

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I know we're already 2 weeks in to 2013, but Happy New Year! How's it going so far? Did you make resolutions this year? Did you already break your resolutions this year? A new year is a great time for a fresh new start, to do some cleaning up, in your home, in your schedule, in your life and to have a fresh new start... and I hope you didn't forget to make some resolutions to clean up your soul and have a fresh new start there, too.

But how have those resolutions gone? Fresh new start of the year already muddied and dirtied with resolutions spoken then broken? Resolve to do better only to find yourself back on the couch, back in the fridge, back in the old routine, and back in the filth of sin?

Well, let's not wait for 2014 to make some new resolutions. Let's get a fresh, new start all over again today... and every day. As we remember our baptisms each day, we get a fresh, new start. We get a clean slate, we get a new life, and we resolve all over again to live fresh, new lives in Jesus.

Our text for this morning reminds us of this fresh, new start we get every day as our Savior reveals himself to us in baptism—in our baptisms that connect us to him and give us a new start.

This whole day, so far, we've been talking about baptism, so it would seem only appropriate that our sermon text touches on that subject as well. Now, if you quick look over our verses again, you notice the word baptism actually isn't used there at all, right?

And yet, hearing these verses, reading through them on your own, though, would you agree that these verses aren't talking about anything but baptism? I'm sure you would. This is what Paul writes, "He 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..."

The washing, the rebirth, the renewal, the presence of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, poured out on us generously, all the result of the immense love of God of Father, the same love showed to us Jesus Christ our Savior...all of it points to the beautiful blessing of baptism.

Today, we get to talk about one of the greatest miracles to ever occur in each of our lives. That fact, that because of our baptisms, we have a fresh, new start. Now, do you remember what it was like, your baptism? A majority of you probably don't, especially if you were baptized as a baby.

Well, Paul tells us not only what happened at our baptisms. He even tells you and me what life was like for us before our baptisms, before that miracle took place, before Jesus revealed himself to us. Listen to what he writes in the verse prior to our verses, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another."

Or, rather, to sum it all up, we were scum. Full of scum, dirt, impurities, sin.

Now, I know what you're thinking...babies, cute, innocent, but full of scum? That can't be. Well, first, my smart-aleck response to that is always, "What babies have you been around?" Babies cry, they kick, they scream, they cry, they pull hair, they throw temper tantrums, they cry. That's sin.

But really, even if that weren't there, every baby, just like every human being, was doomed to be scum even before we got the chance to prove just how sinful we really are, even before we saw life outside the womb. The psalmist writes, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

Just as genetic traits are passed down from parents to their children, from generation to generation, so was sin, all the way from Adam and Eve to you and me.

And if you weren't baptized until you were an adult, you can probably see more easily how you were scum, impure, full of malice, envy, hatred, foolishness, disobedience to God, controlled by the passions and lusts of your sinful nature. Always thinking, , "How can I serve myself?" "How can I get what I want?" "How can I do what needs to be done to make me look good in the eyes of others, even if it meant not looking good in the eyes of God? Who cares what God thinks or what God wants?"

At one time, all of us lived under the rule of the devil, catering to his wants, his desires, and sweeping God under the rug or out the door. And as scum, dirt, impure, sinners, we deserved to be treated as such by God.

Now, what do you do with something, like clothes or furniture, or carpeting, that gets dirty or greasy and just will not come clean? You throw it out. You trash it. That's what we deserved. To be tossed out by God and thrown into the fires...the fires of hell.

So what changed??? You notice I couched all that talk in the past tense? So, what changed??? Well, Jesus revealed himself to us in baptism. God gave us a fresh, new start. He washed us clean.

You see, we were in need of a full scrubbing, not just a quick wash, like when you tell your children to go wash up for dinner, and they run to the sink, put their hands under the faucet just long enough to get them quick, and then proudly declare them clean. No, we desperately needed a deep cleansing.

And in baptism, that's what God gave us. On that special day, through water and the Word of God, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," God washed us clean of the grease and the grime that had dirtied our hearts and our souls from the moment we were conceived. Our lives, wiped clean, with no trace of dirt or scum or impurities or sin ever being there.

Through the miracle of baptism, God saved us. Not only did he wash our sins away. He gave us the benefits and the blessings of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. He gave us Christ's white, clean robe of righteousness, his holiness, his perfection, made ours.

Through our baptisms, God gave us a fresh, new start. He gave us new birth, a rebirth. Not another physical birth, but a spiritual birth. We have been given another chance at this life, to live a holy and righteous life, the kind of life God expects and demands of us. He put to death our sinful natures and

brought a New Man to life, a holy, righteous New Man, controlled not by the devil, but by the Holy Spirit. God gave us new life, life as his own children, made that way by the blood of his own Son, given for us.

Whether as a baby or an adult, that's what God did for us at our baptisms. Do you know why he did? Paul tells us why he didn't. "He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." The exact same thought Paul expressed in the book of Ephesians when he said, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this NOT from yourselves, it is the gift of God, NOT by works..."

My baptism and the blessed results God gave me through it had nothing to do with me...thankfully. It had everything to do with God. Jesus revealed himself to us, not us revealing ourselves to him, saying, "Ok, God, I'm ready for you now, come on in." Jesus came to me, not the other way around. God came to me when I was filthy with sin, unable to make myself clean. God came to me and generously poured out his forgiveness when I deserved only wrath and punishment and hell.

Paul tells us why God did that. "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us...because of his mercy...justified by his grace." Look at all those wonderful characteristics Paul describes God as showing in our baptisms. His kindness, the good will and love for mankind God naturally has.

His love, the basis of everything God does for us, described as his mercy, his grace, undeserved love, the same love the apostle John wrote about, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." Just note how one-sided our baptism really is!

And to make it even more one-sided, God gives us another blessing in baptism. Do you know what it is? You see, Paul calls baptism a washing or rebirth AND renewal. In baptism, God works a renewal.

He makes us new again...and again....and again. You know, we often like to say, "Oh, yeah, I was baptized." But that's not exactly accurate. The better way to talk is to say, "I am baptized," because baptism is a daily renewal.

Now, you might ask, "Why do we need that renewal?" Because we still sin. We might resolve to sin less. We may try to improve our spiritual lives. And we might even be making progress. But with sin, with Satan right there, it's always a one step forward two steps back sort of deal. That malice, envy, hatred, disobedience is still there, and we still face the temptations to give in. And sometimes we do.

But you are baptized. I am baptized. Martin Luther writes, "Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

That's our New Man, renewed by God, day after day, putting to death our sinful nature, living lives of daily repentance, having God's constant forgiveness, then striving to make the most of our fresh, new

start, a clean slate, to live for God a life of righteousness each day, having the Holy Spirit working in us to do exactly that, to reveal Jesus. You and I are baptized. That affects how we live our lives. We have been changed. We live, not to satisfy our sinful natures, but to reveal Jesus in what we say and what we do.

And as baptized children of God, we have been reborn as heirs. Besides the blessings of being baptized children here, in this life, we have the blessing of eternal life after this life. That is our hope. That is our confidence.

Talk about a fresh, new start. We have been made alive by Christ. Through our baptisms, he has given us new life. Resolve to live for him.

You might goof up and break that resolution today. Then go back to the cross. See reminders of your forgiveness. Go back to your baptism. See your Savior, revealed to you in water and Word. And get a fresh, new start all over again today and every day. And remember what's at the end. You are an heir. You have eternal life. You are God's dearly loved child. Nothing can take that away. Amen.

**God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ!
He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price.
Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any
That brought me salvation free, lasting to eternity!**

**There is nothing worth comparing to this lifelong comfort sure!
Open-eyed my grave is staring: even there I'll sleep secure.
Though my flesh awaits its raising, still my soul continues praising:
I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise!**