

The Best Robe

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by H.C. Nitz

“Baptism, the monument of the era of grace,” is the designation of the sacrament of Baptism by one who does not hold that baptism is a means of grace in the sense in which a Lutheran speaks of it. Yet he begins his treatment of Baptism with these remarkable words: “Baptism is closely connected with the work for which the Son of God came into the world and which He accomplished by His death and resurrection. It is God’s appointed monument marking and distinguishing in striking way the era of the New Covenant, under which the sins of His people are forgiven. It is a ‘figure’ (1 Pet. 3:21) of that which saves believing sinners from the righteous judgment of God and the wrath to come.

“Baptism, therefore, is divinely associated with that which is most vital and most holy in all the revealed dealing of God with man. The depths of God’s mercy, the riches of His grace, the infinitude of His power, the unspeakable treasures of His love and wisdom and the mountains of His unmovable righteousness—all the attributes of God Himself that are engaged and revealed in the mighty work of Salvation—are shown, by the light of the New Testament Scriptures, to be closely associated with the solemn and expressive rite of baptism.

“The act of baptism is itself an act of great simplicity. It is thus in keeping with all that pertains to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3). It is merely the immersion or momentary *burial* in water of one whose sins have been forgiven thru faith in the Christ of God, who died and rose again. But simple as is the rite itself, it would require volumes to unfold in detail the great and marvelous truths expressed by it. When we realize something of the vital importance of the truths with which baptism is associated in the Scriptures, we do not wonder that the enemy of truth, ‘the spirit of error,’ should have sought to produce confusion and uncertainty in regard to it, to cloud its meaning, and to cause it to be neglected by those who hear the responsibility of teaching the people of God. But there is cause for the deepest anxiety in the fact that, thru conflicting teaching, the subject of baptism has come to be treated, by many believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as *of little or no consequence*.” (Philip Mauro, *BAPTISM AND THE NEW COVENANT*, n.d., Scripture Truth Depot, Boston.)

What Mauro deplors is just what is happening in those Reformed circles in which baptism is a mere figure or symbol. One of their spokesmen writes: “Denying that the Lord’s Supper and Baptism have any real relevance with respect to the body of Christ, we interpret these institutions symbolically. But insofar as the body of Christ is concerned, they have tended to become *symbolic of precisely nothing*.” (Glen W. Barker, Prof. of NT at Gordon Divinity School, Beverly Farms, Mass., in *THE WORD FOR THIS CENTURY*, p. 120.)

There are indications that among us, too, baptism is considered “as of little or no consequence,” and that we are in danger of its becoming in our thinking “symbolic of precisely nothing.” For some it is merely a “christening,” a name-giving ceremony. Delayed baptism of children seems to become more frequent. Reference to the meaning of baptism is alarmingly absent from our devotional literature and from our sermons. Herman J. Gockel’s splendid evangelistic book on *THE CROSS AND THE COMMON MAN* does not make a single reference to baptism or the Lord’s Supper. When did you last hear it mentioned in a Lutheran radio sermon, while, on the contrary, radio evangelists of the Reformed sects go out of their way to

belittle the saving power of the sacraments, bracketing them with the man-made rite of confirmation.

And speaking of confirmation, it deserves being down-graded. It is a purely ecclesiastical ceremony, a product and relic of Pietism, not observed during the first two centuries of the Lutheran Church, yet celebrated today with much to-do and pageantry, while baptism is so much relegated to a private affair in the home or in the parsonage that in some congregations the baptismal font is largely a piece of furniture of about as much sentimental meaning as the open Bible on the “altar” of a Masonic lodge. It would be a wholesome thing to perform all baptisms, if at all possible, in the presence of the congregation. An incidental result would be a better acquaintance with our treasure of baptismal hymns.

One of the most neglected books in the Lutheran Church is Luther’s Large Catechism. In this precious volume he says, “It is of the greatest importance that we esteem Baptism excellent, glorious, and exalted, for which we contend and fight chiefly, because the world is now so full of sects clamoring that Baptism is an external thing, and that external things are of no benefit. But let it be ever so much an external thing, here stands God’s Word and command which institute, establish, and confirm Baptism. But what God institutes and commands cannot be a vain, but must be a most precious thing, tho in appearance it were of less value than a straw.” (Trigl. 733)

“But,” says Luther further on, “*it requires skill to believe this*, for the treasure is not wanting, but this is wanting, that men apprehend it and hold it firmly.” (Trigl. 748:3)

“Therefore,” Luther continues, “every Christian has enough in Baptism to *learn and to practice all his life*; for he has always enough to do to believe firmly what it promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, the grace of God, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with His gifts. In short, it is so transcendent that if timid nature could realize it, it might well doubt whether it could be true. For consider, if there were somewhere a physician who understood the art of saving men from dying, or, even tho they died, of restoring them speedily to life, so that they would hereafter live forever, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain, so that because of the throng of the rich no one could find access! But here in Baptism there is brought free to every one’s door such a treasure and medicine as utterly destroys death and preserves all men alive.” (Trigl. 743)

“For this reason,” says Luther in the last paragraph of his treatise on baptism in the Large Catechism, “let every one esteem his baptism *a daily dress* in which he is to walk constantly, that he may ever be found in the *faith* and its fruits, that he *suppress the old man* and *grow up in the new*.” (Trigl. 753)

Taking our cue from Luther, who speaks of Baptism as the Christian’s “daily dress” of faith and its fruits, let us consider Baptism as

THE BEST ROBE.

And may we find it

- 1) a source of solace and
- 2) a stimulus to sanctification.

I. A Source of Solace

Several years ago, a lay member of the Missionary Board of the Synodical Conference had a stroke on his way to breakfast. When he was taken back to his hotel room, one of the pastors on the board hastened to his bedside and assured the panic-stricken man, who soon

lapsed into a coma, “Fear not. You are a child of God. You are baptized. You have the forgiveness of sin. All is well.”

It is said of Luther that when he became despondent—as he often did—he would write on his desk with chalk: *BAPTIZATUS SUM*.

Jesus tells us of a “beatnik” of His day who, unshaven, unshorn, unshod, in rags, smelling of the pig-sty, in which he had been staying, staggered homeward and was met by his father, who embraced him, re-instated him and ordered “the best robe” to be put on him.

That is not only a full-length portrait of all prodigal sons and daughters of Adam, but also a glorious revelation of the loving Father in heaven who is eager to clothe all his rebellious and run-away children with the “best robe.” The apostle Paul writes “unto the *church of God* which is at Corinth, to them that are *sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called to be *saints*”:

Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived (misled): neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality, nor cheats—swindlers and thieves; nor greedy-grasper, nor drunkards, nor foul-mouthed revilers and slanderers, nor extortioners and robbers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God. And *such some of you were (once)*. But you are *washed clean* (purified by a complete atonement for sin and made free from the guilt of sin); and you were consecrated (set apart, hallowed); and you were justified (pronounced righteous, by trust) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the (Holy) Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11, *The Amplified NT*.)

Washed, sanctified, justified: a triple blessing bestowed by the Triune God! Each of the three terms describes a *change of status*. The washing, for instance, removes the filth and replaces it with cleanness. There seems to be an autobiographical overtone in these words. Surely when Paul reminded the Corinthians of what some of them had been, he was not doing it in a spirit of self-righteous pride. He could not well say, “Such were some of us.” And yet, the “chief of sinners” was just as guilty as the former denizens of Skid Row in Corinth. He may not have had blood on his hands, but he had murder in his heart, which is just as damnable before God. Yet to this hate-filled Saul the Lord sent a special messenger to tell him: “Arise, and *be baptized*, and *wash away thy sins*, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16)

A little *detour* would not be amiss here. Calvinistic or Reformed theology refuses to accept baptism as a means of grace. Interpreters who are on most other points orthodox resort to ridiculous reasoning at times to support their contention that the sacraments are nothing more than signs and ceremonies. Rationalistic prejudice blinds them so completely that they cannot correctly understand even such a plain statement as: “Baptism doth now also save us.” (1 Pet. 3:21) They seem to think they have said everything when they remark: “Of course, the apostle was not a *sacramentarian*!” Such darts are patently aimed at Lutherans and Romanists. And here we have a fine example of the vicious and malicious art of using *loaded words* in name-calling. What a world of difference between the papistic “*opus operatum*” view of the sacraments, and Luther’s sober, sane, Scriptural explanation. Yet in the eyes of the Reformed, Luther and the Pope are “sacramentarians.” We do not, of course, relish being smeared with the same stick as is used for Rome. So let’s be careful in our use of adjectives when speaking of those who differ

from us and have even separated themselves from us. Separatistic, legalistic, Romanistic, high church, Calvinistic, unionistic—to mention only half a dozen—are handy terms that may be justified, but they are always loaded and should therefore be used only with great caution and precise aim, and always in an atmosphere charged with 1 Cor. 13. It may be fun for a sarcastic and cynical intellectual to use eight-cylinder slurs. But whom does he convert or edify?

After this little detour with its unedifying scenery let us return to consider baptism, OUR baptism, as a source of solace. In the Small Catechism, Luther asks, “What does baptism give or profit?” And he replies, “It *works* forgiveness of sins, *delivers* from death and the devil, and *gives* eternal salvation to all who believe, as the words and promises of God declare.” What a breath-taking stupendous, inexhaustible statement! But is it true? Or is your Calvinistic radio preacher justified in warning us not to stake our salvation on baptism, but on “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” or some other experience which he prescribes?

Now, according to Schmid’s *TAMEION* (Edition of 1717) there are in the New Testament 107 references to the verb “*baptizo*” and its cognates: *baptisma*, *baptismo*, and *bapto*. And if we add the numerous references to washing, cleansing, burial into the death of Christ, resurrection with Christ, sprinkling, regeneration, adoption, we begin to realize the outstanding emphasis the Holy Spirit puts on the manner in which the Triune God imparts to the sinner the merits of the saving word of Jesus Christ.

Let us examine a few of these references. In Gal. 3:27, Paul says: “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on Christ*.” He is God’s “best robe.” The *Amplified New Testament* puts it thus: “For as many (of you) as were baptized into Christ—into a spiritual union and communion with Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah—have put on (clothed yourselves with) Christ.” Kenneth Wuest, in his expanded translation, says tersely: “As many as were introduced into union with Christ, put on Christ.” Note his paraphrase of the word “baptized.” It has some merit. In Eph. 4: 5 he translates “one baptism” with “one placing into (the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit)”. Commenting on this verse, Luther says in his brief commentary on Galatians:

He (Paul) declares that they are children of God thru faith in Christ. Baptism (he says) effects that you put on Christ. But to put on Christ is to *put on the righteousness, truth, and all grace and the fulfillment of the whole law*. Therefore you have thru Christ the blessing and the inheritance of Abraham, if, then, you have put on Christ, Christ is the Son of God, and you, *by this very robe*, are children of God. This is the same manner of speech that the apostle uses in Rom. 13:14, when he says: ‘Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,’ and Ep. 4:24, ‘Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (St. L., VII, 1505f)

This short sentence in Galatians 3:27 alone would suffice to reveal to us the content, meaning, and glory of our baptism. Confidently we may base our hope on this declaration and in the face of death exult:

Christ’s holy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, *my glorious dress*;
Arrayed in these, I’ll surely stand,
On Judgment Day, at God’s right hand.

This passage is one of the clearest and most comforting descriptions of baptism as “the best robe” or the “daily dress,” as Luther calls it. It reminds us of the prophetic provision the Lord made to cover the guilt of man after the fall, when “the LORD God (did) make coats of skins, and clothed them.” (Gen. 3:21) We are also reminded of chapter seven of the Revelation, where the “great multitude” of white-robed saints with palms in their hands are described as “these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:14)

It is a pity that great preachers like A. T. Robertson and Harold J. Ockenga, whose expository sermons are a delight to read, have a blind spot with regard to the Scriptural meaning of baptism.

And the same applies to some commentators. B. B. Sutcliffe, in his useful little book, “Galatians, God’s Answer to Legalism,” fails to make any comment at all on Gal. 3:27. Even J. B. Lightfoot in his work on Galatians only remarks on this verse that it can hardly refer to the white garments worn by catechumens about to be baptized. Matthew Henry has a good deal to say on this verse, but misses the point quite completely.

Lehman Strauss, author, and brilliant preacher of Highland Park Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan, only remarks on Gal. 3:27, “When these Galatians believed, they were baptized into Christ.” (P. 52) And on the “one baptism” in Eph. 4:5 he is equally vague and brief. (P. 172) Both quotations are from his otherwise worthwhile *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians*.

But how satisfying and edifying it is to read what our own Prof. Joh. P. Koehler says on this passage:

“*To be baptized into Christ* is another expression which we can understand only if we know what baptism is. It is a means of grace, like the word of the Gospel. Baptism therefore has all the gifts of salvation and gives them to us thru the external action in connection with the Word. In baptism, as in the Word, the Holy Ghost operates; and by offering us all the gifts of grace, he generates faith, even as the Word does, too. Therefore Paul calls baptism the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). The outward act expresses also in a symbolic way what is taking place here. In Romans Paul uses two expressions which explain it. ‘We are buried with Christ by baptism into death’ (Rom. 6:4). Baptism puts us into such a relation with Christ that what has happened to Him, namely death, happens in a certain sense also to us.

“In the very next verse, v. 5, Paul employs another figure. We are “planted into Christ,” we are engrafted into Him. The figure is to express the intimate relations existing between Christ and the believers. And this time Paul applies it not only to death, but also to life. What the Lord did, he surely did not do for Himself. Then the entire matter would be meaningless. It was done for us, everything belongs to us. These two figures—to be baptized into Christ’s death, to be planted into Christ, into His life—Paul joins together in our text and says, to be *baptized into Christ*. His death is our death that His life may be our life. The same thought Paul then expresses with the further figure of putting on a garment. We have put on Christ in such a way that God no longer sees us

as we are by nature, but He sees the figure, the face, of His Son and declares us His Children.” (Paul’s Ep. to the Gal., Tr. by E. E. Sauer, p. 101).

Now let us look at another faith-strengthening statement: Rom. 6:3-11. In the Amplified New Testament it reads:

Are you ignorant of the fact that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus (Kenneth Wuest: ‘placed in Jesus Christ.’) were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by the baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious (power) of the Father, so we too might habitually, live and behave in the newness of life. For if we have become one with Him by sharing a death like His, we shall also be (one with him in sharing) His resurrection (by a new life lived for God). We know that our old (unrenewed) self was nailed to the cross with Him in order that (our) body, (which is the instrument) of sin, might be made ineffective and inactive for evil, that we might no longer be the slaves of sin. For when a man dies he is freed—acquitted, absolved—from (the guilt of) sin (among men). Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. Because we know that Christ, the Anointed One, being once raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has power over Him. For by the death He died He died to sin (ending His relation to it) once for all, and the life that he lives He is living to God—in unbroken fellowship with Him. Even so consider yourselves also dead to sin and your relation to it broken, but (that you are) alive to God, living in unbroken fellowship with him—in Christ Jesus.

This passage, too, is a complete explanation of the statement of our Catechism in answer to the question, “What does Baptism give or profit?”

Now let us examine a few passages in which our Confessions speak of Baptism. The Apology of the AC says:

A Sacrament is a ceremony or work in which *God presents* to us that which the promise annexed to the ceremony offers; as, Baptism is a work, not which we offer to God, but in which *God baptizes us*, i.e., a minister in the place of God; and God here *offers* and *presents* the remission of sins, etc., according to the promise, Mark 16:16, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. (Trigl. 389:18)

And again the Apology says:

For these rites have God’s *command* and the *promise of grace*, which is peculiar to the New Testament. For when we are baptized, when we eat the Lord’s body, when we are absolved, our hearts must be *firmly assured* that God truly forgives for Christ’s sake. And God, at the same time, by

the Word *and by the rite*, moves hearts to believe and conceive faith, just as Paul says, Rom. 10:17, Faith cometh by hearing. But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our heart, so *the rite itself* strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word *and of the rite* is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a VISIBLE WORD, because the rite is received by the eye, as is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same. (Trigl. 309:5)

In our hymnal, too, we find numerous references to the blessings of baptism, not only in the six baptismal hymns—which, alas, remain unsung altogether too much!—but also in other connections. For instance:

Be of good cheer, for God's own Son
Forgives all sins which thou hast done,
And justified by Jesus' blood,
Thy Baptism grants the highest good. (245:4)

Hear us, dear Father, when we pray
For needed help from day to day
That as Thy children we may live,
Whom Thou in Baptism didst *receive*. (288:3)

And when they leave their childhood home,
When Satan comes alluring,
May their *baptismal grace* become
A refuge reassuring!
Best he who then can say:
“*God's covenant stands for aye.*”
He ne'er can be undone
Who trusts in God alone—
God is his mighty Father! (337:4)

We are God's house of living stones,
Buildd for his habitation;
He thru *baptismal grace us owns*
Heirs of his wondrous salvation. (467:3)

Once in the blest baptismal waters
I put on Christ and made Him mine;
Now numbered with God's sons and daughters,
I share His peace and love divine.
My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
Thy peace may bless my dying day. (598)

Here in baptismal water pure

We find *for sin a gracious cure*;
Our children here to Thee we bring
To be *Thine heirs*, O heavenly King. (634:5 Dedication)

It is astounding how frequently Luther refers to baptism in his sermons, lectures, and letters. In the St. Louis edition of his works there are sixteen columns of his references to baptism, according to the index volume. The first reference, in his commentary on Genesis, states: “Thru baptism we are brought again to a hope of life, for only that is a true life which we live in God.” (I:240) The last two references state: “It is not the person of the pastor who baptizes, but Christ, the Son of God himself does the baptizing,” (XXII:550) “The baptizer is only an agent in God’s stead thru whom the Lord in heaven with his own hands immerses you into the water and promises you the forgiveness of sins.”

Now, if “the robe of righteousness” (Is 61:10) which the Triune God presents us in baptism is of such overwhelming value and importance, why are we not reminded of it more in sermons, in private counseling, in our devotional literature? Why do we not make it THE thing in our confirmation instructions, and especially in the confirmation rite? It is significant that in the exhaustive index to the works of Luther just mentioned there is *but one lone reference to confirmation*. It is a rather casual remark in a letter Luther wrote to Nic. Hausmann in Zwickau, March 14, 1524, and says, “You know yourself that confirmation is nothing else than the laying on of hands and prayer.” No doubt the late Ewald Plass, in his monumental anthology, “*What Luther Says*,” cites many words of Luther on baptism, but I doubt that he has even one on confirmation.

Dr. Walther says in his “*Pastorale*” (p. 266): “The pastor must carefully avoid treating confirmation as a rite which complements and completes the baptism administered in unconscious infancy, as if, for instance, the confirmand now makes the confession and vow spoken by the sponsors his own. Rather should the rite of confirmation above all serve to remind the confirmands as well as the whole congregation impressively of *the glory of the baptism* already administered in infancy. Giving confirmation a sacramental character is one of the rather frequent aberrations found just in those circles that want to be considered strictly Lutheran.”

The text of the sermon our pastor preached on our confirmation day, the memorial verse he gave us as he gave us his individual blessing, the vow we solemnly made jointly with our classmates—all this may make our confirmation day one of the most memorable in our life. But of vastly greater importance is the day on which we were born again into the kingdom of grace by Water and the Word. Ought we not, as Luther puts it, “crawl back to our Baptism” every day?

II. A Stimulus to Sanctification

Sanctification is, of course, just as much the work and gift of God as is justification. “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and *sanctification* and redemption.” (1 Cor. 1:30) The Holy Spirit enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps us in the true faith.

But we may also speak of sanctification as a *life-long process* in which the regenerate sinner so to speak cooperates with God with the strength which God supplies. It is this phase of sanctification of which Paul says to the Thessalonians:

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us *how ye ought to walk and to please God*, so ye would *abound more and more....* For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in *sanctification and honor....* For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto *holiness.*”

(1 Thess. 4:1.3.4.7)

“*Noblesse oblige*,” says a French proverb. Persons who are noble ought to act nobly. To his people of old the Lord said, *Sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be ye holy; for I am the LORD your God.*” (Lev. 20:7) And the Lord Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: “Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Mt. 5:48) Which word is a fiat, a command as well as an enabling promise.

A certain queen-mother reportedly reminded the young crown prince again and again. “Remember, George, you are a king.” A similar motive underlies the words of Paul when he begins the hortatory part of his Epistle to the Romans by saying:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies *a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed *by the renewing of your mind*, that ye may prove (Wuest: put to the test) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12: 1f)

Would the re-instated prodigal son, arrayed in the best robe, return to the far country as a swine-herd wearing his gorgeous garment? Does not a cleansed leper, rejoicing in restored health, avoid re-infection, or does he continue to associate with men afflicted with Hansen’s disease? Does a sweet little child, dressed by her mother in the finest frills and furbelows, head for the nearest mud puddle?

Likewise those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb pray with Frances Ridley Havergal:

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord to Thee.

The “church of the firstborn” rather sings: “Unto him that loved us and *washed us from our sins* in his own blood, and hath made us *kings and priests* unto God and his Father, to him be *glory and dominion* for ever and ever. Amen.” What greater glory can they give him than to love him with all their soul, heart, mind, strength, and to dedicate their lives to him in every phase and let him have dominion over their thoughts, words, and deeds.

Immediately after the great word on baptism in Romans 6, Paul goes on:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God as those that are

alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” (Rom. 6:12-14)

And Peter says:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world thru the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and *the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.* (2 Pet. 2:20-22)

Our venerable Prof. Joh. P. Meyer wrote recently: “We have our Baptism. Most of us were baptized as little children. Do we make *daily use* of it for our *comfort* and for *strength*?” (Northwestern Lutheran, 27 March, 1960, p. 101)

Our Catechism asks fourthly: “What does this baptizing with water signify?” And it answers: “It signifies that the old Adam in us is to be drowned *daily* by *contrition* and *repentance*, and is to die with all sins and evil lusts; and that a new man should daily come forth and arise who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Expanding this thought, Luther in his Large Catechism says:

Lastly, we must also know what Baptism signifies, and why God has ordained just such external sign and ceremony for the Sacrament by which we are first received into the Christian Church. But the act or ceremony is this, that we are sunk under the water, which passes over us, and afterwards are drawn out again. These two parts, to be sunk under the water and drawn out again, signify *the power and operation of Baptism*, which is nothing else than putting to death the old Adam, and after that the resurrection of the new man, both of which *must take place in us all our lives*, so that a truly Christian life is nothing else than *a daily baptism*, once begun and ever to be continued. For *this must be practiced without ceasing*, that we ever keep purging away whatever is of the old Adam, and that which belongs to the new man come forth. But what is the old man? It is that which is born in us from Adam, angry, hateful, envious, unchaste, stingy, lazy, haughty, yea, unbelieving, infected with all vices, and having by nature nothing good in it. Now, when we are come into the kingdom of Christ, these things *must daily decrease*, that the longer we live we become more gentle, more patient, more meek, and every withdraw more and more from unbelief, avarice, hatred, envy, haughtiness. (Trigl. 749) Repentance therefore is nothing else than a *return and approach to Baptism*, that we *repeat and practice* (*treibt, excreatur*) what we began before, but abandoned. (Trigl. 751)

“For this reason,” says Luther in the last paragraph on baptism in his Large Catechism, “let every one esteem his Baptism a DAILY DRESS in which he is to walk constantly, that he may ever be found in the *faith and its fruits*, that he suppress the old man and grow up in the new. For if we would be Christians, we must practice and work whereby we are Christians. But if any one fall away from it, let him again come into it. For just as Christ, the Mercy-seat, does not recede from us or forbid us to come to Him again, even though we sin, so all His treasure and gifts also remain. If, therefore, we have once in Baptism obtained forgiveness of sin, it will remain every day, as long as we live, that is, as long as we carry the old man about our neck.” (Trigl. 753)

Charles P. Krauth in his great book, “The conservative Reformation and Its Theology,” pp. 583f, sums up his treatment of baptism thus, assembling the statements on Baptism as found in the Lutheran confessions:

“The whole doctrine of our Church, then, on the question, ‘What is Baptism and what are its blessings?’ may be summed up in these words: ‘By Christian Baptism our Church understands not MERE WATER (SC), but the whole divine institution (LC), resting on the command of the Savior (Mt. 28:19) (C), in which He comprehends, and in which He offers the promise (Mk. 15:15. SC), and which is, therefore, ordinarily necessary to salvation (AC); in which institution, water, whether by immersion (LC), sprinkling or pouring (LC), applied by a minister of the Gospel (AC), in the names of the Trinity (SC), to adults or infants (AC), is not merely the sign of our profession, and of our actual recognition as Christians, but is rather a sign and testimony of the will of God toward us (AC), offering us His grace (AC), and not *ex opere operato* (AC), but in those only who rightly use it, i.e., who believe from the heart the promises which are offered and shown (AC), is one of the instruments by which the Holy Ghost is given (AC), who excites and confirms faith, whereby we are justified before God (AC), so that they who thus receive or use it, are in God’s favor (AC), and are released from condemnation and eternal death (AC SC), so long as they are in a state of faith, and bring forth holy words (AC SC); while, on the other hand, where there is no faith, a bare and fruitless sign, so far as blessing is concerned, alone remains (LC), and they who do not use their Baptism aright, and are acting against conscience, and letting sin reign in them, and thus lose the Holy Spirit, are in condemnation, from which they cannot escape, except by true conversion (AC), a renewal of the understanding, will, and heart. (LC)

“This is the doctrine of our Church, and not one letter of it is destitute of the sure warrant of God’s Word. The intelligent examiners will soon discover that, while the whole sum and tendency of the Romish and Romanizing doctrine of the Sacraments is to make them a substitute for faith in the justification of man, the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, in consonance with the Holy Scriptures, makes them a guard and bulwark of the great central truth, that ‘by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, —it is the gift of God.’ Her view of the nature and efficacy of the

Word and Sacraments, is the only one which solves the mysterious question how God can be sovereign and yet man be accountable; and how the Church can at once avoid the perilous extreme of Pelagianism on the one hand and the unconditional Election and Reprobation on the other.”

In a paper read to a conference of parochial school teachers in San Francisco in 1958, Dr. Don Deffner calls the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Baptism “*a well-spring of spiritual life* which needs to be tapped by the spiritually weary professional church worker.” But his remarks are equally valid for the man in the pew. He says: “Perhaps no other means of grace is neglected as much as Holy Baptism. We read—or at least *hear* the Word of God. We go to Holy Communion—occasionally. But what do we do about our baptism? Do we take to heart the words of the Great Reformer when he came across a depressed parishioner and boomed out to him: ‘What’s the matter, man, don’t you realize you’ve been baptized?’” (*American Lutheran*, Nov. 1959, p. 7)

With Thomas Hansen Kingo (1634-1703), the great Danish hymnist, let us confess:

He that believes and is baptized
Shall see the Lord’s salvation,
Baptized into the death of Christ,
He is a new creation.
Thru Christ’s redemption he shall stand
Among the glorious heavenly band
Of every tribe and nation.” (LH 301:1)

And with him let us pray:

With one accord, O God, we pray,
Grant us thy Holy Spirit;
Look thou on our infirmity
Thru Jesus’ blood and merit.
Grant us to grow in grace each day
That by this Sacrament we may
Eternal life inherit. (LH 301:2)

And, finally, let us often “crawl back to our baptism” in the spirit of Johann Jacob Rambach (1693-1735) and humbly but confidently pray:

Baptized into thy name most holy,
O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
I claim a place, tho weak and lowly,
Among thy seed, thy chosen host.
Buried with Christ and dead to sin,
Thy Spirit now shall live within.” (LH 298:1)

AMEN

