

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday in Lent, March 5, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 288, 207:6, 298, 302, 377:7.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 4:1-14, Acts 8:26-39, Mark 10:13-15.

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:18-20.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our next several sermons we will be talking about sacraments. So we really should review what a sacrament is. Chances are that you had to memorize the orthodox Lutheran definition of a sacrament. A sacrament is a sacred act, instituted by Christ himself. It uses earthly elements connected with God's Word. A sacrament offers, gives, and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. When we use the word "seals" we think of a seal that makes something genuine, that is, that we are really receiving what has been offered and given. We recognize two acts that meet this definition. They are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. Today we consider

BAPTISM

- 1. Jesus' command to baptize.**
- 2. What is the meaning of this command?**
- 3. Who is to be baptized?**

When Martin Luther is teaching about Baptism, he asks "What is Baptism? Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word." "What is that word of God? Christ Our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew, 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!'" It is certainly worth remembering these words: *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"* Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV) You may have memorized these words from the King James Version: *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."* Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV)

To despise and reject Baptism is to despise and reject Christ himself.

This command – to *"make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"* to *"teach all nations, baptizing them"* – is given to Christ's disciples, that is, to his church on earth. Thus the church – no other organization – is to baptize, not the government nor anyone else. The church administers Baptism through the called ministers of Christ; but in cases of emergency and in the absence of the pastor, any Christian should baptize. We recognize that anyone who has been instructed in the Word of God is one who can baptize, and so we do not acknowledge baptism done by small children, as when they are playing and imitating what they see in church.

Some churches teach that unless a person is completely immersed into water, he is not baptized. While they may have little to say about the spiritual benefit of Baptism and the significance of such immersion, they make much of the outward form and mode of Baptism. The word "baptize" is derived from a Greek word which

means to apply water in a ceremonial manner. It also means to dip in or under water. And so we admit that we may baptize also by immersion, but this is not the only meaning of the word as used in the Bible. Without reviewing here every passage that uses the words “baptize” and “baptism”, the following are among the most important. Mark writes of a partial washing of the body as “baptizing”. Cups and pots may have been “baptized” by immersion, but a dining couch would not have been immersed. We read in Hebrews of “**various ceremonial washings**” Hebrews 9:10 (NIV) which is also the Greek word “baptizings”. Matthew writes of John the Baptist saying “**I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**” Matthew 3:11 (NIV) That baptism with fire was fulfilled on Pentecost when tongues like as of fire descended on the followers of Jesus. It is essential that water be applied, which may be done also by pouring or sprinkling. It does not depend upon the amount of water used, nor upon where and how it is applied. We do not immerse because we do not wish to support the false teaching of the immersionists and let our Christian liberty be judged by their conscience.

Baptism is not simple water only, because in Baptism water is used by the command of Christ. Although water is not expressly mentioned in Christ's command, it is clearly designated as the external means because of the word "baptize". The word "baptize" implies that we use water. Water is expressly mentioned when Jesus told Nicodemus: “**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**” John 3:5-6 (NIV) Paul also speaks of baptism when he writes: “**Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**” Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV) Peter compares the flood in the days of Noah with Baptism: “**In [Noah’s ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and 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. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.**” 1 Peter 3:20-22 (NIV)

Because the water is applied in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, it is connected with God's word. In Baptism the promise of the Triune God is connected with the water.

We find a command and a promise in the words by which Baptism was instituted. This promise of God lies in the words “**in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**”. These words connect the most glorious promises of God with the water of Baptism. If a church admittedly and confessedly denies that there is a Triune God, the baptism of that church is not valid, even though it uses the Trinitarian Formula of Baptism, because it is not the Baptism Christ instituted.

What do the words “baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” mean? They mean that by Baptism I have been received into communion with the Triune God, and I was made partaker of all his blessings. I have been made part of his family, as Paul writes: “**For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.**” Galatians 3:26 (KJV)

The “name of God” stands for all he has revealed of himself, for everything he has done for us and promised to us. We have in the three Articles of the Apostolic Creed with their explanations a brief summary of the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. These Articles of confessing one’s faith most probably grew out of the Trinitarian Formula of Baptism. When Christ therefore says that we are to be baptized “into” or “unto” the name of the Triune God, he means to say that by Baptism we enter into a very definite relationship and close communion with God, who here offers and assures to us the riches of his blessings. God the Father becomes our dear Father in heaven; God the Son becomes our Savior; God the Holy Ghost becomes our Comforter; and we, accepting these blessings in faith, become God's dear children, Christ's disciples, and temples of the Holy Ghost. Thus these words indicate the covenant relationship between the Triune God and us, into which we enter by Baptism. The command to baptize lies in the words of Christ, “**Go ye and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them**”. The blessings of Baptism are promised in the words “**baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**”.

And finally, we ask today: who is to be baptized? We baptize those who request baptism as a means of grace for themselves or for their children. I want to emphasize that those who request baptism must realize that it is a means of grace, a means by which God delivers his grace, his undeserved goodness and love. This is in response to people who might think that ‘the baby won’t have a name’ if it isn’t baptized. Names are recognized by the birth certificate issued by the state.

The Baptism which Christ instituted should not be administered to lifeless things, to dead persons, to animals, but to **“all nations”**, living human beings, and this includes men, women, and children.

Those who are able to receive instruction, for example, adults, are to be baptized after they have been instructed in the principal doctrines of the Christian religion. We read of the day of Pentecost after Peter’s sermon: **“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”** Acts 2:41 (NIV)

We baptize infants as well as adults because Jesus tells us that **“all nations”**, that is, all human beings, young and old, are to be baptized. Little children should be baptized when they are brought to Baptism by those who have authority over them. **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”** Ephesians 6:4 (NIV)

Christ does not say that we must by all means first instruct and then baptize, but that we make men his disciples by baptizing and by teaching them. And so, while we first teach those who can be taught, we do not deny Baptism to infants, who were not yet instructed. Bringing up children **“in the training and instruction of the Lord.”** certainly includes that we baptize them. Just as Jesus blessed those little children who were brought to him in our Gospel lesson, so we baptize those children who are brought to us for Baptism. However, just as we may not baptize an adult against his will, we may we not baptize children against the will of their parents or guardians. We mention that because stories have been told of an old nun, a nurse at Mankato’s hospital when it was still a “Catholic hospital”, who secretly baptized every child born at that hospital. That is not right.

Infants are to be baptized because they are included in the words **“all nations”**. On Pentecost we read: **“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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”** Acts 2:38-39 (NIV) Infants, too, are sinful, as we confess: **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** Psalm 51:5 (NIV)

Infants are to be baptized because Holy Baptism is the only means whereby infants, who, too, must be born again, can ordinarily be regenerated and brought to faith. Children are not to be excluded from the kingdom of God. Jesus said: **“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”** John 3:5 (NIV) In the Old Testament children were circumcised when they were eight days old, and were thus received into the covenant of God's grace. In the New Testament we might say that we are ‘spiritually circumcised’ with the circumcision of Christ by being buried with him in Baptism.

Finally, we baptize infants because infants, too, can believe. Jesus himself also said: **“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”** Matthew 18:6 (NIV) This point answers an objection often raised against infant Baptism. No one, neither adults nor children can, by their own reason and strength, believe in Jesus Christ or come to him. But the Holy Ghost can and does work faith in little children as well as in adults. Baptism is called a **“washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,”** Titus 3:5 (NIV) a washing by which the Holy Ghost regenerates us or works faith in us. And this he can do also in little children. The assertion that little children are not conscious of their faith does not prove that they have no faith;

And so Baptism is a sacrament that works faith – in infants; or strengthens faith – as when adults who have been instructed are then baptized. It offers and gives the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, ideas we shall consider in our next sermon. May we always look on baptism as a true means of God delivering his grace to a sinful world. Amen.