

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

We are keeping watch tonight, for it is the third day; it began as evening came; it the day of Jesus' resurrection.

It's not surprising that tonight also is a time to think on baptism — to remember ours and to rejoice with those who receive this washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. In the Service of Baptism, we heard the close connection of Jesus' death and resurrection to baptism. In baptism we were buried with Christ, united to Him in a death like His, that we might be united with Him in a resurrection like His. *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved"* (Mark 16:16).

But God's promises linked to water extend back into the Old Testament. Long before scientists would begin to tell us of the importance of water for life, God through His prophet Moses was pointing us to water, in the creation, in the flood, in Israel's deliverance. Water is the common element in all these Old Testament accounts, and they all point us to our baptisms.

As God began His six-day work of creating, *"the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters"* (Gen. 1:2). On the second day, God would separate the waters on earth from the waters in the sky (Gen. 1:6-8). And on the third day, He gathered the waters on earth into seas and made dry land (Gen. 1:9-10). Here God was laying the foundation of all living things that He created, including man on the sixth day.

But waters have a recreative function in the New Testament, and that happens in baptism. You recall that we are *"baptized into Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:27), and St. Paul tells us that when we are *"in Christ,"* we are *"a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come"* (2 Cor. 5:17). And all this is from God; it is His recreative gift to mankind.

Or consider the flood. There God used water to destroy the wickedness that grieved God — the wicked men and women. But eight were saved in the Ark that faithful Noah built, along with the animals that God commanded Noah to take into the Ark with him. Carried by the Ark that *"floated on the face of the waters,"* Noah and His family were saved. St. Peter makes the baptismal connection: this was but a type; the fulfillment would come in baptism — *"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 21). Luther highlights connection in his baptismal "Flood prayer."

Baptismal waters save, but baptismal waters destroy. They drown the old sinful nature in us along with *"all sins and evil desires,"* so that a new person might *"emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity,"* as Luther puts it

(Small Catechism, Baptism, part 4). If only sinful nature stayed dead, but our old Adam is resilient, which is why it's good to remember our baptisms tonight, and why we are reminded to drown him by contrition and repentance in a daily remembrance of our baptism.

So God creates with water and destroys with water and saves through water. Salvation is seen also in Israel's deliverance from its Egyptian taskmasters. They were saved as they passed through water, *"the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left,"* and as God destroyed Pharaoh and His people's enemies, drowning them in the water: *"the LORD ... has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."*

Paul again makes the baptismal connection for us: *"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea"* (1 Cor. 10:1-2). And Luther, again, highlights it in the flood prayer, Pharaoh's army being destroyed in the sea, thus *"foreshadowing this washing of ... Holy Baptism."*

Thus these Old Testament texts were read as we wait and watch at this Easter Vigil, for by them we are able to ponder the means by which we are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection, to ponder the new life we have in Christ by Holy Baptism, to ponder the hope of everlasting life we have through this sacramental connection, and to rejoice in a salvation, neither earned nor deserved by us, but earned by Christ's passion and resurrection and given to us by Christ in this Sacrament.

Rejoice, you Baptized. You have died with Christ; you will also live with Him.

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