

Baptism is....

Taylor Swift's first release was in 2006. I always thought the line, "When you think Tim McGraw, I hope you think of me," was great. We all have associations with things that are strong in one of our 5 senses. So, when you see, hear, touch, taste, or smell Baptism, what do think of? That will depend on what you think Baptism is....

It's "not" just plain water. That's what the 1991 catechism we use says. Over the years, I've been amazed at the variety of ways that has been translated even among the LCMS we came from. "Not *simple* water only" is the way it was translated from 1921 to 1991. "Not simply plain water" by Kolb, 2000. "Not merely water" by Tappert, 1959. Then our Larger Catechism blows it open: "Therefore it is not only natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water – praise it in any other terms you can – all by virtue of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word which no one can sufficiently extol, for it contains and conveys all the fullness of God (IV, 17). Here's an example of Luther further extolling Baptism in a 1534 sermon. "Behold, it is water that takes away the sin, death, and all sadness and helps all the way to heaven; such a precious aromatic, medicine, results from this because God Himself has mixed Himself thoroughly within" (Peters, *Baptism & Lord's Supper*, 93). Wow!

I touch Holy Water when I baptize. I touch heavenly divine water. I touch God. The one being baptized gets touched by Him; I get to touch Him. But we reject the Catholic teaching that God has joined spiritual power to water independent of it's use (SC, III, V, 2). We also steer away from the ditch on the other side that the Reformed, Protestants, Nondenoms, Evangelicals all drive into. That Baptism's washing takes place through God's will, "Not at all through Word and water" (Ibid., 3). Recently a member asked be about when is it a Divine, Holy water. I answered when it's included in God's command and combined with God's Word. That's what we say in the Catechism, but I should've fleshed it out better. Unlike Roman Catholics we don't fix a moment for the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood. They ring bells at that moment. We don't. We quote what Augustine said about Baptism: "'The Word is added to the element and it becomes a Sacrament'" (SC, III, V, 1). Water used by God's command and with His word is divine, holy.

At what age does a kid learn not to judge a book by its cover; not to judge a Christmas present by it's wrapping? Although God the Son, His death and resurrection, His rescuing from Death and the Devil, His lifelong forgiveness of sins looks, tastes, feels, sounds, and smells like plain water, not even mineral or sparkling, but plain, simple, mere, water, don't be fooled. King Louis the Pious, circa 813, said, "The three handfuls of water that were poured on my head in Holy Baptism are worth more to me than the crown I am wearing" (O. Reiss, *That I May Know Him*, Teacher's Ed., 52). When our kids were young, because newspaper was way cheaper than wrapping paper, we wrapped all their presents in it. Now because of the switch to electronic media, wrapping paper is cheaper than newsprint. A curious thing happened. The kids tell me when they see a present wrapped in newspaper, which they still use with birthday gifts, a wave of anticipation, expectation, and joy comes over them that doesn't with wrapping paper.

May such happen when we hear Baptism because Baptism is not just plain water. It has God's Name connected to it. Here's how we put it in LC: "It is nothing else than divine water not that the water itself is nobler than other water but God's Word and Commandment are added to it" (LC, IV, 14). What 5-year-old is not going to trade you his 1 dollar bill for your 500 dollar Monopoly money? He doesn't know what legal tender means or the concept of having the full faith and credit of the U.S. behind something. The difference between plain water and Baptismal Water is the Name and Word of God behind it. When you hear Baptism I hope you think of God's Word and Name. Ps. 138:2 connects the two. "Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name."

My opinion, yours, anyone's about what Baptism is counts for nothing, what the Lord says counts for all. And since 1529 Confessional Lutherans have confessed this connection. We said from 1921-1991 Catechism: The water of Baptism is "comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word." In 1991 it was "included in God's command and combined with God's Words". Kolb in 2000 translated: "water enclosed" in God's command and connected with God's Word." A 21st century English translation is, "The water given shape by God's command and bound to God's Word" (Peters, *Bpt & Lord's Supper*, 77).

God's Word, His command and promise in particular, count for everything. If God commanded us to pick up a piece of straw and promised to forgive our sins, that would make straw picking up a Sacrament (LC IV, 8). How did God create? He spoke. How did God the Son raise the dead? He spoke. How did God forgive David's adultery and murder? He spoke, "Your sins have been put away you will not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). God's Word connected, comprehended, included, combined, enclosed, shaped and bound to Water has all the promise, power, and authority of God when spoken by His command. God's Word speaks into being what didn't exist before. God's Word calls sinners 'saints' and they are. God's Word calls the dead living and they do. Everything depends on God's Word and what He connects it to. In the Sacrament of Baptism, God connects His word of Command and Promise not to diamonds, not to grape juice, but to water.

Which is that Word of God? Ever got one of those gift baskets that has variety of things in it, but some of the labels have fallen off? You're not sure if something is to be eaten, for decoration, to keep the basket fresh, or even a room deodorizer. God's Word must tell us what Baptism is, and we note this by asking, "Which is that Word of God?" And it's not for nothing that Luther wrote and we confess Word *singular*. The words from the Bible passage we quote are one Word; they belong together and are to be understood together.

I have pointed out how the WWII generation would brag on the fact they memorized for confirmation all 700 Bible passages in the Explanation of the Catechism. That is an accomplishment. What you don't have in memory, you can't

use. However, you can see Luther wants a select few Bible passages to stick in our hearts. Here it's the Lord speaking in Mat. 28:19. But, as a stickler Luther was for the Word, he didn't include all of that Matthew says here. We have, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..." The full passage goes on into verse 20 like this. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The actual command here by Jesus is to make disciples after going. And Jesus adds two participles indicating how disciples are to be made: by baptizing and by teaching. But here Luther quotes only the part about baptizing.

That's probably because the Small Catechism doesn't deal with infant Baptism. The Large does and gives a defense of it. But it says before doing so that the question of is it right to baptize infants should be referred "to the learned" (III, 47). I think the more we understand what Baptism is, then onto it's benefits, its power, and how to use it, the question of baptizing infants will be moot. How could Christian parents who know what Baptism is, gives, and does, not baptize they're babies? It would be like having clothing, food, and shelter but not giving them to their kids!

Baptism is not just simple water because it not only has God's Word of Command attached to it, but His Word of Promise too. He promises you: apply water using the Name of the Triune God as Jesus commanded and that person is sent into, brought into, goes into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Greek word here is not 'in' but 'into'. There is actual movement going on. As the Baptismal Waters are sprinkled on the baby or person, heaven's gates open. They must open to the King of Kings, the Lord of lords, the Triune God who now cover this person. The baptized move into that space where all that God the Son did in His flesh and blood for the world, is applied to them personally. In the Flesh, Jesus kept all the commandments necessary for a person to go into heaven, but then Jesus was sent to hell forever during His lifetime of sorrow, His sweating blood in Gethsemane, His being forsaken at Golgotha.

To go into heaven we need Jesus' Holy Life and His guilty death. Baptism takes you into these in the name of the Triune God. Here Devil, World, and sinful nature can't go. Here sins of long ago or just today slide off. Baptism moves you into the reality where your heavenly Father and Brother Jesus reign and rule over all things for your benefit. We confess, "Where the name of God is there is life and salvation" (LC, IV, 27). When you're ushered into that Name, watch out. Heavenly, holy, happy things bless and keep you. You should hear and see at every Baptism what you do at Jesus'. Luther put it this ways: "The water which is poured in Baptism is not the water given by God as the Creator, but given by God the Saviour" (Krauth, *Con. Ref.*, 541). See heaven open, the Holy Spirit bodily descend on the person, and hear the Father declare from heaven, "This is My Beloved child in whom I am well-pleased."

As Jerry Seinfeld's friend is noted for saying, "That's gold!" When you hear Baptism, I hope you think: "Gold": "The amount of gold dissolved in the oceans is nearly 9 million tons, about 180 times the total amount of gold dug out of mines in the entire history of humanity. But the gold in the ocean is too diffuse to be extractable at a profit" (Asimov's, *Bk of Facts*, 18-19). All of the gold of God: His sonship, His forgiveness, His everlasting life is concentrated in the handfuls of water sprinkled on you. And in hearing that think not only, "That's gold" but, "That's too much." When a new convert was appointed to translate the Bible at Malabar, he got to the place where it says "ye shall be sons of God", and was so startled he laid down his pen. "It is too much; let me rather render it, 'They shall be permitted to kiss His feet'" (*6000 Illust.*, 13). Think again; in Baptism He washes yours. Amen

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Midweek Advent – I (20221130); Baptism I