

Title: "Baptism"

2000 years ago the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell with Christ's people. And the Holy Spirit came with power. The power of the Holy Spirit came into the apostles, in order that THEY be witnesses to Christ. *At our baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit came into us as well, that we might be witnesses of Christ to the world. Amen.*

Today we celebrated the baptism of Hunter Lona, our new brother in Christ. Hallelujah! Amen In obedience to the command of God, "to believe and be baptized," he was baptized. Through faith he is a child of God. In getting baptized, God has come down to him and given His words to him. God has promised that all his sins have been forgiven and that he is saved. Independent of the depth or clarity of his understanding of faith or even his understanding of baptism, at his baptism God has come down and said "You are my child." It is a work of God and not of our own.

Yet, baptism is not only a reminder that we are children of God, but it comes with power. It is here that God has given us the same promise which he gave to the disciples two millennia ago. At our baptism God has given us the promise that the same Holy Spirit who did miracles among the disciples is at work within us. You see, baptism is more than a ceremony where we simply declare publicly our acceptance of Christ. Baptism has power, power from God power of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says in Rom 6:4

"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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."

At our baptism, in some divine manner, through God's power, we have been united with Christ.

When people think of the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God, most times they think of great miracles: the splitting of the Red Sea, laying hands on the sick and healing them, speaking in tongues, etc. As spectacular as these miracles are, I would say to you that they are just earthly miracles. There is a greater miracle of God. In fact, this greater miracle is the primary concern of God. The primary work of the Holy Spirit, the primary miracle that He does is not physical, but spiritual. The primary miracle which the Holy Spirit does is "to bring faith to non-believers." That is a miracle!!!

Why is it a miracle? Why is it one of the greatest miracles that God has done? Since the time of Adam and Eve, mankind has been sinful and imperfect. Now it's important to remember that we weren't created sinful. We read in the book of Genesis, that before the fall, at the creation of the world Mankind was without sin. We could see God. We were friends of God. Everything worked out for the good of mankind. We trusted God for everything. We put our faith in God. But then Genesis tells us of the Fall into Sin. Ever since the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin entered Mankind. Our entire race has since then inherited that sinfulness,

and has been deemed imperfect in the eyes of God. Not only that but all of mankind lost the ability to see God, that is, to see God with their physical eyes. We lost the ability to trust God. We lost our faith in God. We lost our relationship with God and a giant chasm appeared between us and God. This is the reason why we don't always do good. This is why it is so hard to follow the 10 commandments of God, perfectly. We are sinful and separated from God. Not only that but because we fell, because our relationship with God was corrupted we dragged the world down with us. The world which was created perfect became sinful and separated from God, because of what we did. Creation itself became corrupted. Things no longer worked out well for mankind. Things no longer worked out for creation as well. This is the reason why bad things happen in this world. This is why there is death in this world. We became sinful. The world became sinful. As a result, we were in a bad situation.

This, in fact, is what we confess every Sunday, during the confession of sins, at the beginning of our service. We remind ourselves about our sinfulness. We do that because only when we see ourselves as we truly are, can we see and appreciate the greatness of the gift which God has given us. To really appreciate the gift, think about what we deserve. What do YOU do when something doesn't work? What did you do when your computer stops working, when it no longer does what you want it to do? Why, you get rid of it, right? You throw it away and get a new one! A computer can become so riddled with viruses or corrupted files that you say it is not worth fixing. Just start from scratch and build a new one. This is the same situation which God faced when Adam and Eve became corrupted by sin. God, as the creator of this universe, would have been within his rights, to simply wipe the whole world clean and start over. Genesis tells us this is exactly what happened with Noah and the flood.

But God decided that total destruction was not the way. God loved us. Rather he had a better plan. He had a plan of redemption. Instead of leaving us separated from him, instead of destroying us utterly, God, the ever-patient the ever-loving the ever-powerful decided to reach out to us instead. God loved us so much that though WE could not bridge the chasm between us, God sent his son to do just that. When Jesus died on the cross, he bridged the gap between God the father and us. Once that gap was bridged, God has sent His Holy Spirit to do a miracle. He has taken people who were blind to God and let them see God. We now see God, not with physical eyes, but with eyes of faith. God has taken people who were dead and resurrected them to eternal life. God has turned his enemies, into friends. Through faith, we have a new relationship with God. We are children of God. That is the miracle I speak of! The miracle that the Holy Spirit of God, now works within us. The relationship that mankind had at creation, has now been restored to those who have faith in Christ. That is the primary work of the Holy Spirit. That is the miraculous work of God, the Holy Spirit. And at our baptism God has given us a promise to us personally that the same Holy Spirit that did miracles for the disciples, is at work within us today, that the same miracle of faith has been worked in us. For this reason baptism is a tremendous comfort; a comfort that God has given his people to use in times of trouble.

In what way is baptism a comfort? At some time or another I think that every Christian struggles with their faith. In particular, they struggle with doubt. They struggle about whether

they really believe. They struggle about whether they really trust Christ in their lives. They looked at their lives and wonder “why don’t they see more evidence of Christ in their lives?” When they looked at other Christians they thought, “How come God appears to be working so much more in their lives?” Not only did they struggle “with” doubt, but they struggle “because” they doubted. “If I really was a Christian,” “I shouldn’t be doubting?” “Right?” So they start to doubt whether or not they are a Christian. They start to wonder if they will go to heaven when they die. This is where the comfort of baptism comes in. As we recall our baptism, it becomes a concrete reminder that God adopted us as his children. Our Baptism becomes a “warranty” of God’s grace, a reminder which strengthens our faith in God’s promises when our trust weakens. At your baptism God has promised to you, that you are his child, because he has come down to claim you. We do not question our relationship with God or our salvation, for we know it was God who brought us in, who adopted us first. You are not a Christian because of what you do for God. You are saved because of what God has done for you. Baptism is a comfort because it guarantees that you are a child of God.

Another comfort which baptism brings is during times of illness and death. During a time of grief, like a funeral, our baptism becomes a comfort to those left behind. What happens is that when we know that the deceased was baptized we have a concrete proof that they were a child of God. For this reason, we KNOW we will see our loved one again. We can look forward to a glorious reunion in Heaven. As scripture says “We grieve, but we do not grieve as those without hope.” Your baptism is special to those of us who are left behind. That is the comfort of Baptism. That is the power of Baptism. This is the comfort and power which was given to Hunter today. –

I would make an offer to anyone who has not yet been baptized. God offers it now through His church. If you have no church home, I invite you to be baptized here. Simply contact an elder or call me at the church office. It is my desire that the comfort and power of Baptism be yours.

Finally, Baptism is more than just a reminder or a warranty. It comes with the power to transform. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within us. As the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, he works in us, in such a way that we become more like Christ. He empowers us in such a way that we accomplish Christ’s work on Earth. At the first Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit came into the apostles empowering them to be witnesses to Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit has come into you in order that YOU be a witness to Christ.

My brothers and sisters we are so blessed. When we come face-to-face with the reality of death, we have such a comfort in our baptism. However, the world has no such comfort. There are billions on this Earth, even now.... who are afraid of death. There are many in our community, many of who we see face to face, who in the face of death, have no defense. They have no peace when faced with the separation, the loneliness, which accompanies death. At best, they simply resign themselves to the sting of death, to the suffering and grief as a natural part of “the circle of life.” God is calling you to share the good news of Jesus Christ, with them. God has provided you with the Holy Spirit, that you might bring the good news God’s love comfort and hope, to all. You can give them a defense against the grief of death. You can

protect them against the sting of death. Make friends with someone this week, who does not know Jesus. Share with them the promises which God has given you. Do not be afraid to share. The message is not yours but God's. You are just the messenger. Jesus has said do not worry about what words you will say. The Holy Spirit will supply them to you. Start by just letting them get to know you. Then as they come to know you, they will come to know the Lord whose Holy Spirit dwells within you.