

Born of Water and the Spirit

John 3:1-21

Introduction

In this week's Lenten Sunday service, we took a look at the Treasure of the New Birth. In **verse 5** of **John 3**, Jesus tells us about the mechanics of it. The new birth comes about when one is born of the water and the Spirit. This is Holy Baptism. Today, we unpack Baptism.

The History of Baptism

Baptism isn't something that is new with Christians. The Jews had developed a rite of Baptism for proselytes, Gentile converts to Judaism. It was a rite that was to cleanse the person as they entered the covenant community.

John's Baptism

John the Baptist took that rite and expanded upon it to make it apply to all people. Gentiles aren't the only ones who have sin in their lives. Jews do as well. John recognized that all are sinners. To fulfill his mission of *making the way straight* (**Matthew 3:3**) for the Messiah, he administered this baptism for the remission of sins to everyone.

Christian Baptism – Trinitarian

(Read **Acts 19:1-5**). John's baptism pointed the way to Jesus Christ. But Jesus instituted another Baptism, a Trinitarian Baptism. Just before He ascended to heaven, He said, "*Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (**Matthew 28:19**). Notice the formula, there is one name but three Persons. When the Ephesians in **Acts 19** were baptized in the name of Jesus, that was shorthand for being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is the Baptism which is the new birth in "*water and the Spirit*" (**John 3:5**). Baptism is the entrance into the kingdom of God and His church. To get a full understanding of Baptism, we turn to the **Catechism**.

A Catechetical Understanding

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

Which is that Word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "*Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (**Matthew 28:19**).

What benefits does Baptism give?

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are these words and promises?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).*

How can water do such great things?

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word the water is just plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in **Titus, chapter three**:

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying (Titus 3:5-8).

What does such Baptism with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St Paul writes in **Romans chapter six**: *We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:4).*

In short, Baptism is the beginning of a new life, a life in Christ of daily dying to sin and living for Him. It is our entrance into the kingdom of God and His invisible church. All this is accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God as it is added to the water. *Soli Dei Gloria!* Glory to God alone!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*