

6 Appreciating the Faith of Godparents

Godparents of baptized individuals are Christian people who actively practice their faith. They pledge themselves to assist the parent(s) in modeling a life of commitment to God. Godparents, or Sponsors as they are often called, want to be a part of the baptized child's spiritual growth. It is serious business. The baptismal liturgy even requires parents and sponsors to make an oath of allegiance to the child's well-being. This means more than sending a birthday gift to the God-child each year. It implies constant prayer for the baptized child, interest in the youth's own faith journey, and attentiveness on baptismal anniversaries. More than anything else though, should you ever be a sponsor yourself, you will want to provide your God-child with consistent and generous love so that the child may see Christ in you -- unmistakably!

7 Baptism is Permanent. Once is Enough.

Our baptism walks with us all our life. The trick is to *live it* or *claim* its strength in a daily way. Every morning when you look in the mirror, to prepare for the coming day, you are obliged to face the same chilling reality: you must live with the same grudge-bearing, jealous-minded, and sinful self as yesterday.

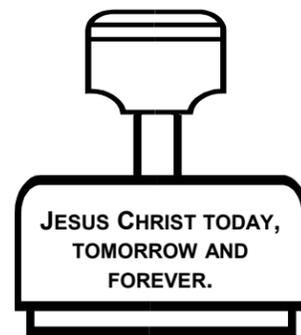


(Unfortunately, all too often, others must also live with the same old you.) But wait!! Baptism tells you that this does not have to be. Each new day is just that -- new. A day which the Lord has made. If you can come running back to the power of your baptism, and the strength which Christ's grace grants you, you can reclaim the day. You can look differently (and more favorably) upon others, yourself, and the problems you may be up against. Lutheran Christians baptize once, and then seek to live that baptism every day.

8 Getting Marked for Life

If you enter Disney World, your hand is stamped to permit your re-entry, should you momentarily leave the park and wish to get back in on the same day. Preschool children get their hands rubber-stamped with smiley faces if they've eaten their lunch or shared the toys with their classmates.

In Holy Baptism, the candidate is sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. Lutherans usually make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized. Consider this invisible sign to be indelible. Unlike the rubber stamp ink that fades away, baptized people live with the permanent etching of Christ's grace. Everything that Jesus Christ is about, from sorrow to joy and from suffering to resurrected life, belongs to the baptized. Christ impresses himself upon the life of the believer and marks us with an inseparable relationship to him.



9 Going Public

One of the joys of baptism in the Lutheran Church, as in most Protestant and Catholic communities, is the public nature of the act. This sacrament is not something we hide in the privacy of pastor's office or separate from the believing congregation. Rather, think of baptism as a public reminder that we belong to each other and to God. The gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit given in baptism add up to nothing if they are not shared with others.

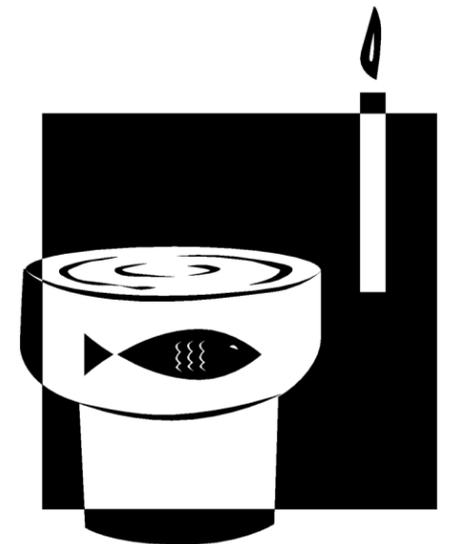
Baptism is a congregational event. We welcome you or your child with open arms. We speak together our common faith. We pledge our support to the baptized. In short, the church finds great excitement in this form of new life. At St. Paul, children or infants who are baptized receive a cloth napkin with the symbol of a dove, emphasizing God's dramatic work through the Holy Spirit. Your baptismal candle, which may be lit on successive baptismal anniversaries, brings to mind the light of Christ in your life.

How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. . . . So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. --Romans 6

Celebrating New Life

A Guide to the Joy and Meaning of Holy Baptism

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1 We Baptize to be a Part of Something . . .

. . . Not to avoid some peril.

Christ Jesus is plain and straightforward about baptism. Using two simple verbs --“GO” and “DO” -- he instructs all those who follow him to baptize. It’s an invitation to a whole new kind of life. It comes in the way of encouragement to be a part of the community of all Christians.

Think globally. When we baptize, we baptize into the whole Christian Church on earth. Baptism at St. Paul is not baptism *into* St. Paul. It is not even baptism into the Lutheran Church. We’re not allowed to think so locally or so narrowly.



On the same day that you or your child are baptized, so are other people in Helsinki, Johannesburg, Sydney, and Anchorage receiving the same blessing. That’s a tremendous joy to celebrate. Baptized Christians share in a common life.

Remember: We “do it” because Jesus said to do it. That’s reason enough to baptize. It has to be more than an act we engage in to please grandma or grandpa. It is more than avoiding hell. Jesus did not spend time speculating on the temperature of hell or offering clever means to avoid it. Instead he preached a way of life that amounted to unswerving allegiance to God, our eternal hope.

2 Baptism is a Gift of Assurance and Hope

Baptism is a gift that comes to us. You are likely to spend the rest of your life trying to appreciate the strength of this gift. “Why would God choose simple water as the means, and mere me as the recipient, to share the joy of living with a new perspective?”

Baptism is not a vaccination shot against hell or high water. It is not something *we get done in order to be on the safe side of life*. Insurance policies do that sort of thing. No, calamities may still strike the baptized. Cancer may still be a very real force in the life of one washed by Christ. There are no bets that life will change in remarkably visible ways for the better . . . or easier. But the gift of Christ receiving us as his very own in Baptism is the inspiration, incentive, and power to live with a new identity.



3 Faith Makes All the Difference in the World.

The Christian life turns on trust in God’s power and love. Baptism is the big move in life to make that trust a priority. The true believer always fights those ways of living that emphasize self-congratulation, insensitivity towards others, and excessive pride.

To be washed with baptismal water is to acknowledge that faith can make all the difference in

the world when it comes to *right living*. It is the Christian’s way of saying: “I need the constant presence of Christ in my sinful life to shape and guide me.”

All power for new living that we receive in Baptism is God-given. God takes the initiative to love us regardless of what strengths and weaknesses we possess. Our task is to believe or trust in the bestowal of this loving promise. Lutheran Christians baptize infants and children, as well as adults. In the case of young ones, the faith which parents or sponsors bring to nurture these little lives is of paramount importance.

4 It Helps If You Understand Adoption

Any parent who adopts a child is making a deliberate decision to give that child a future which he or she otherwise might not have. A commitment of love is made to a stranger. Risks are involved. Kindness is shared without any deep knowledge of how it will be received.

Baptism *into Christ*, as St. Paul says it always must be, means entrance into the family of God. (This is why many Christians refer to Holy Baptism as a right of initiation.) God ADOPTS the baptized person. God claims her out of God’s own love and mercy. God accepts him and grants him a future, in spite of the risks involved and the sinfulness of that one cleansed by water. God opens God’s heart to us, by choice, even to the point of accepting the hurts and disappointments we bring. This kindness offers us the greatest future for which we could ever hope -- one that extends into eternity.



5 Water That Cleanses Without Soap

We take for granted an endless supply of water -- for cooking, washing, showers, pools, lawns. There is such an abundance of water, we forget how essential it is to our survival. Baptism requires water too. It doesn't have to be Jordan River water, the source of Jesus’ own baptism. Nor must it be some sort of bottled “holy water.” More than likely, the water for your own baptism has come, or will come, from the faucet in the church sacristy. If it is administered in an emergency, it may be that a hospital nurse fills a styrofoam cup with available water. If the local river was clean, and it was part of our culture to regularly gather at the river, we might baptize there. Usually we take advantage of baptizing in the place where we and fellow believers most vividly worship the Lord.



Water alone won’t make baptism. God’s Word and our common trust in that Word are also required. It’s the combination of these things that makes this life-giving water which renews the human spirit. Think of drowning sin or washing away sinful habits, and rising to new life. When the Bible mentions events connected with water, as in Noah’s flood or Moses crossing the Red Sea, they all share a common meaning: **STARTING OVER**. Baptism is your opportunity to start over.