

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

Those words recall the baptism of Nativity Joy this morning, as she was washed in the water combined with the powerful word of Christ and made a disciple by baptism in Holy Name of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this water, she was united with the Father's beloved Son in His death and buried with Him. But then given new life in Christ, in His resurrected life—*“dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

Moreover, the gift of the Holy Spirit was given her. The Spirit descended upon her with power giving her the regeneration and renewal that believes what God does in baptism, calling her by the Gospel to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, enlightening her with the gift of faith, giving her entrance into the kingdom of heaven, making her holy in Christ's righteousness.

But those Trinitarian words not only recall her baptism, but also yours. You were washed in the same powerful word of Christ, made disciples by the same Holy Name. Thus every time you say them and make the sign of the cross, you should recall how the Lord washed you and cleansed you and presented you to Himself *“in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that [you] might be holy and without blemish.”* Recall it because this one Baptism has daily implications for your life.

Moreover, these familiar words, in a way, recall the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ, for that same God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, made Himself known powerfully to us: the Father in the voice from heaven acknowledging His beloved Son from eternity; the Son just baptized in whom was the hope of all mankind; the Spirit coming down from heaven in the form of a dove and anointing the Son with Himself and with power.

Still, though we naturally link the Baptism of Jesus with our own baptism, and today especially because of Nativity's baptism, these two are not so closely linked in our Lutheran Symbols. You know your Small Catechism. Is Jesus' baptism foundational for Luther's teaching on this sacrament: the nature or blessings or power in baptism? Never mentioned. In the Large Catechism? Luther does present Jesus' baptism, with the heavens opened and the Spirit descending visibly, as confirmation of God's grace in Holy Baptism — but that's not much.

But Luther does link them up—Jesus' baptism and our own. We just prayed Luther's Flood prayer, and there he states how he views the benefits of Jesus' baptism: that the “Almighty eternal God” “through the baptism of [His] dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has consecrated and set apart the Jordan and all water as a salutary flood and a rich and full washing away for sins” for there in Jesus' baptism is the incarnate Word of God added to the water, changing it from plain water and no baptism, to truly a baptism, “a life-giving water, rich in grace.”

Moreover, this grace is given, Luther preached, as we are washed by the baptismal waters and experience “a beautiful, glorious exchange, by which Christ, who is wholly innocent and holy, not only takes upon himself another’s sin, that is, my sin and guilt, but also clothes and adorns me, who am nothing but sin, with his own innocence and purity.”

You see, Jesus wasn’t baptized for His good, but for ours. John tried to stop Jesus from what he thought was an unnecessary baptism. Certainly Jesus had no need of repentance. John said, “*I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?*” But Jesus affirmed it was not for His sake that He was baptized, but for ours, “*to fulfill all righteousness.*” For remember, Jesus was “*born under the law*” Gal. 4:4), and He had to fulfill all righteousness. His obedience had to be flawless if His obedience were to substitute for our disobedience, and we might be reckoned righteous in His righteousness. He had to be the spotless Lamb of God if His sacrifice were to count as the redemption price for “*us who were under the law*” and incapable of keeping it.

So Luther continued: Jesus “dies the shameful death of the Cross for the sake of my sins, through which I have deserved death and condemnation, and grants to me his righteousness, in order that I may live with him eternally in glorious and unspeakable joy. Through this blessed exchange, in which Christ changes places with us (something the heart can grasp only in faith), and through nothing else, are we freed from sin and death and given his righteousness and life as our own.” (*Luther’s Works*, 51:315).

No one else could accomplish this blessed exchange. No one else could take on the punishment for sins that are not His. No one else could die once for all sins of all people and all times and all places. No one else could bestow on us “*the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor. 5:21) but the one who fulfills all righteousness, the one who knew no sin, yet whom the Father made to be sin for us. No one else could accomplish this but Him who by His cross has forgiven us all our trespasses, Him who has canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, Him who set that debt aside, nailing it to the cross, Him who triumphed over all our enemies—no one else but Jesus, anointed the Christ, affirmed to be the beloved Son of God.

John the Baptist did as Jesus insisted. He baptized Jesus. But more than that, he saw the Spirit descend and understood, for the next day he identified Jesus as: “*the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.*”

You are the baptized and you have witnessed it again today. The Holy Spirit came down and gave rebirth to another little lamb to frolick after Jesus. You get it, and so you will join your voices today to John’s, singing, “*O Christ, Thou Lamb of God who takest away the sin of the world.*” And then you will come to this altar on which that same Lamb has placed His body and blood, and you will receive Him

with your mouths. You will receive Him to whose death and resurrection you have been united in your baptisms, and you will proclaim the crucified One again who came for you and the whole world.

Therefore, today rejoice in Baptism: Jesus', yours, Nativity's. Rejoice in the Holy Name placed upon you. Rejoice in the Blessed Exchange effected for you. Rejoice in Him who will not leave you, in Him who promises to be with you to the end of the age. Yes, rejoice every time you recall these momentous words:

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