**Matthew 3:13-17**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14**  John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

**“Taking The Plunge For You”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5). Learning to swim really opens up a whole new world for a person in life. Typically, it starts out with the famous “doggy paddle.” The goal is simple, which is just trying to keep your head above water. Latter, you might transition into the more fancy moves like the breaststroke, backstroke, and butterfly. Maybe you even end up learning to tread water for long periods. Whatever way you get around in swimming, the joy is that you can swim.

Unfortunately, plenty look at water only in terror. Being unable to swim is worse for adults than children. The fear of drowning by water also stands out in Scripture. A worldwide flood washed away everything accept those on Noah’s ark. Moses and the Israelites saw the Red Sea overwhelm the Egyptian army with walls of water. The Church is now in the Epiphany season and today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. More than wisemen coming to worship Him as a child is how Jesus truly is as Simeon said, “…a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” Luke 2:32. God brings good news to those threatened by waves of sin, death, and the devil. Plunged into the waters of baptism Jesus has promised you are safe.

The unsightly scene of baptism is how it came from John the Baptizer. He proclaimed God’s Word to the fullest saying, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” Matthew 3:11-12. The One coming was going to clean house. He would be a sight for all to see. “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.” At that moment, the baptizer was beside himself about baptizing! John saw that this water was not for Jesus. It was full of sin and He was sinless. It was death and God’s Son was Life. Accept the powerful preacher heard the humble Word say, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

The unsightly scene of baptism is true. You die. You drown. This sinful abyss is dark and goes deep. It rages with the stain of sinners. There is no way to tread this water or swim to shore. “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in God’s sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). If baptism were a work of man, it would be a polluted pool, a stagnant sign of death. Yet, Jesus stands at this unsightly scene with righteousness for those who are not right. One baptism does count for the many baptized. Luther explains what Jesus means by His baptism, “…for the sake of sinners I have become a sinner, I must therefore do what God has charged the sinners to do, in order that they may become just through me” (Bul’s notes). Any peaceful life for Jesus was over. His baptism bound Him to the cross. The water held what He would later have to say, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” Luke 12:50

The Word made Flesh surprises a sinful world. Death by water is real and death by baptism puts to death sinners. However, what came out of the water before John the Baptizer was no sinner, but the promised Savior. John later said, “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” John 1:34. Jesus was the new creation conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. The Heavens open to Him. The Holy Spirits rests on Him. The Father is pleased with Him. Jesus humbly carried the sin of the world. God sent His Servant who could suffer all judgment not merely from men, but from God. It was so that none need deny baptism, but be baptized into His Name. As Isaiah revealed, “He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.”

The Word of salvation always surprises a sinful world. This is what comes out of the water of baptism. Jesus brings the new creation. He told Peter while washing their feet, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” John 13:8. Where the water is fearfully to be our death, Jesus stands present to hear life in His Name. Baptism truly is the beginning of the new heavens and new earth for believers. It is greater than the first creation where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. The new creation comes by God working out of the cross with the Holy Spirit bringing Christ. Rather than a tradition of man, Jesus works in a sinful world by water and His Word. More than a moment, baptism is the church’s life where faith confesses, “I am baptized.” Handling doubt and despair, “I am baptized.” Facing pride or temptations, “I am baptized.” Dealing with death and all we fear, “I am baptized.” The surprise God gives by His Word is adopting us by water to be loved because of Jesus.

Baptism now saves because God said at Jesus’ baptism, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” None other was pleasing to the Father, none other Holy and without sin, none other defeating death by His sacrifice. We call God Father only because of His Son. It was not my baptism but His baptism put upon me. It means as Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” John 15:5. The challenge until death is not with God but the sinful nature that is restless and the devil’s relentless attacks. The power of baptism does not change nor does God’s promising Word, but how easy is it to turn away from baptism. John the baptizer forgot what He boasted over about Jesus while sitting in prison. Only to hear the message sent by Jesus saying, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Luke 7:23).

We cannot ignore the Old Adam in this life just because we are saints by God’s promise in Jesus. The sinner in us knows how to swim for the sake of self-preservation. Repentance is the way God turns us back to baptism. We do not find acceptance of sin or ignoring the need to forgive, but a family built on God’s forgiveness. That’s why the Father sends the Son to speak His absolution. “…God wants us to always have a way to hear about and receive forgives…” (Lutheranism 101: Baptism 132). Jesus established His public ministry to proclaim such forgiveness by Word and sacrament so we stay alive in Him. Thankfully, there is an end to it all where new life in Christ reigns with baptism finishing God’s faithfulness. St. Paul tells us, “For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” What do you have to fear? You died by water to Jesus and death has died to Him. Plunged into the waters of baptism Jesus has promised you are safe. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.