
LIVING OUR BAPTISM

Sermon Series Overview: Lent 2017

6 Weeks: March 5 - April 14

*Don't you know that all of us
who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
We were therefore buried with him through baptism 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 6:3-4

Introduction

It was Martin Luther's daily practice to wake up and remind himself of his baptism. Luther would place a hand on his head where the water was poured and say, "I am a baptized person, and today I will live out my baptism." Luther clung to his baptism as a sign and assurance of God's grace and of his identity as a forgiven child of God. For Luther, baptism was not just a single moment in the past but an ongoing reality that shaped his life.

John Calvin held a similar life-shaping view of baptism. Calvin wrote in his pastoral teaching book, *The Institutes*: "We are baptized into the mortification of our flesh, which begins with our baptism and which we pursue day by day and which will, moreover be accomplished when we pass from this life to the Lord."

For many followers of Christ today, baptism is something that happened to them once in the past, especially for those baptized as infants, and it doesn't really form and shape their daily lives now. But the daily practice of Luther and the theology of Calvin invite us to see our baptism as something we live into each day - as we work and play, as we pray and sing, as we learn and grow.

As we enter into Lent this year, we are exploring the meaning of baptism in order to help us wrestle with our understanding of the sacrament and what it means for us today.

The rich understanding and practice of baptism in the Reformed tradition offers us a wealth of imagery and vocabulary to help us deepen and expand our understanding of the sacrament. At the heart of the Reformed understanding of baptism is our understanding of God as a promise-keeping, covenant-making, people-calling God. While many other Christian traditions stress the actions of the *individual* in baptism, the Reformed tradition looks to *God's* action of calling, claiming, forgiving, and saving.

The sermon series is built on the scripture passages mentioned in the baptism liturgy we use here at Community CRC (the liturgy is included at the end of this overview). The scripture passages

used in the liturgy draw our attention on the biblical teaching of baptism, covenant, saving faith, and the life-long call of discipleship.

In addition to the baptism liturgy and the scripture passages mentioned, you may find the following resource links helpful as you prepare to plan and lead worship during this series. The resources listed below were used to create this sermon series:

- [Belgic Confession](#), Articles 33-34
- [Heidelberg Catechism](#) LD 25-27
- [“Remembering Baptism: Living Wet,”](#) Calvin Institute for Christian Worship
- [“Take Me to the Water: Ideas for keeping baptism front and centre,”](#) *Reformed Worship*, Issue 62, December 2001.
- For extra points and to have your mind blown and faith affirmed, read [N.T. Wright’s lecture on baptism](#) in *Reformed Worship*, Issue 90, December 2008.

Season of Lent

Why focus on baptism in Lent? Isn’t Lent supposed to be all about the suffering and death of Jesus in preparation for Easter? Are we missing the point? Well, actually not. Baptism and Lent have a long history together. Turns out preparation for baptism is actually the reason Lent became a thing.

In the early church (think 4-5th centuries), Easter was the big day to get baptized for new converts. The new converts had to be taught about their faith and what baptism means, so the church used the 40 days before Easter to lead a big pre-baptism catechism class. Which means that the earliest form of what we now know as Lent revolved around study and Scripture, prayer and teaching on baptism and what it means for our everyday lives. For this sermon series, we follow this ancient practice of focusing our attention on the meaning of baptism for how we live our lives each day.

Themes

If this sermon series were to have a jingle or a subtitle it would be: **“Remember who you are.**

Remember whose you are.” Teaching about baptism isn’t just about making sure we have the right theological understanding of a particular doctrine or that we can defend infant baptism (though those things help!). Teaching about baptism is about reminding us of who we truly are in Jesus Christ and the kind of life we’re called to live because of that identity.

The three themes below centre around the idea that we do not belong to ourselves alone, but, through baptism, we belong to God and to each other, and that belonging changes the way we live our lives.

- **Community and Belonging.** Our understanding of baptism only makes sense in the context of covenant and community, so a major theme of this series is belonging to God’s people. We will be talking of and thinking about and making sense of our faith in terms of “us” and not just “me.”
 - Choosing songs and hymns that emphasize the communal nature of faith will reinforce this theme.
- **Vocation and Identity.** Who we are shapes how we live. As 21st century middle-class Canadians who live in English-speaking Ontario, we live in a specific way. All these identity markers shape our lives - how we live, how we speak, what we eat, what we buy, what sports

team we cheer for. If baptism reminds us and assures us that our primary identity is as a child of God through Jesus Christ, then we have to ask ourselves, “How do I live as a child of God?” How does my identity shape my life - how I live, how I speak, what I eat, what I buy, etc.? Throughout this series, we will be coming back to the idea that being marked by baptism sets us apart not as obedient church-goers but as called and sent followers of Christ given a mission and a purpose in God’s kingdom.

- While it may not seem immediately self-evident, songs and hymns that highlight the church’s mission in the world will be at home in this series. As will songs about dedicating our lives to God’s will and purpose.
- **Water.** While this may make you say “Duh!”, the theme of water in this sermon series can open lots of doors for choosing songs and avoiding the constraints of having to choose only baptism-focused songs. So songs like “Oceans” and “Lighthouse” play with the metaphor and imagery of water without being explicitly baptismal. (Both songs would be great in this series, by the way.)
 - Also, as you lead us in worship, feel free to introduce the song and draw our attention to the water imagery - highlight a line or image in the song itself, read a verse that connects to the water image or focus of the song. As worship leaders, feel free to prepare us as we enter into singing to deepen our engagement with the song!

Worship Practices

During this series, we will be adding a few liturgical elements, as well as keeping a few pieces consistent week to week.

- **Placement of the baptismal font.** The baptismal font will be front and centre during this series to highlight the series’ theme. The font may move back and forth from its current place on the stage to the floor in front of the pulpit.
 - **Note: If you’re placing your team across the stage, please give the font sufficient space. The ministers will be leading the Confession/Assurance from the font. And children’s messages or blessings may also happen around the font.**
- **Guide for Grateful Living.** Because the series focuses on how we live out our baptism, we are adding a piece to the Confession/Assurance. After the Assurance of Pardon, the minister will ask “As God’s baptized and forgiven people, how then do we live?”, and there will be a short reading from scripture that emphasizes how we live as Christians. *But this will also require other voices and leaders!* The Guide for Grateful Living will change week to week and will be designed and scripted for a variety of voices - worship teams, children, congregation, etc. *Make sure to look at your service in PCO ahead of rehearsal to check out the script for this part of the service.*
- **Learning LUYH 846 “Baptized in Christ”.** As a bridge between the Guide for Grateful Living and the Children’s Blessing, we will be learning LUYH 846 as a congregation and the song will also be shared with Children’s Worship for the children to be learning it together. “Baptized in Christ” is a simple and child-friendly song. And we’ll keep it short by singing select verses each week. We will try this song out for the first 3 weeks. If it doesn’t click, we’ll revisit this idea.

Along with the above worship practices, we will also be playing with **consistent liturgical elements**, mainly the Call to Worship and Confession/Assurance.

For the first three weeks of the series (Mar. 5, 12, 19), the **Call to Worship** will be the same each week:

All who thirst, come to the water.

Come, all who are weary.

Come, all who yearn for forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ is with us,
and our gracious and holy God claims us as his own.

Drink deeply from the well of living water.

The God who claims us in baptism, greets us with these words...*(Greeting + Mutual greeting)*

And the **Confession/Assurance** will also remain the same each week during that time:

Call to Confession: Water cleanses, purifies, refreshes, and sustains. *(Minister pours water into the font.)* Jesus Christ is the living water. Through baptism, Christ calls us to a new obedience: to love and trust God completely, to forsake the evil of the world, and to live a new and holy life. Yet when we fall into sin, we do not despair of God's mercy, or continue in sin, for baptism is the sign and seal of God's eternal covenant of grace with us.

Trusting the promises of our God in our baptism, let us ask God for his forgiveness, confessing our sins together:

Prayer of Confession: **God of grace, in the wrong we have done and in the good we have not done, we have sinned without knowing it, we have sinned willfully, and we have sinned in weakness. We are sorry. We repent and turn to you. Forgive us and renew our lives through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness: Hear the good news! Through the prophet Ezekiel, God speaks a word of grace to us:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. You will be my people. And I will be your God" (Ezekiel 36:25-26, 28b).

People of God, know and trust that in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven and you are loved.

Thanks be to God!

[*Guide to Grateful Living:* As God's baptized and forgiven people, how then do we live?....]

Special Services

March 5: Profession of Faith

March 12: Lord's Supper (no Sunday School)

March 26: Baptism

April 2: Profession of Faith

April 14: Good Friday (Lord's Supper)

Sermon Series Overview (March 5-April 14)

First Sunday of Lent | March 5 | The Covenant with Abraham

Text: Genesis 17

Theme: God calls and marks a people to be his own.

Preacher: Pastor Amanda

Worship Team: Rick

Special: Profession of Faith

Summary: In this passage, God gives Abraham a new name and promises him a son. God also marks Abraham and his household as his special people through the mark of circumcision.

Notes: Genesis 17 is the last of three passages in which God affirms and reaffirms his promise and covenant with Abram/Abraham. In Genesis 12, God promises Abram that he will be the father of many nations. In Genesis 15, God “cuts a covenant” with Abram. In Genesis 17, the covenant of chapter 15 is reaffirmed by the ritual of circumcision. This is also the passage where God renames Abram (“exalted father”) Abraham (“father of many”).

The covenant of circumcision is very important in the Old Testament because it marks God’s people as distinct from other peoples in the world. This is such a big deal for Israel that it becomes a major conflict in the early church—do Christian converts need to be circumcised? At the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), it was decided that the mark of circumcision ought to be left behind, and baptism became the “distinguishing mark” of God’s people.

John Chrysostom, a preacher in the 5th century, emphasizes this in one of his sermons on this passage: “Our circumcision—I mean the grace of baptism—involves a painless medicine and is the means of countless good things for us, filling us with the grace of the spirit. It has no limited span as circumcision did, but rather in early years, in middle age, and in the very height of old age can a person receive this circumcision—not the work of human hands—which involves not simply endurance but laying aside sin’s burden and finding pardon for the faults of all time.”

What is particularly important in this passage is God’s work of calling and marking a people, which is exactly what he does to us in baptism. In baptism, God marks us as his own. We are not our own, but belong to our faithful saviour, Jesus Christ.

Special: We have at least two Professions of Faith slated for this Sunday. We will probably do this as a response to the word (at the end of the service) rather than as part of the Confession & Assurance.

Second Sunday of Lent | March 12 | The Red Sea

Text: Exodus 13:17-14:31

Theme: God leads his people through stormy waters.

Preacher: Pastor John

Worship Team: Christina

Special: Lord's Supper

Summary: In the face of death, God leads his people through the stormy waters that block their path to the Promised Land.

Notes: In the Old Testament, water carries a lot of cultural meaning. The Hebrew word for water is *Yām*, which is also the Canaanite word for the god of the sea. Canaanite religion was centred on the “Baal saga.” Baal was the god of the sky/sun. And the idea was that every day, Baal travelled across the sky bringing sunlight and rain to the people on earth. At night, though, Baal was swallowed up by *Yām* (i.e. the sun set into the Mediterranean sea), and all throughout the night Baal and *Yām* fought for the future of the world. Every morning, of course, people waited and prayed, hoping that Baal had been victorious and the sun would rise again. *Yām* was not a god that people liked very much.

Yām was seen as a violent and unpredictable god (also understandable because there are no natural ports on the coast of Canaan/Israel/Palestine), and so “the sea” came to be used as a symbol for political power/political unrest/political violence (this is also why in Revelation it's such a big deal that the sea is perfectly still, like polished crystal. The sea has lost its violent power. i.e. the nations of the world submit to God's peace). Water also began to symbolically represent chaos/disorder (and so in Genesis 1:2 you have the Spirit of God hovering over the waters of the formless void).

So whenever we see God controlling water in the Bible (creation, Red Sea, Jordan River, rain and drought, walking on water, etc.), it's a big deal, because water is the most destructive, violent, unpredictable force of nature that Israel knows about.

One interesting part of this story is how God, in the pillar of fire, physically stands between his people and their enemies. This physicality is paralleled in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, where Christ physically offers himself to his people to nourish and sustain us in our faith.

Another thing that this story emphasizes is how the action of grace is all on God's end. Moses' words to Israel at the shore of the sea really sum up what we believe about baptism, too. “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” In baptism, we don't dedicate our children to God and we don't dedicate ourselves to God. We simply accept the free gift of grace that God offers to us.

Special: Lord's Supper. There is no Sunday School, so we will have to be intentional about being friendly and accessible for children and watch the length of our service.

I will make my covenant with you last forever. It will be between me and you and your family
after you for all time to come. I will be your God. And I will be the God
of all your family after you. —Genesis 17:7.

Third Sunday of Lent | March 19 | The New Covenant

Text: Jeremiah 31:21-37

Theme: God restores and renews his people with a new covenant of grace.

Preacher: Pastor Carel

Worship Team: Sarah/Kristen

Summary: In this passage, God announces the promise of a new covenant, which will transform his people and equip them to live faithfully in his presence.

Notes: Already in the earliest days of the church, Christians recognized the unique importance of this Old Testament passage. Augustine, a pastor in the 4th century, writes “Nowhere, except in this passage of the prophet, do we find in the Old Testament Scriptures any mention so made of the New Testament as to indicate it by its name.”

In this passage, God, through Jeremiah, is talking about how he will restore his people after their captivity. The first part of the passage is about how God will break the hereditary power of sin. This parallels Paul’s teaching in Romans 5 about how death came through the first Adam (because of his sin), but the coming of the second Adam brings life (because of his power and his Spirit). In the future, God promises, children will not pay for the crimes of their parents, but everyone will be responsible for their own sin.

In the second part of the passage, God promises even more. He promises to “put my law on their minds and write it on their hearts.” The ways of holy living won’t even have to be taught, God says. People will *know* how to live holy lives because it will be a part of who they are. All people will know God, “from the least of them to the greatest,” and God will forgive all their sins.

There are so many awesome parallels to baptism here. First, baptism is the mark of the new covenant that Jeremiah prophesies. Second, in baptism we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us and inspires us, giving us faith and knowledge of God and his law. Third, in baptism, we are washed with the blood of Christ, through which God forgives our sins.

The passage ends with God promising to restore Jerusalem. As surely as day is bright and night is dark, God ensures that his people will be protected. The early church recognized that when the prophets speak about Jerusalem, they, without knowing it, are talking about the church of Jesus Christ. And this is the New Jerusalem which we join through the mark of baptism, in which we live all our lives.

“Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today.
... The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” —Exodus 14:13-14

Fourth Sunday of Lent | March 26 | The Blood of the Covenant

Text: Matthew 26:26-30

Theme: Jesus marks and sustains his people with his own self.

Preacher: Pastor John

Worship Team: Adom/Aly

Special: Baptism

Summary: In the sacraments, Christ's own presence in body and blood brings salvation from sin and death.

Notes: It's always been interesting to me that this passage is quoted in our form on baptism, since it is so obviously a passage about the Lord's Supper and not so obviously a passage about baptism. But there is a lot of wisdom in holding these two things together, because the sacraments are united in some very special ways. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper bring us the presence of Christ through ordinary things. Both point us to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Both assure us of God's promise and sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

In many ways, it's important that we hold the sacraments together in our minds, because the Lord's Supper is one of the primary ways that we "remember our baptism." Baptism is our washing, when our sins are washed away and we are marked with the love of God through the Holy Spirit. This only happens once. The Lord's Supper is our nourishment, when we are filled and sustained with Jesus Christ himself. This happens over and over again. The Lord's Supper is the "habit" that forms us once our baptism is completed.

I think this passage also offers us another teaching that is important for us, and countercultural in a lot of ways. We often look for God in the spectacular, the extraordinary, these awesome moments of divine intervention. But in the New Testament, God promises to be with us in the ordinary. So often, we're keeping our eyes peeled for the fantastic fire and water of the Red Sea, and our eyes pass over the very ordinary water and the wine of the sacraments. We're looking for the next Billy Graham, the next great prophet, the next Willow Creek; and we miss the everyday faithfulness of God in the actions of our neighbours, our family, and our friends.

The sacraments invite us to experience God's presence in the ordinary. In these ceremonies, God infuses our mundane, everyday world with his awesome divine presence. Simple, everyday practices—washing and eating—become symbols and reminders of God's awesome grace in our lives. Cool stuff.

Special: We will likely have a few baptisms on this Sunday. We'll have to think about how to weave that into the service so that we don't break the patterns we've been developing throughout the series.

**"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord.
"I will put my law on their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they
will be my people."
—Jeremiah 31:33**

Fifth Sunday of Lent | April 2 | The Promise to Your Children

Text: Acts 2:14-41

Theme: God extends the promises of the covenant to believers and their children.

Preacher: Pastor Amanda

Worship Team: Rick

Special: Profession of Faith

Summary: The coming of the Holy Spirit prompts Peter to preach the death and resurrection of Jesus and call those who hear to be baptized.

Notes: Peter's Pentecost sermon is the first sermon about the death and resurrection of Christ in the history of the world. At 9:00 in the morning (the "third hour" in ancient timekeeping), Peter stands up, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and preaches the death and resurrection of Christ. He weaves his way in and out of the Old Testament, showing how the prophets, and King David, and the Psalms all point to Jesus. All this in 429 words! (our sermons average about 1500-2500!)

The early church was fascinated by the symbolism of the "third hour." The Holy Spirit comes at the "third hour," and Jesus was crucified at the "third hour" (Mark 15:25). The number three is the number of divinity (trinitarian!) and so the early church thought it was tremendously appropriate that the major acts of the Son and the Spirit both occurred at the "third hour." That's a little rabbit trail, but I liked it...

Peter's point is simple: The Spirit of God has been poured out on all flesh, just as Joel prophesied, marking the beginning of the last days. The events of recent history, which Peter and others have witnessed firsthand, make clear that Jesus is the Messiah of God, and he alone has power over sin and death.

When people hear this message, they are "cut to the heart" and ask the apostles, "what do we do?" And Peter says the words which we recite in every baptism service: "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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Peter's rootedness in the Old Testament and his inclusion of children in the promises of baptism teach us very clearly that the promise that God makes is rooted in his covenant with his people. Even as the borders of "God's people" are radically expanded in the New Testament, the fact remains that God calls a people (more than individuals), and that God works through covenant. In Baptism, we are marked as recipients of God's covenant promises. In Profession of Faith, we confess our trust in God's promises.

Special: We already have at least two Professions of Faith this Sunday.

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." —Matthew 26:27-28

Sixth Sunday of Lent | April 9 | A Trustworthy Saying

Text: II Timothy 2:1-13

Theme: God remains faithful to his covenant.

Preacher: Pastor Carel

Worship Team: Christina

Summary: Paul appeals to Timothy to stand strong in his faith, recognizing that it is not by his own strength that he stands, but by the grace and faithfulness of God in Christ.

Notes: Paul's letters to Timothy are not so easy to read. They are weird hodgepodge of gospel preaching, advice from a mentor to a mentee, proverb-like wise sayings, and old Greek cultural references which we don't really get anymore. But at the heart of these letters we see a beautiful mentoring relationship between an old missionary and a young pastor.

In this passage, Paul encourages Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." He goes on to appeal to his own experience as a "soldier for Christ" who is now "being chained like a criminal." Paul's point, though, is that the gospel doesn't depend on our own efforts, but on Jesus Christ, who is not chained, but rules over heaven and earth. The knowledge that Jesus Christ is in control motivates Paul to do whatever it takes to preach the gospel, even if it means suffering, even if it means losing his life.

Paul roots this, at the end, in one of his famous "trustworthy sayings," which we use in our baptismal form:

If we died with him,
we will also live with him;
if we endure,
we will also reign with him.

And this is the great mystery and good news of the Christian faith. Christ reigns by nature, because he is the Son of God, but by his grace, we reign with him, we are raised with him, we are glorified with him, and we endure with him. This is the truth that is proclaimed over us in baptism. We are no longer marked by our sinful nature—that is no longer our distinguishing characteristic. Instead, we are marked by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of righteousness! What Christ has accomplished, he shares with us, freely!

“Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” —Acts 2:38-39

Good Friday | April 14 | Dying and Rising with Christ

Text: Romans 6:1-14

Theme: In baptism, we die with Christ, and are raised with him to new life.

Preacher: Pastor John

Worship Team: Special

Special: Lord's Supper

Summary: In our baptism, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection in such a way that we die to sin and are raised to life with God.

Notes: This is one of the coolest passages about baptism in the Bible. Paul here uses very powerful language to talk about baptism as a reenactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our own lives. In the new life we have received through Christ, we are born to a new life of righteousness and holiness. We no longer live for sin, instead, we live for God!

We've been talking already in this series about how the sacraments unite us to Christ, and here Paul makes that very clear once again. In our baptism, we are sacramentally united with Christ in a death like his, and because of that we are also assured of our hope that we will one day share in a resurrection like his. In baptism, we have been crucified with Christ, and have died to sin. Even though we do not participate fully in his resurrection yet, already in this life we experience a foretaste of the resurrection joy which we will one day enjoy fully.

I call baptism a reenactment of Christ's death and resurrection, but this doesn't really capture the meaning, and could be misleading. We don't believe that Christ is re-crucified and re-resurrected every time we celebrate the sacraments. Christ's death and resurrection were once-for-all events. But in the sacraments, we are invited to make Christ's story our story as well. We are invited, every time we come to the table, to die to sin and to live for God. We are invited to give up our selves to crucifixion and death, and to live into the new self that God created us to be. Every time we come to the table, we are invited to renew our baptismal vows, and offer our lives to the God who offers himself to us.

Special: Every Good Friday we celebrate the Lord's Supper. We will have the congregation proceed to the front of the church and receive the sacrament by intinction.

Here is a trustworthy saying: "If we died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him." —II Timothy 2:11-12

Appendix: Form for Baptism

Call to Confession

Before we proceed with the sacrament of baptism, let us hear what the law of God requires of us, that it may convince us of our sins and motivate us to seek his mercy. In the gospels, our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us this summary of the law: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." (*Matt. 22:37-40*)

Knowing that we have failed to live in accordance with God's will for our lives, let us confess our sins before God in prayer.

Prayer of Confession

Father in Heaven, we pray that you will never destroy us in our sins as in the flood, but save us as you saved believing Noah and his family and spare us as you spared the Israelites who walked safely through the sea. We pray that Christ, who went down into the Jordan and came up to receive the Spirit, who sank deep into death and was raised up the Lord of life, will always keep us and our little ones in the grip of his hand. We pray, O holy Father, that your Spirit will separate us from sin and openly mark us with a faith that can stand the light of day and endure the dark of night. Prepare us now, O Lord, to respond with glad hope to your promises so that we, and all entrusted to our care, may drink deeply from the well of living water. We pray in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Promises of God

Let us hear the promises of God which are confirmed in baptism.

The Lord made this great promise to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." (*Gen. 17:7*)

In later years, though Israel was unfaithful, God renewed his promise through the prophet Jeremiah: "'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ... For I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more.'" (*Jer. 31:33-34*)

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptisms 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 6:3-4

In the fullness of time God came in Jesus, the Messiah, to give pardon and peace through the blood of the cross, "the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt. 26:28)

After Jesus had risen from the dead, the apostles proclaimed: "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 Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children and for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39)

The apostle Paul was looking forward to the fulfillment of these promises when he wrote, "If we died with Christ, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him." (II Tim. 2:11-12)

These are the unfailing promises of the Lord to all who are baptized.

The Institution

People of God, after Jesus had risen victorious from the grave, he told his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt. 28:18-20)

In obedience to this command the church baptizes believers and their children.

Teaching on Baptism

Water cleanses, purifies, refreshes, and sustains. Jesus Christ is the living water. Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience: to love and trust God completely, to forsake the evil of the world, and to live a new and holy life. Yet, when we fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, for baptism is the sign and seal of God's eternal covenant of grace with us.

From the beginning, God graciously has included our children in his covenant. All God's promises are true for them as much as they are for us. It is our responsibility, then, to teach them that they have been set apart by baptism as God's own children so that as they grow older they may respond to him with faithfulness and love.

The Vows

[*Parents*], since you are presenting [*child*] for holy baptism, you are asked to answer the following questions before God and his people:

First, do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, accept the promises of God, and affirm the truth of the Christian faith which is proclaimed in the Bible and confessed in this church of Christ?

Second, do you believe that your children, though sinful by nature, are received by God in Christ as members of his covenant and therefore ought to be baptized?

Third, do you promise, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community, to do all in your power to instruct Gavin in the Christian faith and to lead them by your example into the life of Christian discipleship?

[*Parents*], what is your answer?

We do, God helping us.

And do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive these children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?

We do, God helping us.

The Baptism

Our Lord said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." (Mk. 10:14)

[*Child*], I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Baptismal Prayer

Lord our God, forever faithful to your promises, we thank you for assuring us again that you will forgive us and receive us as children in Christ. Grant wisdom and love to [*parents*] and to us all as we carry out the vows we have just made, we pray that you will govern [*child*] by your Spirit and guide them throughout their lives. Help them to see your fatherly goodness which surrounds us all and enable them to respond in faith to Jesus Christ, our chief teacher, eternal king, and only high priest. Give them strength to fight sin and endure trials. And when Christ returns, let them celebrate with all the people of God your greatness and goodness forever in the joy of the new creation. Amen.

Welcome

Children of God, let us welcome our new brother/sister(s) in Christ:

Joyfully we receive you into the body of Christ! May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever. Amen.