

Sermon – The Hard Conversations:

Baptism – When & Why

Pastor Ed Blonski | January 8, 2023

New Message Series

Today we begin a new message series called “The Hard Conversations.”

On this first full weekend of the new year, when the Church remembers that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, we’re going to begin to look at several difficult conversations that we, as followers of Jesus, have.

The Hard Conversations

1) Baptism: When & Why

We’re going to start with Baptism itself, and I want to take on the questions “when” and “why” we baptize or get baptized.

2) Marriage: Should We or Just Live Together

In this series we’re also going to take a look at the hard conversations about marriage and whether people should get married or it is just better for all involved to simply live together.

3) Pregnancy: Pro-Life or Pro-Choice

And finally, we’ll wrap up this series by looking at human pregnancy and what it means to be pro-life and pro-choice.

Followers of Jesus

You may be asking yourself, why should we take time out in church, in worship, to go through not only hard conversations but also controversial conversations.

That’s a legitimate question! After all, no one goes to church to be frustrated or infuriated or offended.

1) Face These Questions – just like everyone else

But for those of you who are followers of Jesus, you face these conversations just like everyone else does!

These conversations – or ones very much like them – are part of being a person in today's culture!

2) Are Asked These Questions – by just about everyone else

But I have noticed that followers of Jesus – when it is known by others that you are a follower of Jesus – get asked these questions by just about everyone else.

In fact, it seems like people in our world today go out of their way to ask Christians about marriage and pregnancy, children, and – maybe to a lesser extent – the baptism of children and adults.

Some ask because they like to stir the pot of controversy! They like to gaslight Christians in order to embarrass them and ridicule them in public or on social media.

Others ask followers of Jesus about baptism, marriage, and being pro-life or pro-choice because they are genuinely interested in learning more and somehow, instinctively, turn to Christians to get answers, thinking that we should have the answers to their questions.

3) Should Have Answers to These Questions ... and Do!

And you know what? They are right! We should have answers to these and the other questions non-followers of Jesus ask of us.

In fact, I would go even so far as to state that God is nudging them to us followers of Jesus because a) they need answers and b) we have the answers.

Or, at least, we should have answers since we have a Bible, read it, and hear and learn about Bible teachings pretty much every week.

So, on this day that the Church sets asides to remember and celebrate the baptism of Jesus, let's take some time to tackle the hard conversation of baptism: when & why!

Baptism: When & Why

What Baptism Is

1) Luther's Small Catechism

First, I need to set the table for this conversation.

Here is what we Lutherans officially believe, teach, and confess about Holy Baptism.

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

[I mentioned water.] Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: *"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, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying."*

[And so, this "washing" indicates that [our sinful human nature inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve, also known as] the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Now, if these words sound vaguely familiar, that's because you are a Lutheran and went through catechism classes!

They are taken directly from Martin Luther's Small Catechism!

What makes us Lutheran followers of Jesus is, in part, that we learn about Jesus through the questions and answers in the Small Catechism.



But we don't just take Martin Luther's word for this!

What Jesus Said About Baptism

Jesus had something to say about Baptism that we should pay attention to.

1) John 3:5

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

This is from John 3 and Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. The same conversation that gave us John 3:16.

That "born of water and the Spirit" is a reference to Holy Baptism.

2) Matthew 28:19

Jesus specifically mentions baptism by name in Matthew 28.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

3) Mark 16:16

And Mark's Gospel records Jesus saying:

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Later, after Jesus ascended into heaven and founded the Christian Church to carry on the mission of proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples – followers of Jesus – St. Paul comes around and has some more to say about what Baptism is.

What St. Paul Said About Baptism

1) Romans 6:3-4

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

And if these words sound familiar, is probably because you've been to a funeral here at St. Matthew. I speak these words at every single funeral service and have for the last 28 years!

They are comforting and inspiring words that remind us – when coming face to face with death – that being baptized means we have the sure and certain hope of resurrection and a happy reunion in heaven with everyone who has fallen asleep in Jesus!

Baptism is a Gift

That comfort and hope is an incredible gift to us followers of Jesus because Baptism is an incredible gift of God.

1) Given to Us

God is the originator of Baptism as we believe, teach, and confess. He gives it to us because He loves us and is a gracious God.

2) Given to Us to Use

And like all of God's gifts, it is meant to be used!

Baptism is something through which God acts graciously, if not a bit mysteriously.

By that I mean that we can't really understand how God acts in Baptism. And I know for myself, I can't understand why God would love me so much!

But I believe it. I believe that Baptism is a gift of God through which He gives me – and all followers of Jesus – grace.

Baptism is a Means of Grace

That's why we Lutherans call baptism a "means of grace." It is something through which God gives us grace – faith and the forgiveness of our sins earned by Christ on the cross – as Paul alluded to in Romans 6 that we looked at a little while ago.

What Baptism Does

Through the Holy Spirit, It Gives Faith

We would say, then, that something that Baptism does is that the Holy Spirit uses it to give us faith in Jesus.

We can believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior because the Holy Spirit gives us the power to do so in our baptism.



By the Holy Spirit, It Gives Us Forgiveness of our Sins

Because what was preventing us from ever believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior was our sin!

Sin separated us from God. Being born sinners means that we are born spiritually dead. And the dead can't do anything for themselves.

That's why Jesus uses the phrase "born again" in John 3.

We were born dead because of sin.

We are born again through baptism! Because we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ.

Jesus died. Was dead. And is now alive forevermore. And His death and resurrection forgives all our sins!

With Faith and Forgiveness We Now Have Power to Live As God Created Us

So, with faith and forgiveness you now have power. The power of God the Holy Spirit to live as God created you to live. With love and intimate relationship with Him and with others – especially for those who are married, your spouse – which I'll talk about in another message in this series.

Faith and forgiveness, given to you in baptism, gives you the power to live the baptismal life that God created you to live.

But Wait, There's More!!

Baptism connects us

1) To Jesus

From Romans 6, we can see that our Baptism connects us to Jesus' death and resurrection.

In a sense – and here's where it helps to be a science fiction nerd like me – you travel back in time when you are baptized.

You travel all the way back to nearly 2000 years ago to the hill called Golgotha. Where Jesus was nailed to a cross to forgive every one of your sins.

You travel all the way back to nearly 2000 years ago to the garden tomb which is empty, and meet the Lord Jesus!

2) To Our Parents, Grandparents, & Ancestors (known & unknown)

And more than just this time travel, baptism connects you to your parents. Here's what I mean.

When your mom and dad brought you to the baptismal font and you were baptized, you were connected to mom and dad who were themselves brought to a similar – if not the very same – baptismal font by your grandparents.

You are also connected to your grandparents who were brought to a similar baptismal font and themselves baptized.

Baptism connects you to your parents, your grandparents, and your ancestors – those you know through the family stories told and the ones who are lost to the shadows of history.

3) To Billions of Other People Who Are or Have Been Followers of Jesus

And one more connection for you.

Baptism not only connects you to your family, but it also connects you to every single one of the followers of Jesus who are baptized today – which number in the billions – but also to every single baptized follower of Jesus all the way back to the first ones baptized on Pentecost in Jerusalem 50 days after Jesus' resurrection!

A. Packer Fan Illustration

Looking at some of you, I can see that you are not quite getting the connection of the connections of baptism.

Let me try with this illustration.

Let's say you are a Green Bay Packer fan and you are taking a once-in-a-lifetime tour of the Gobi Desert in Mongolia. Like all other Packer fans I've met, you are wearing your Green Bay Packer polo as you head to the restaurant at your hotel in Ulanbaatar. As you walk to your table, you pass a couple sitting having their dinner, and he's wearing a Green Bay Packers sweatshirt.

Here you are, 6000 miles away from Wisconsin, in the middle of Asia, and you meet another Green Bay Packer fan.

You don't know who this person is. You've never seen him before in your life!

But even 6000 miles from home, you have an instant and powerful connection.

That's what baptism does for you! It connects you to everyone else baptized – no matter how old they are, where they are from, or where you happen to be.

Baptism is an instant and powerful connection!

What To Do With Baptism



So what do we do with baptism? For most of you, if you are expecting a baby to come into your life, the subject of baptism has or will come up.

"When are you going to get the baby baptized?" you may be asked.

"Where are you going to get the baby baptized" may also be a question

Is It Really That Important?

Here's another one. Is baptism really that important?

1) Jesus Told Us to Do It – Matthew 28

Here's how I answer that question.

Yes, it is important because A) Jesus told us to do it.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

That's a pretty powerful reason to baptize someone.

And here's another one.

2) Paul Told Us What It Does – Romans 6

St. Paul, in Romans 6, tells us what baptism does:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

I want that for my kids and my grandkids and for everyone!

The Hard Conversation

But here's the hard conversation. When should we baptize or be baptized?

1) When to Baptize or Be Baptized

A. As an Infant?

As an infant? The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod follows the precedent set by the Church all the way back to the beginning to include infants in baptism.

Our reasoning is that infants would be included in Jesus' commission to make disciples of “all nations.”

Today there are some Christian churches that do not. Instead, they baptize when a person reaches the point of the “age of accountability”

B. When You Can Decide for Yourself?

Some Christians feel that a person must decide for himself or herself that they want to be baptized.

And some parents then do not baptize their children with the thought that their kids need to make this decision for themselves.

Here's my answer to that.

C. The Answer – Baptism is what God Does, Not Us

If baptism is just a symbolic ceremony that a person has accepted Jesus as their Savior, there would be no reason to baptize an infant since they cannot tell us they accept Jesus.

But Holy Baptism is not symbolic. It is a sacrament.

A sacred act instituted by Christ that joins His Word to an earthly element – in this case, water – that gives the forgiveness of sins.

Let me put it another way.

Baptism is not something you do. It is something that God does.

It is entirely God's doing. We simply receive the gift.

The only thing we bring to baptism is the child – or ourselves if we are older. God does all the rest.

2) Considering what Jesus and St. Paul Said

Realizing that, and considering what Jesus and St. Paul say about Baptism, then I would say...

A. We Need to Baptize Our Children as Soon as Possible

We need to baptize our children as soon as possible. In the Dark Ages and Middle Ages, Christian parents would have their child baptized a day or two after birth, partly because infant mortality rates were so high back then.

When You Have a Great Gift You Want to Give it as Soon as Possible

But today, I feel that since baptism is such a great gift from God, I would want to share that gift with my child as soon as possible!

My Encouragement to You

Let me close with this encouragement.

Jesus Gives Us Baptism

Baptism is an incredible gift given to us by Jesus. He himself was Baptized and told us to baptize all nations as well as teach them.



He Told St. Paul What It Was

But he didn't just tell us to do it. He also told us what Baptism is through St. Paul. Jesus didn't have attitude, "Just do what I say."

That's how much Jesus loves us. He brings us into the gift by telling us what the gift actually does!

It is an Awesome Gift

And it is an awesome gift!

1) It connects you to Jesus

It brings you back in time – spiritually – to the cross and the empty grave of Jesus!

It brings you all that Jesus did on the cross – namely the forgiveness of all your sins and a new life lived here and in eternity!

2) That Connects You to All Followers

It also connects you to all followers of Jesus – past, present, and future!

3) That You Get to Give Your Children

And it is an incredible gift that you get to give to your children. And when they are infants or toddlers, you get to remind them as they grow up what it means to be a baptized child of God.

Remember, Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

I pray you will continue in those words and promises and pass them along to your children and your children's children.

In Jesus' name. Amen.