

What's in the Water?

VBS Sunday (18 July 2010)
Acts 2:38-39

Dearly beloved, what's in the water? The title of this year's VBS sounds like a sound bite from the evening news. Eight days ago five Chicago beaches were closed because of dangerous E. coli levels in the water. Florida beaches are occasionally closed because sharks are sighted in the water. Down in the Gulf of Mexico there is a lot of crude oil in the water. While there are lots of things in the water of our lakes and oceans, you as parents should know that we did not expose your children to E. coli, sharks, or crude oil this past week.

So the question remains: What's in the water?

What's in the water that Christ commands His Church to **“go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (Mt 28:19)?

What's in the water that Christ uses this **“washing of water with the word”** (Eph 5: 26) to sanctify for Himself a holy bride—the Church?

What's in the water that Christ uses this **“washing of regeneration”** (Titus 3:5) to shape for Himself **“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession”** (1 Pet 2:9)?

Just what's in the water of Holy Baptism that you and I value it so highly?

This past week the VBS participants set out to answer that question by studying five Bible stories, learning two hymns, and memorizing a Bible passage. This morning I will remind the children, and teach you in the process, that there are an abundance of great and precious things in the water of Holy Baptism.

First, there is *forgiveness* in the water of Holy Baptism. Boys and girls, you learned this in the first part of your memory verse. **“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”** On Monday evening you learned why we need this forgiveness. After God created our world and everything in it and pronounced it all very good, our first parents—

Adam and Eve—disobeyed God, ate the forbidden fruit, and therein brought sin and death into the world. Since the fall, sin is part and parcel of our human nature. It's passed on from father to children at conception. And it is evidenced in our lives in sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

But thankfully, sin does not have the last word. God does. Already there in the Garden of Eden, God promised a Savior. And sure enough, the angel Gabriel later announced this Savior's coming with these words: **“You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”** (Mt 1:21). This baby Jesus grew up and fulfilled His name wonderfully. He took our sins upon Himself, suffered and died what we deserve, and then rose again victoriously. The forgiveness He won on the cross He now distributes in the water of Holy Baptism. **“Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins”** (Acts 22:16).

Second, there is *Spirit*—the Holy Spirit—in the water of Holy Baptism. Boys and girls, you learned this in the second part of your memory verse. **“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** On Thursday evening you learned how the Holy Spirit—in the form of a dove—descended upon Jesus at His baptism in the Jordan River. The same thing happened to you in your baptism. In that water connected with God's Word, the Spirit came to you and fashioned your body into His holy temple.

You might be wondering: How in the world can water do such great things? How can it forgive sins? How can it give the Holy Spirit? Certainly it's not just the water, but the Word of God in and with the water that does these things, along with the faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. Which is to say: God's word and promise is what gives Baptism its power. The story of Naaman you heard earlier demonstrates this beautifully.

So, what's in the water? So far we've discovered two blessings. The forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. And we're just getting started.

Third, there is *sonship* in the water of Holy Baptism. The Apostle Paul writes: **“In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith”** (Gal 3:26). When God the Father looks at you—the baptized—He sees you as He sees His own dear Son. For Christ is the Head and you are the body. In Holy Baptism Christ is joined to you and you to Him. And that makes you children of the heavenly Father.

Fourth, there is *righteousness* in the water of Holy Baptism. The Apostle Paul continues: **“In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”** (Gal 3:26-27). To put on Christ is to be clothed with Christ’s perfect righteousness. You learned on Thursday evening how Jesus underwent baptism **“to fulfill all righteousness”** (Mt 3:15). He put Himself into the water to take on the filthy rags of our own seeming righteousnesses and to put on us the perfect robe of His righteousness that covers all our sin.

Fifth, there is *salvation* in the water of Holy Baptism. God saved Noah and his family in the water of the flood. You learned on Tuesday evening how God saved baby Moses by placing him in the safety of a little floating ark in the water of a river. God later saved the Children of Israel by leading them through the water of the Red Sea. Jesus says: **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”** (Mk 16:16). Paul writes: **“He saved us ... by the washing of regeneration”** (Titus 3:5). Peter adds: **“Baptism ... now saves you”** (1 Pet 3:21).

Sixth, there is *life*—newness of life, rebirth—in the water of Holy Baptism. Jesus says: **“Unless one is born again [of water and the Spirit], he cannot see the kingdom of God”** (Jn 3:3, 6). Saint Paul writes: **“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”** (Rom 6:4). Friends, you’ve been born again in Holy Baptism. You’ve been given a new life to live in that water. It is the life of Christ. The life that dies daily to sin and rises daily in the resurrected life of Christ to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

So, what’s in the water? Forgiveness. Spirit. Sonship. Righteousness. Salvation. Life. Believe it or not, we’re still just getting started. For there are plenty of other blessings in the water of Holy Baptism. But when it comes down to it, there is one chief blessing in the water of Holy Baptism that makes these and all the other blessings possible. **CHRIST!**

As mentioned earlier...

- ✓ you are baptized into Christ;
- ✓ you are given the forgiveness Christ won for you;
- ✓ you are given the Spirit of Christ;
- ✓ you become a son of God, like Christ;
- ✓ you are clothed with Christ’s righteousness;

- ✓ you are saved by Christ; and
- ✓ you receive newness of life in Christ.

It all has to do with Christ because He is the One who was conceived, born, lived, suffered, died, rose again, and ascended to the Father's right hand for you.

So, what's in the water? **CHRIST!** Jesus is in the water. Your Savior is in the water. The King of kings and Lord of lords is in the water. He locates Himself there in the water for you!

That's why you and I value Holy Baptism so much. Christ and all of His good gifts are given to you in that washing of water with the Word.

So celebrate your baptism regularly and splash around in its blessings daily. Boys and girls, you learned on Friday evening that, just as God sent His servant Joshua to lead His people of old through the water of the Jordan to their promise land flowing with milk and honey, so God has now sent His Son—the new and better Joshua: Jesus Christ—to lead you through the water of Holy Baptism to the land He has promised you, a heavenly land where the river of life flows from the throne of the same Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who baptized you into His name and into His kingdom!

All of that is yours because Christ is in the water of Holy Baptism for you. Thanks be to God!!

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 minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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