before the Council were false witnesses, their testimony was enough for the High Priest to understand that our Lord Jesus saw Himself as the one who would build the true Temple of God: *Are you the Christ, he asked our Lord Jesus, the Son of the Blessed? And our Lord Jesus answered: I am!*

In Baptism we are made one with Him who made Himself one with us by Baptism. We are incorporated into the Church, *which is His body and His fullness, who fills all in all.* All that is His, He makes to be ours, His holiness and righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, His eternal life and His heavenly glory.

He who had Himself baptised into us unto death has us sinners baptised into Himself for eternal life. As He died for our sin, so our sin dies with Him, our guilt and debt before God, so that it is no more, and will not condemn us in His judgement; we come out of Baptism all righteous and right with God, all debts paid, in full and in abundance.

And so we shall not perish and die in His judgement, but rather live and be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. As the holy Apostle Paul writes it: *Since we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.*

This is what Baptism with water indicates. Symbolically, in the water of Baptism, our sinful self drowns and dies and is buried, and our sin with it, our guilt and debt before God, and we come out of Baptism as beloved children of God, pure and perfect and precious to Him, and heirs to His heavenly Kingdom, because in Baptism we are made one with Him who had Himself made one with us by Baptism into death. And what happens symbolically, according to the ordinance of God, happens for real in that real reality which is the reality of God. For again, as our Catechism also teaches it, *Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word.* Baptism has its place in the purpose of God for the salvation of sinners, that is: for real sinners such as ourselves.

We heard tonight how deeply Peter fell, and failed the faith, when he denied his Master. When a servant girl said to him: *You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!*, he denied it.

But in Baptism sinners such as Peter, and ourselves, are raised from our falls and failure. We are made not only to be able to be again *with* the Nazarene, but made to actually be *one* with Him in all that is His. Our sin drowns and dies and is buried, never to rise again, no more to be before God. And we ourselves are raised from the death of sin to live with God and serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days, in this life and in the next.

This is what our Catechism teaches, because Holy Scripture teaches it, about the significance of Baptism with water. For again, *Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word.* It has its place in the purpose of God for the salvation of sinners. As our Catechism says it: *the Old Adam in us 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.* This is God's gift, given to sinners in Baptism, and continually and constantly given, with His promise, in the Word and worship of His salvation, to all who will receive it from Him.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Amen.