

## Heart of Worship: It Begins with Your Baptism!

A sermon based on Matthew 28:16-20

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Does something about this service seem a little off to you? I mean, we've been singing baptism hymns so far. We've had baptism related Scripture readings. And we haven't even had a baptism today (even though last week we had a private baptism). And we're not celebrating Jesus' baptism, either (that belongs during epiphany). So, what's the deal?

Friends, this morning, now, we're going to start taking a more in-depth look at our worship service, and what better way than to start at the beginning. And here it is, again, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Words Jesus used at the tail end of his ministry, we use to start our worship together.

Why? Well, if you look at these words in your worship folder, you'll see they're part of what we call an invocation. Do you know what that word, invocation, means? Often, that word's associated with people invoking, or calling upon, a spirit or deity for aid, protection, inspiration, what have you. Something you'd expect to find common in the ancient religions and even in some religions today (remember how Martin Luther, while he was still part of the Roman Catholic Church, cried out to St. Anne when he feared for his life in the midst of a terrible storm).

Another meaning, though, is to acknowledge God's presence, and that, friends, is what we do here. Our invocation expressly reminds us worshipers that the God we meet here is the true and triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God whom we worship here and now.

But it's more than that...much more than just that. The invocation also warmly calls to mind the words through which we believers have been baptized into Christ and made members of his Church and his heavenly family. Right, isn't that why Jesus spoke those words? In his Great Commission, in sending his disciples out with the command to make more disciples, he told them to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The same words which were used on you, when you were made God's own child through the waters of baptism. And now, Sunday after Sunday, those words are used for you again and again, to remind you of your humble beginning, this awesome act of grace, your baptism.

Does that seem a little odd to you? For many of you, your baptism is something you can hardly remember, especially if it happened when you were an infant. For all of you, your baptism was just a one-time event, wasn't it?

So, why hear the words of baptism Sunday after Sunday? Why do you need that reminder? Well, do you even think you do?

Well, I do. And, whether you think you do or not, you do, too.

You see, one of the amazing blessings and benefits of baptism is how, through the water and God's Word, God sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts to drown our sinful natures, wash our sins away, and instill in us the gift of saving faith in Jesus. And, if we were to leave this life the moment that took place,

we would have no greater comfort than to know that through those waters of baptism, we are God's children and the inheritance of eternal life in heaven is ours.

But I'm still here. You are, too. And you know what happens to those amazing blessings and benefits of your baptism with time? They begin to lose their significance. Baptism begins to lose its importance. Do you know why? Because life.

Do you know what happens when you take a bath or shower, or even when you just wash your hands? You don't stay clean forever. Grease, sweat, dirt, food, it finds its way to you and dirties you again and again and again.

That's what life here is like. Baptism washes us clean. Baptism makes us children of God. But we also live in a world dirtied by sin. We live amongst children of the devil. Worst of all, we still live with a sinful nature.

And, in spite of the intense drowning that sinful nature endured on the day of your baptism, it's come roaring back, looking to win you and me back over. The apostle Paul wrote in the book of Galatians, ***"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit (that is, the Holy Spirit), and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict (waging war) with each other, so that you do not do what you want."***

That's the struggle going on in here...for you and me and every other person. It's really a civil war taking place inside of us every single day. Who's winning? Sadly, for me, more often than not, it's my sinful nature. I imagine the same is true for you, too. A quick glance at Law sections of Scripture, like Galatians 5:19ff, 1 Corinthians 6:9ff, Mark 7:14ff, the 10 Commandments, etc., can verify those losses to sin we've incurred.

And slowly, those waters of baptism which once meant for us our salvation, become somewhat of a distant memory, replaced by different waters, the rising floods of sin, the guilt and shame it produces, and the very real and scary judgment those sins deserve.

The truth is, spiritually speaking, most days consist of you and me just trying to stay afloat, keep our heads above water, and desperately try to fight off the rising tide of sin. How does that go?

Is the water rapidly rising and the room to breathe fading? There's only one thing to do. ***"Out of the depths of woe I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?"***

***"But with you there is forgiveness."***

And in the torrential rains of sin and the rising floods of God's eternal judgment, a vessel appears, Jesus reaches down and drowns you. Wait! Is that what you were expecting to hear?

Just listen to Peter's comparison in our 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson, ***"God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you."***

Most of you know the story of Noah and the ark fairly well. He and his family were all safe from the flood while on that ark. But, here Peter says it was the water that actually saved them. How so? Well,

the water that brought about the death of the wicked people and drowned them all...that same water kept the ark afloat and kept the people inside that ark safe.

How did the water of baptism save you? You know, we often think of baptism as the water washing away our sins, but it's more than that. It's water where Jesus drowned us and put our sinful natures to death. And out of those same waters, he pulled us onto the ark of his grace and revived us...with a New Man...with the gift of saving faith. And on that ark, having been baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," we now enjoy the very real blessings of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection – forgiveness, forgiveness, and more forgiveness!

Again, why do we need the reminder of baptism? We are safe on the ark of God's amazing grace. But the waters of sin are still around us. And if you've been on a boat or kayak or canoe before, you know how easy it is to fall off or to fall in.

Your baptism may have been a one-time event, but your being baptized child of Christ is constant, and when the waters of sin are rocking the boat, we need the constant reminder and comfort that comes from being baptized. We need to be reminded our sinful nature needs to be drowned (on a daily basis) so our New Man can arise and live as God's faithful servant. We need to be reminded of who we are, dearly loved children of God. We need to be reminded of how we've gotten here...saved by the waters of baptism, but even more, saved by the cross of Christ.

Just an aside here, but maybe you've been at churches before where people will make the sign of the cross when they hear those words, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Our typical response is, "That's so Catholic!" But really, doing this is meant to remind you of your baptism, how the pastor made the sign of the cross on your head and your heart to mark you as a redeemed child of Christ. Maybe it isn't so bad to do that, then! We need to be reminded of that cross of Christ.

It begins with your baptism. You know the gist of Jesus' Great Commission is for you to go and make disciples, 1) by baptizing them and 2) by teaching them God's Word. Before we can go and share the gospel (which might be a scary thought for you), we need to start here and be reminded of our own baptism and be reminded of who we are.

You are a child of God. Jesus' blood has saved you...washed you clean. Your baptism reminds you of that. And now, the service can continue. You can be taught and encouraged to obey everything Jesus has commanded in his Word.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And the faithful respond, "Amen!" "Yes, God is here to bless. Yes, we have arrived to worship him! Yes, it is good to be here...as baptized children of God, eager to learn...eager to live for Christ!" Amen.