

Titus 3:4-7

4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Dear Friends,

If you were here last Sunday you heard that Epiphany means "revelation." Of course the reference is made directly to the Bible lessons that are read during the Sundays after Epiphany which "reveal" Jesus as the Son of God, and true God himself, worthy of all the same praise and honor which God the Father, who created all things, deserves and receives. Last week we read how the wise men came and worshiped Jesus. Today we heard in the gospel lesson how God the Father spoke at the Baptism of Jesus, "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" (Luke 3:22)

In the book of Titus we have another mystery of God that is revealed to us, one that at times baffles our minds, and one that transcends our reason, understanding and explanation. It is a "mystery" which the believers in God accept by faith, worked by the Holy Spirit.

The Mystery of Baptism

- 1. Is Worked by Our Savior God**
- 2. Washes away Our Sin**
- 3. Gives Us Certainty of Eternal Life**

Baptism is a "mystery" that is worked by God. But it is good for us to remember who our God is...he is also our Savior. He is the almighty One who has power over everything, who can do all things and who often does things that are beyond our understanding.

For a moment let's think about some of the things God does that we do not understand: God blesses people who obviously, understandably, reasonably don't deserve it.

He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Mat 5:45)

God allows difficulties to come to those who are faithful and good.

{Jesus'} disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. (John 9:2,3)

Loves those who are rejected.

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they

may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. (Luke 14:12-14)

After the brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery, God used their sinful action to save the people of Israel. Even when people or situations are wicked or evil God makes good out of evil. Joseph explained to his brothers,

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Gen 50:20)

Some of the questions our feeble minds would ask are, “Why does God do those things?” Or, “How does God do such wonderful things?” Because God is, as he says, a “good and faithful God” “showing mercy to thousands.” God cannot be unfaithful to himself. God has always been and always is merciful. Since God has made promises of mercy, and since God cannot lie, each of God’s promises of grace must be kept and fulfilled.

4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

You may or may not have noticed that the word “baptism” is not in this lesson in the book of Titus at all. Are we stretching the lesson to make a point? Are we dragging in an idea that the apostle Paul didn’t even intend to make? If we are, we’re in good company. To help children understand baptism Martin Luther wrote in his small catechism,

How can water do such great things?

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 God’s Word it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit.

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.” (Titus 3:5–8)

The Mystery of Baptism that 2. Washes away Our Sin

It is sin which disqualifies people from earning God’s favor and blessings. We have accumulated sin ever since the day we were conceived,

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5)

Sinful moms and sinful dads have sinful babies. I wish it wasn't that way, but just like you can't choose who your parents will be, you can't choose whether or not you want to be sinful. You're born that way. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go." Then why didn't our parents train us up to be good and decent? Don't you think they did their best? They made you learn to sit at your place at the table, and "stay out of other people's space." They taught you to tell the truth, and not to take things that aren't yours. Maybe they washed your mouth with soap because you said things that ought not be said. They punished you when you got in trouble because your behavior was not acceptable. Where did you learn to do all those naughty things anyway? Did your mom and dad "train you up" that way? No! Those sins came from within your selfish, mean-spirited and conniving little sinful hearts. So, the sin that separates people from God is sin that we're born with, sinful things we have done, sinful ideas that we never acted on but we have pondered and entertained ourselves with such thoughts anyhow, and the sins of not doing the things we should have done. Here's a question: How will God show grace to sinful people like that? But he does. And the Bible is filled with so many descriptions of what God's forgiveness is like. The prophet Micah says

You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)

King David wrote,

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Ps 103:12)

Isaiah said,

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (Isa 1:18)

Here the "mystery" of baptism is again set before us. Baptism washes away our sins. This is another picture of how God shows mercy. Consider the simple passages that clearly say,

This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. (1 Pet 3:21)

And

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

The mystery is explained (perhaps as much as it can be) God the Father, works through the waters of baptism, by His Holy Spirit, through whom the redemption worked by Jesus Christ is planted in our hearts. That's big. Simply put, baptism washes away sin.

In the ceremony of baptism we have been assured,
Your sins are washed away. You are a redeemed child of God, through Jesus Christ.

In this letter to Titus, Paul said in verses five, six and seven,
[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.

The Mystery of Baptism 3 Gives Us Certainty of Eternal Life

Perhaps you've noticed that when we use the word "hope" in sermons or Bible classes, we almost always talk about "certain hope." That's because in our normal conversations, we often use the word "hope" in an uncertain way. We say, "I hope the weather will be nice tomorrow." "I hope the traffic isn't bad during rush hour." When Christians talk about their faith, they use the word "hope" in a very different way. Christian hope is not a fingers-crossed, guessing sort of hope. Our Christian faith and hope does not involve guessing, worries, or uncertainty. What greater certainty, what greater kindness and love could we have than the work our Savior did for us; than the washing away of sin that God gave each one of us in Holy Baptism; than the rock-solid promises of God which point us forward to heaven!

Sometimes people think that they are doing something for God when they are baptized. Some claim that their baptism was an act of obedience or a promise they made to commit themselves to God. But nothing could be further from the truth. Listen to Paul's language. Your baptism was a special, unique act of God in your life that has significance each day of your life. Our baptism is a special one-time gift of God that brings to you the promise that Christ has washed away our sins, that we adopted into his family, and that he will stand by us every day of our lives.

It's a mystery! We stand guilty before God We are guilty of doing everything wrong! God knows. He is an eyewitness to all our sins. He has seen every mistake. He has read our thoughts. He knows all the gross and disgusting things we are capable of. He knows we are guilty for a fact! Still, we are declared not guilty—justified by his grace. How? Why? Because God is a gracious and merciful God, forgiving our sins through Jesus Christ, washing us clean, and making us heirs of eternal life. Amen!

Prayers for Sunday, January 13, 2013

Maynard Adams, released from St. Mary's, now at Hi Park Care Center

Shirley Schlichting, released from Red Wing Hospital, now at Ellsworth Care Center

Joan Jablonski, released from Red Wing Hospital, now at Seminary Home

Brad Jablonski and Pam Mueller released from Red Wing Hospital, now at home

Heart issues, pneumonia, intestinal problems and knee surgery. We pray that God watch

over them all and keep them safe.

Dear Lord Jesus, during your earthly ministry there was no sickness you could not heal and no pain that you could not relieve. Even now it is you who gives comfort and healing to all who suffer. Hear our prayer on behalf of our congregational brothers and sisters who are enduring sickness and suffering at this time. Send your Holy Spirit to comfort them and your angels to watch over them. Let them know that no matter what problems they face, your power is made perfect in weakness. Ease their pain, calm their fears, and encourage their faith with the promise of your grace.

Let your loving hand rest upon all people, throughout our country who are sick and suffering during this horrendous flu outbreak. Strengthen the doctors, nurses and caregivers who are serving them and by your grace bring this epidemic to an end. Amen.

Tomorrow Pastor Engel will lead several members of our congregation and others on a tour to Israel. We pray for their safety.

Lord God our Father, You kept Abraham and Sarah in safety throughout the days of their pilgrimage, You led the children of Israel through the midst of the sea, and by a star you led the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Protect and guide those who travel to see and experience the places where Jesus and the disciples walked. Make their ways safe and their home-comings joyful. May this trip be a reminder to us all that wherever we are, our life in this world is a journey which we pray will bring all of us at last to our heavenly home, where You dwell in glory with Your Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. We ask that you hear our prayer for the sake of Jesus, who taught us to pray ...