



## Sermon

25<sup>th</sup> February 2024

### Baptism – Its Significance

Ezekiel 36:22-28 ; Romans 6:1-5 ; Matthew 28:16-20

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Baptism. It is a powerful symbol – it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. It happens to our bodies and can be seen and represents something that happens inside and spiritually. What does it mean?

Out on the cattle ranches of the American West the unbranded calves that roam wild are known as "mavericks." They are claimed by the man who is first to get his brand on them at the annual round up. A little Western girl had been baptized one Sunday by the minister of the town. Her schoolmates questioned her the next day as to the meaning of the ceremony. "Well," she said, "I will just tell you. I was a little maverick out on the prairie and that man put the Jesus mark on my forehead so that when He sees me He will know that I am one of His children."

That's not a bad understanding – Lucas will declare that he belongs to Jesus and I will sign him with the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Years ago I was talking to a missionary who served in Nepal where it was illegal to encourage people to change their religion. He said that the authorities didn't mind a local going to church but if they got baptised they would arrest and imprison them. They recognised there is something real happening at baptism which matters. There is a change of spiritual loyalty.

The first thing about baptism is that Jesus sent out his followers to make disciples and baptise them. It is a command and so it is an act of obedience to get baptised.

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and earth is given to me – therefore go!" "Go and make disciples, baptise them and teach them." We, today, as their followers, can be confident that he is with us every day to the very end. We do this under his total authority and with his constant presence.

Baptism simply means immersion. This baptism is into the single name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is not in the name meaning "with the authority." It is into the name. So he says, "Immerse them into the name of God who is the Trinity. When we are immersed in water, the water surrounds us. Baptism helps us see that we are surrounded by God. When we are also filled with the Spirit it means we are immersed in the name of God and filled with the presence of God.

Christian baptism is not into any one denomination, it is into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We recognise the baptism of any other Trinitarian Christian denomination.

As we read on in the New Testament, we find there are two meanings put on baptism.

What does it look like? It's like having a bath isn't it? And we have a bath to get .... clean.

Indeed the Bible speaks of baptism as washing. When Ananias met Saul after he had met Jesus on the road, he said to him, "be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16 )

That seems fairly obvious. It is the way the Jews used ritual washings and how John the Baptist used it – as a sign of washing and repentance. A sign that you have changed your mind about how you are going to live and you are washing off the old way and starting fresh.

But there is another meaning that Paul and Peter both give to baptism. They describe it as dying to self with Christ on the cross and rising again to new life with him.

That is what Paul is writing about in our passage from Romans 6. When the person goes down under the water, it is a picture of dying. If I hold Lucas down too long he would die! It is like burying a body. But then I will raise him up from the water again. This signifies our resurrection with Jesus.

I hope you have all read the Narnia books by C.S. Lewis. In *The Voyage of the Dawntrader* there is boy called Eustace who is arrogant, whiny, and self-centred.

The children found themselves on a ship, "The Dawntrader". When they came to an unexplored island, Eustace wandered off by himself. He discovered a great store of gold – a dragon's hoard and found himself transformed into a dragon by "greedy, dragonish thoughts" in his heart. He was stuck in that form which caused a problem especially when it came time to leave the island, as the ship could not hold a dragon.

Then, Eustace met Aslan (who represents Jesus in the story). Aslan returned him to human form by peeling off his dragon skin and sending him into a refreshing bath.

Eustace's transformation into a dragon showed on the outside what has already happened to him spiritually: he was hideous, buried in layers of rough nastiness. Before Eustace could be tossed into the pool (i.e. baptized), he had to peel off his outer shell of meanness and selfishness – he had to repent. But he couldn't do it alone. Whenever he tried to peel off his outer shell himself, he only got a thin layer, leaving lots more behind. Finally, Aslan had to do it for him and it was a painful process. The bad, old character of the dragon died and the boy came forth rid of his old nasty ways.

Do you see the parallel to baptism? We can't avoid sin or become pure by our own efforts - Jesus has to step in and change us. Baptism is a picture of the old man – the flesh – dying and our being given new life (being born again) in Christ.

As the Passion Translation renders Romans 6:4-5:

Sharing in his death by our baptism means that we were co-buried and entombed with him, so that when the Father's glory raised Christ from the dead, we were also raised with him.

We have been co-resurrected with him so that we could be empowered to walk in the freshness of new life. For since we are permanently grafted into him to experience a death like his, then we are permanently grafted into him to experience a resurrection like his and the new life that it imparts. (Romans 6:4-5 TPT)

What a wonderful assurance. Thanks be to God that Lucas is being baptised today. Thanks be to God for what it means in terms of commitment to Jesus and the new life that came when he accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour.

May we all walk in the confidence of our baptism leaving the flesh in the grave and living in the life of Christ into which we have been born anew.