
Holy Baptism: Deliverance from Death
Sermon for the 1st Sunday after Epiphany (The Baptism of Jesus)
Romans 6:1-11

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading we heard before, Romans 6:1-11: ¹ **Therefore what shall we say? “Shall we go on sinning so that God may be more gracious to us?”** ² **Certainly not! How shall we, who died to sin, live any longer in it?** ³ **Or do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?** ⁴ **Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life.** ⁵ **If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection.** ⁶ **We know that our old self was crucified with Him, that our sinful bodies might be rendered powerless, in order that we might not be slaves to sin any longer.** ⁷ **For the one who has died has been declared free from sin.** ⁸ **If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,** ⁹ **because we know that, since Christ was raised from the dead, He will not die again. Death no longer has any mastery over Him.** ¹⁰ **For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives He lives to God.** ¹¹ **So you too, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In our Gospel today, we heard how Jesus was among the people who were being baptised by John. Jesus identified Himself with people whom He had come to save. In his Gospel, Matthew tells us that the association of Jesus with

sinners coming for baptism had brought forth a protest from John. John said, “*I need to be baptised by You, and are You coming to Me?*” Jesus answered him, “*Permit it to be so now! For that is how it is proper for us to fulfil all righteousness*” (3:14-15). Jesus’ answer points to His work of fulfilling the entire will of God for us. The sinless One does not separate Himself from sinners but becomes one with them in His baptism.

Now listen to these words of Paul: “**Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life.**”

Jesus has died for us. We have heard this often enough. He has died on the cross to take away our sins: that is taught in the earliest years of Sunday school. But ponder Jesus’ death for a moment in a different way. On the cross, Jesus died twice. He suffered physical death, and He suffered eternal death - the “second death,” too.

The second death came first and was far more horrific. On the cross, Jesus suffered hell for the sins of the world. God condemned His Son on the cross for the sins of all. He forsook His Son and made Him to be sin who knew no sin.¹ Thus Jesus suffered an eternity of the second death while He was on the cross. That eternal second death came to an end, however; and before He died, He prayed, “*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit*” (Luke 23:46). Jesus had undergone eternal death, and from that He was already delivered. He therefore declared, “*It is finished!*” - and then He breathed His last. He suffered the physical death of His battered flesh and blood.

But that was not the end! Three days later, He rose again from the dead. He appeared to the women, then to the disciples, and then to many more. He showed them His body, His hands and His side, demonstrating both that He had died, and He was risen. Risen again, He lives and reigns forever. He has conquered the inevitable ends of death and grave.

Now, we embrace and confess this when we recite the Creed; and with joyful

¹ 2 Cor. 5:21

anticipation we say, “*We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*” This is good news, but it is not all the good news. There is more, and it is this: we do not just look forward to eternal life, as if it is some future event. No, *we already have eternal life.* When was it made ours? When we were baptised. Already now we “**walk in newness of life.**”

Jesus has died our death for sin, suffering God’s wrath on the cross. In baptism, He shares it with us, and we die with Him. Having borne the totality of hell for our sin, Jesus now shares this death with us with a splash of water accompanied by His Word. If any of us are asked, “*Will you suffer God’s judgement for your sin?*” an appropriate response is, “*I already have suffered all the judgement that is left for me. That is, Jesus has suffered it for me and shared it with me in holy baptism.*”

Surely this is of great comfort when we think about the end of our lives. We can be absolutely certain that the second death does not lie ahead because it’s already done. We have already died to sin.

But it doesn’t stop there. Christ has suffered that death and risen again; and not only does He share His death with us, but He also shares His resurrection. Paul writes, “**If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection.**”

We have died to sin in baptism and have been raised up with Christ there. Our once-dead soul now has eternal life already and will remain alive as long as we remain in Christ. Christ’s death and resurrection were the basis of the righteousness that the Father credited to us to make us children of God, fit for His Kingdom.

Of course, we must condemn the error of the one who says, “*Since I am baptised, and I have already died and risen in Christ, I can now quit church and do what I want. My salvation is secure.*” This thinking leads only to condemnation, for it says, “*In baptism, I have died to sin with Christ and risen again. But I prefer sin and desire to return to that dead state. No eternal life for me, thank you.*”

We can see, then, the precious treasure and power of baptism, and we can see the frightful sin of avoiding it. The one who says, *“I believe in Jesus, but I don’t want to be baptised”* is saying, *“I believe in Jesus, but I don’t want to die and rise with Him. I don’t want Him to share His death and resurrection with me.”* Faith in Christ and a rejection of baptism simply do not compute.

We can also see why we bid new parents hasten to the altar with their newborn children. So great is the curse of sin that even infants suffer death at times; so, Jesus was born an infant so that He would go to the cross and redeem them as well. He shares His death and resurrection with them at the font, too.

We can see why Luther rejoiced, *“I am baptised!”* not *“I was baptised.”* We do not say, *“Once upon a time, I had eternal life with Christ,”* but *“Because of Baptism, I have eternal life in Christ.”* We do not shout *“He was risen!”* on Easter Sunday, but *“He is risen!”* We rejoice that Christ lives forever. *“I am baptised”* does the same: it declares that eternal life is already ours now, for the sake of Christ.

What a precious treasure this is, and this treasure grows only more precious in the face of death. It is important that we drive this point home because we may not think too much of baptism when death draws near. This happens in part because, especially if we were baptised as a baby, then our baptism lies in time at the far end from our dying. But it happens even more so because the devil and our Old Adam wishes to deny this comfort.

You see, when death is near, it looks like the final end, that the mouth of the grave will swallow us up. But our Saviour tells us differently. He says, *“I’ve died, and death could not hold Me. I’ve conquered death of body and soul. In holy baptism, I have shared that victory with you. Your soul has already been raised up to eternal life; and now, My beloved child, your body is about to be raised up again. Death remains your enemy, but I keep it under My feet; and until I destroy this last enemy once for all, I use it to transform your battered, afflicted body like unto My glorious body. You have been living eternally by faith since the moment I baptised you; now you are about to start living eternally by sight in My glory, too.”*

We do not pretend to believe that this removes the haunting spectre of death or the terror that it will whisper. But even as we do not mourn as those who have no hope, neither do we die as those who have no hope.

Dear baptised people of God, rejoice! Christ has died, and Christ is risen. We were dead; now, in baptism, we are alive. We have eternal life even now, because through baptism we have been forgiven all our sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Lord God, heavenly Father, we praise You that You have revealed Your will and wisdom in the life of Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. We praise You that You have given us the gift of Your Holy Spirit in our baptism, and that in baptism You have acknowledged us as Your dear children. We praise You that in the baptism of Your Son in the Jordan You marked Him out as the Messiah, who would be our true representative, to fulfil all righteousness, and, as our Substitute, to give Himself in sacrifice for our sin and death. We praise You that, as Jesus saw the heavens opened when He was baptised, You have assured us of eternal life, where we shall see Your heaven opened to us.

Through Your Holy Spirit renew the mind of Christ in us, and let it grow in us. As Jesus began His public ministry for us at His baptism, we thank You for the privilege of regarding our baptism as our commissioning to serve You. Make us ready to give ourselves sacrificially for others, as Jesus has done, in ways that glorify You.

In mercy care for the spiritual welfare of all our baptised children. Give us grace as parents to show Your will and way to those who have yet to learn all that Christ has commanded us, by faithful worship, love for Your Word, and the desire to walk in the ways of Christ at all times. Free us all from being like this world. Transform us inwardly, that all our thoughts, words, and deeds may reflect Your perfect will.

Bless those who are one in confession with us in the fellowship of Your Church. Pour out Your blessing and strength on our pastor, that he may preach and teach Your Word with warmth and energy, and let the light of Your Gospel shine to people in darkness. Bless the witness of us all to the power of Jesus Christ to save sinners. Fill us with increasing zeal for the salvation of people who do not yet know Him as their Saviour, and for the extension of His kingdom. Send Your Holy Spirit to all Your people, to overcome weakness in Your Church, to remove all indifference, to cast out all fear of human beings, to reject the love of the world, and to banish all lukewarmness.

Grant that we may find strength in Your almighty power and daily care. Show Your mercy and goodness to the sick, the lonely, the bereaved, and the suffering. Teach them to cast their cares on You. Show them that You are not dealing with them in wrath, but in love, for Jesus' sake.

Help, heal, uphold, and strengthen us all, and in all things enable us to rejoice in Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom we adore, with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

Isaiah 43:1-7

¹ Now, however, this is what the LORD has said, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: "Do not be afraid! For I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are Mine. ² When you go through the waters, I shall be with you. When you go through rivers, they will not flood over you. When you walk through fire, you will not be scorched, and the flames will not

burn you. ³ For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I have given Egypt as a ransom for you, Sudan and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴ Since you have been precious in My sight, you have been honoured and I Myself have loved you. Therefore I shall give other human beings in exchange for you, and nations in exchange for your life. ⁵ Do not be afraid! For I am with you. I shall bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west. ⁶ I shall tell the north, 'Give them up!' and the south, 'Do not keep

them back!’ Bring My sons from far away and My daughters from the ends of the earth! ⁷ Bring everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed and made!”

Romans 6:1-11

¹ Therefore what shall we say? “Shall we go on sinning so that God may be more gracious to us?” ² Certainly not! How shall we, who died to sin, live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life. ⁵ If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with Him, that our sinful bodies might be rendered powerless, in order that we might not be slaves to sin any longer. ⁷ For the one who has died has been declared free from sin. ⁸ If we died

with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ because we know that, since Christ was raised from the dead, He will not die again. Death no longer has any mastery over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives He lives to God. ¹¹ So you too, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!

Luke 3:15-22

¹⁵ The people were expecting something and were all wondering in their hearts whether John might perhaps be the Christ. ¹⁶ John answered them all: “I am baptising you with water. However, the One who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie His sandal-strap. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷ He has His winnowing fork in His hand to clean up His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff with fire that cannot be put out.”

¹⁸ So with many other words John kept exhorting the people and telling them the Good News.

¹⁹ However, when John rebuked

Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done,²⁰ Herod added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

²¹ When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was also baptised. While He was praying, heaven was opened,²² and the Holy Spirit came down on Him in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, which said, "You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You."