

TEXT: Luke 3:16-17, 21-22

THEME: BAPTIZED INTO GOD'S NAME MOST HOLY

1. Baptized with Water
2. Baptized for Judgment
3. Baptized for Forgiveness
4. Baptized into God's Approval

Dear Baptized Children of God:

CUE 16—Some people's careers turn out to be flashes in the pan, brilliant beginnings that soon fizzle to nothing. We call them "One Hit Wonders." Think of your favorite entertainer who came to fame with a chart-topping record or movie or your favorite star athlete who had an impressive rookie year but was unable to follow up with continued success. Such people are soon relegated to games of trivia.

CUE 17—John the Baptist began his career with a bang. He appeared suddenly in the desert across the Jordan River from Jerusalem. He had an impressive, austere appearance that reinforced his powerful, dramatic message: "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**" (**Matthew 3:2**). He proclaimed Jesus as "**the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**" (**John 1:29**). Yet his career fizzled as quickly as it flamed: he was arrested, imprisoned, beheaded.

CUE 18—The same seemed true of Jesus. He began his public ministry by driving the merchants and bankers from the temple (John 2:15-16). He gained fame for dramatic words backed up by powerful miracles. But then he appeared to overreach: his claim to be God cost him popularity, and he ended up being crucified like a common criminal. His career lasted a little longer than John's but ended up pretty much the same.

CUE 19—Or, so it seemed. In reality, John's ministry accomplished everything God wanted. In reality, Jesus accomplished everything that needed to be done for our salvation. It didn't look like much at the time. But the results of John's ministry and of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are eternal.

We can trust that our heavenly Father continues to work in quiet, ordinary, mysterious ways. His Word doesn't say everything we'd like to know. His sacraments don't look very powerful. But we can trust that they are his means of grace, his ways of extending to us everything that John proclaimed and everything that Jesus accomplished.

CUE 20—flash—In Luther's Small Catechism we confess, "Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word... 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"

CUE 21—But is Baptism really all it claims to be? The legendary Greek warrior Achilles had one weak spot. Soon after his birth, his mother dipped him into the river Styx to make him invulnerable to weapons of war. But she forgot to make sure that the heel by which she was holding him was covered in water. So he had one weak spot, his heel. That was where he suffered his fatal wound.

Today we call the vulnerable tendon on the back of the heel our Achilles' tendon, and any little weak spot we may have—physical, intellectual, or emotional—we call our Achilles' heel.

Does Baptism leave us with an Achilles' heel? Are there any of our sins left uncovered so that we still have to fear God's judgment?

CUE 22—That's a very real concern. Our Savior came to judge as well as to redeem. St. Luke records Simeon's prophecy for the 40-day-old Savior: **"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35).** The cute little baby Jesus grew up to be the Savior of whom John the Baptist said, **"[He will] gather the wheat into his barn, but...burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17).** So, does Baptism leave an Achilles' heel?

CUE 23—ripped—In Luther's Small Catechism we confess: **"It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God's Word the water is just plain water and not Baptism. But with this Word it is Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit...[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying."**

CUE 24—Baptism leaves no Achilles' heel. No matter how the water is applied, it is combined with power of God's Word to create faith in his promise of full and free forgiveness. And that is why we are BAPTIZED INTO GOD'S NAME MOST HOLY. We are **CUE 25—flash**—BAPTIZED FOR FORGIVENESS.

When we are sick, do we go to a doctor who says, "I hope you get better"? or who says, "Take this pill as a symbol of the recovery you want"? Obviously not. We go to a doctor who can actually treat us, and we follow his or her prescription because we trust that the medicine will actually heal us.

What about Baptism? Is it only a sign of our dedication to behave better before God? Is it nothing more than a symbol of the forgiveness we hope to receive?

John the Baptist knew better. He administered **"a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).** That means the same thing our doctors mean when they say, "Take this prescription for your cold." The medicine is not a symbol of the cure or a wish for the cure. The medicine is the cure.

Matthew records that when Jesus came to John to be baptized, **"John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.'" (Matthew 3:14-15).** John knew that Jesus didn't need Baptism, because Baptism does something that Jesus didn't need: it forgives sin. Jesus had none.

None of his own, that is. As **“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)**, he was carrying the burden of every sin that ever had been and ever would be committed. By his baptism, he was identifying himself with sinners and identifying the remedy for sin.

CUE 26—ripped—In Luther’s Small Catechism we confess, **“Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare...’Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”**

Baptism is the remedy for sin. Jesus had none, but we do. Jesus was baptized **“to fulfill all righteousness,”** and to be **“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”** **CUE 27—flash**—Through Baptism he gives us credit for his righteousness and that means we are BAPTIZED INTO GOD’S APPROVAL.

If you’re the youngest of your family, as I am, you are assumed to have certain advantages in life. To learn how your parents expect you to behave, you follow the examples of your older siblings. Whatever they do that your parents like, you do. Whatever they do that gets them scolded, you don’t do. Or you try to hide it from your parents.

At Jesus’ baptism, his Father said, **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** Isn’t this an obvious thing to say? Wouldn’t Jesus know that he had his Father’s approval? Jesus was and is his Father’s firstborn, only begotten, one and only Son. He had lived with him in heavenly bliss from all eternity.

But Jesus is also the Son of Man, Mary’s son. During his life on this earth, he didn’t always make use of his divine knowledge or powers or claim his divine privileges. At crucial points of his public ministry—his baptism, his transfiguration, and during Holy Week—his Father’s words of approval encouraged him.

What about us? We are Jesus’ younger brothers and sisters, adopted into his Father’s family. If we want to know what our heavenly Father wants of us, all we have to do is look to Jesus, but not just as an example to follow. After all, we have done many things we wish we could hide from our heavenly Father. We can look to Jesus as the source of our righteousness before God, our gift of forgiveness.

CUE 28—ripped—In Luther’s Small Catechism we confess, **“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.”** Amen.

Special Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we pray for the family of little Charlie, infant grandson of Jerry and Deb Hintz, whom you brought to yourself through Holy Baptism and whom, this last Thursday, you have taken to yourself by death. We also pray for Jill Ferrio and her family at the sudden death of Jill's sister this last Friday. Be with these families and comfort them in their sorrow with your sure promises of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Almighty Father, giver of life and health, we pray for Jeanette Atkinson, Jim LaPrairie, Dennis Martens, Frieda Szczesniak, and for Ray van Mullekom, the husband of our sister in the faith, Kris van Mullekom, and for all who are sick and suffering. Grant that in the midst of pain they may be comforted by your presence and sustained by your love. If it be your gracious will, restore them to health.

Lord God, heavenly Father, you see our young people growing up in an uncertain and confusing world. Send your Holy Spirit into their hearts that they may grow in grace and wisdom. Bless the efforts of our youth ministry so that our young people are strong in faith, faithful in worship, and eager in their service to you and your church. Watch over and keep safe the 14 young people who are in Cadillac this weekend for worship, Bible study, skiing, basketball, and volleyball. May they touch the lives of others with their Christian witness.

Lord of life, bless Art Lijewski who is celebrating his 90th birthday. May this special day remind him of just how special he is in your sight and just how precious your gift of life is to him. May Art be renewed in his joy of living and may he have the health and strength to be here in church with us to sing your praises all year long.