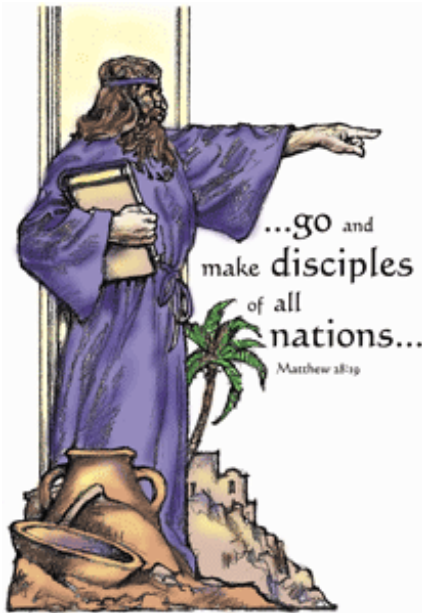


Baptism

A Divine Washing



“So what’s the big deal? I don’t understand why Grandma is so upset about this. She keeps telling me it is a baptism and not a christening. What’s the difference? A church rite is a church rite. Besides, he’s our baby, and Grandma should quit pressuring us to have him baptized so quickly. I’d rather plan for a weekend when the whole family can get together for dinner.”

Sound familiar? Is Baptism more than a simple church rite? Is it a divine washing? Yes! In Baptism, God works a creation miracle at the font. The apostle Paul explains what this miracle means to us when he writes: “It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come: (2 Corinthians 1:21, 22). Baptism is clearly an important part of God’s plan for the church. Jesus showed that as well when he commanded the church, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

What makes Baptism a divine washing? The water is not special. How we apply the water is not an important issue either. The word baptize simply means to use water in any of a variety of ways. The practice of washing with water was an integral part of Old Testament ceremonial worship life. Jesus took that rather well-known custom and gave it a special place in the New Testament church. He told the church to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

What makes Baptism a divine washing and what gives Baptism its power is the connection of water and the Word—the name of the one saving God. As the Catechism teaches us, “God’s Name is everything God has revealed to us about himself in his word” (Small Catechism, David Kuske, page 59). It’s no wonder Luther says, “For God Himself here puts his honor, might, and power on the line...this Word contains and transmits all of God’s fullness” (Large Catechism, Janzow translation, page 100). God places his name upon us in Baptism and welcomes us into a family, the family of God himself.

One final reminder: Because Baptism is a divine washing, any Christian can baptize. The power is in God’s Word, not in the officiant. Normally, for the sake of good order and to prevent confusion or jealousy in the congregation, believers entrust this responsibility to pastors. However, in an emergency any Christian can use water and the word of God and can be an instrument of God’s amazing grace to save.