

A Congregational Journey to the Reaffirmation of Baptism

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This is a five-week course to be presented in a congregation over the five-week period proceeding the Baptism of Our Lord. The five weeks can be set consecutively or on a biweekly schedule prior to the Sunday of the Baptism of Our Lord in January.* The goal is to refresh all members understanding of baptism within the setting of the worship service. The course will culminate with a congregational Reaffirmation of Baptism on the day celebrating the Baptism of Our Lord in January.

Instructions for Use

The readings are assigned to varying parts of the service according to the emphasis of each particular baptismal vow. The area of the service in which the reading is meant to be used is in italics after the Reading number.

Each presentation is designed to be read by a lay reader,** either the assigned lay assistant for the morning, or someone chosen specially for this reading. It has been found to be more meaningful to the congregation if someone is chosen that doesn't read regularly and a different reader is selected for each installment. Discussing the presentations within a bible study setting also stimulates the congregation's contemplation of what baptism has meant in their lives.

The closing service can be used with the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* book, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, or *With One Voice*, and other settings besides the one selected may be used. However, it is important that the Affirmation Worship be used as it focuses the congregation's attention on the importance of baptism in their lives in a way that simply reading the liturgical baptismal statement from the worship book does not. It was found to be a profound experience for many of the congregation in which this was first used.

Calling them to the altar in the same manner as one would be served communion by intinction and using a shell (symbolic of baptism) to hold the oil, anoint each person on their forehead with the sign of the cross, saying "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." When this program was first written, many churches were not yet utilizing weekly communion. If the pastor feels that their congregation would not want to approach the altar twice for the reaffirmation and then again for communion, the two could be combined using assisting ministers to follow the anointing with the bread and wine.

*It was tried on a monthly basis, the first Sunday of each month beginning in September and on the biweekly basis beginning the first Sunday in December and skipping the fifth Sunday (so as to finish the final reading on the Sunday prior to the "baptism.") The biweekly structure worked better as interest was kept alive and the church in which it was tried had biweekly communion services. One of the presentations is structured to be on a Communion Sunday.

**In one of the churches, the pastor read the lessons and in the other church a lay assistant read the presentations. Having the Presentations read by a lay reader seemed to make a greater impression on the congregation than having the pastor read them.

Reading One – Faith

Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness

Good Morning!

This morning we begin a journey which will lead us to a better understanding of our baptism and how we reaffirm that baptism each Sunday within the setting of our worship service. There are five presentations in all and they will be presented every (other) week beginning today and climaxing in January when we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord! (*brief pause.*)

The gift of baptism is life, now and forever. Most of us have been baptized in the Christian faith, as infants – and others as adults. As members of this Christian faith and Lutheran heritage, we are asked to reaffirm this baptism when we are confirmed with the words, “I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.”

Think about what you have just confessed in this morning’s Confession. What is it? And, what have you just said? You reaffirmed the first vow of the baptismal service that your parents made for you when you were baptized or which you may have made as an adult – and the vow you reaffirmed when you were confirmed into adult membership in the church and took responsibility for your own faith!

Each Sunday when we repeat the Confession, we are repeating these vows when we respond, “we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.” We are rejecting sin, asking God’s forgiveness, and publicly declaring our faith by asking, “for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways.”

Luther insisted that baptism is the death of our sinful selves. He said that our baptismal vows should be renewed every day. This does not mean that we must go through a formal litany each day, but that we should live each day according to the gifts of discipleship given to us by the Holy Spirit and affirmed at our baptism and later our confirmation. We do say these vows as we worship on Sunday mornings, but we seldom think of this as a renewal of these vows, (*pause*) it is “just part of the service.!” As adults, we have a responsibility to be role models, the hymn, *Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters* (*verse 3*), illustrates the promises made by God and ourselves during baptism,

*“...To your Name be glory, honor! With our lives we worship, praise!
We, your people stand before you, water-washed and Spirit-born.
By your Grace, our lives we offer, Recreate us, God transform.”*

Entrance Hymn

This Is the Spirit’s Entry Now

ELW 448/LBW 195

or

Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters

ELW 445/WOV 697

Reading Two – Empty Promises

Offertory prayer

Having received our gifts of tithes and morning offerings, and when we prepare to celebrate Holy Communion – the Eucharist – we think about the first baptismal vow we took: “Do you renounce the devil, and all the forces that defy God?” Throughout the communion service, we are asking God to take away our sin. The liturgy of the Lord’s supper says that the “cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and all people for the **FORGIVENESS OF SIN,**” the Lord’s Prayer says, “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” and the verse from the communion canticle, “Lamb of God” says, “Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world...” As we join in communion, God through Jesus’ sacrifice of his body and blood, helps us to renew the promises made when our parents made our baptismal vows on our behalf, and we were baptized by water and the word.

All life needs water! God uses water to symbolize the promise in baptism. The water and the word of God creates new life in us. By baptism, we are cleansed of our sinful lives and, each time we take communion, we are forgiven by the ‘other life force’ – Jesus’ body and blood. We commune as a sign that we are aware of his forgiveness of our sins and, by this sign, we are renewed as we were when we reaffirmed our vows at the time of our confirmation. God gives us new life as a gift of grace and we attempt to live by Christ’s word as a response to this grace, thanking him for this gift and opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit. As the water and the word of baptism renews our lives, so also, in Holy Communion does the body and blood of Christ renew us and cleanse us from our sins.

As we gather this morning to ask his forgiveness and to receive this gift of his body and blood, think of the promise you made at confirmation, and your parents made for you years before at Baptism, “I renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God.” This morning let us take with joy and thanksgiving what Jesus Christ gave for us with his life upon the cross.

The Great Thanksgiving...

Reading Three – God the Father

Hymn of the Day:

Children of the Heavenly Father

ELW 781 / LBW 474

“Do you believe in God the Father?” By answering “I do,” we are receiving God’s forgiveness of our sins and through Baptism, our parents have received on our behalf, God’s promise to deliver us from death and the devil. In the words of the hymn we just sang, we hear some of God’s promises to us, he tends and nourishes us, we flourish in his courts, life and death never severs us from his care, and we are never forsaken! As we are baptized, God promises us everlasting salvation, and each Sunday we are given a chance to reaffirm our faith in his promises.

Baptism marks us as children of God. Because we are children of God, he will not turn his back on us, even though we often turn ours on him. When we go to communion regularly, we are reminded of his promises, and our own vows to him made when we affirmed our baptism at our confirmation. John the Baptist baptized and Jesus reaffirmed this baptism for salvation, and in the service of Holy Communion, we reaffirm his sacrifice of death and resurrection. Through Jesus’ death, we were granted the gift of life, and through baptism and reaffirmation of our faith, we receive it!

As regularly worshiping church members, we hear the promises of God each Sunday. As we were baptized by the Water and Word, God gave us the gift of salvation. And, ... as we remember our affirmation of baptism, we are made new each day by our faith.

The Apostles’ Creed...

Reading Four – The Son of God

Hymn of the Day

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

ELW 254 / LBW 30

In Advent, we prepare for the coming birth of the Christ Child. In our baptismal preparation, we also prepare for the coming of Jesus. The second profession in the Apostles' Creed that our parents made on our behalf at our Baptism answered the question, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?" Here we recite the second part of the Apostles' Creed, the third line of which reads "and born of the Virgin Mary."

As the water and the word of the baptismal service serves as God's promise of new life, we are also to spend this season preparing for new birth. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life." God has made the same promises through baptism, and in Jesus, the Word was made flesh, sent to us at Christmas.

Though most of the baptismal hymns speak of being saved by Christ's death, one is especially appropriate for this Advent season. It goes:

Dearest Jesus, we are here,
Gladly Your command obeying,
With this child we now draw near,
In response to Your own saying,
That to you it shall be given,
As a child and heir of heaven.

...You must all be born again,
Heart and life renewing truly,
Born of water and the Spirit,
And My kingdom thus inherit.

Dearest Jesus, We Are Here

ELW 443 / LBW 187

During this Advent season of renewal and rebirth, we await the birth of the Christ Child and celebrate the joy that we are baptized children of God with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Apostles' Creed

Reading Five – The Holy Spirit

Apostles' Creed

This is the fifth and final step in our journey toward the reaffirmation of our baptismal vows. Next week at worship we shall make that reaffirmation which we have been preparing for as we celebrate the baptism of Jesus!

The final question of the baptismal service in the Apostles' Creed is "Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?" As we just responded in the Apostles' Creed, we do! **And** in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. But it may be a while before most of us get to 'life everlasting,' and in the meantime, we must face daily living. By our baptism and belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in water and the word, we affirm that our sinfulness and desires should be drowned through daily repentance and that day after day, we should rise to life as God would want us to live, in righteousness and purity.

Righteousness and purity? That seems pretty impossible at the best of times, but again, that is **why** we were baptized. Daily living is **not** easy. There are trials, trouble, and pain along with the good times in daily living. However, Luther insisted that baptism is something to be renewed and experienced every day. It takes a conscious effort on our parts to remember these promises and vows, but we can and do seek God's forgiveness in our daily prayers.

Through baptism, God promised by water and the Word, to forgive our sins and renew us in daily life. Life moves from birth to death, repentance to renewal, and from baptism to the death of Christ on the Cross! Through Jesus' death we were forgiven our sins and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we were sanctified and made whole. God knows that we are not perfect, even when we try to be! But we **HAVE** been forgiven and washed in the water and the Word.

Next Sunday, we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord. As we have worked through the five vows of the baptismal service, so we will be given the opportunity to renew those vows with our Lord as his baptism is celebrated and receive the anointing and the sign of the Cross to reaffirm that we are **Indeed! ... Children of God!**

Prayers of the Day...

The Baptism of Our Lord – Sunday after Epiphany

(This service set up using Season A)

ELW – Setting 6

(Or preferred setting)

Gathering – Thanksgiving for Baptism p. 97

Gathering Song *Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling* ELW 608 / WOV 734

Greeting p. 165

Kyrie p. 165

Canticle of Praise p. 169

Prayer of the Day: (in unison)

(select from appropriate church year readings – ELW p. 22)

O God our Father, at the baptism of Jesus you proclaimed him your beloved son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized into Christ faithful to their calling to be your daughters and sons, and empower us all with your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

First Reading Isaiah 42: 1-9

Psalmody Psalm 29

Second Reading Acts 10: 34-43

Gospel Acclamation p. 171

Gospel Matthew 3: 13-17

Sermon TBA

(Topic suggestions – what it means to be a child of God, Water of Baptism, Luther and Baptism...)

Hymn of the Day *We Are Baptized in Christ Jesus* ELW 451

We Were Baptized in Christ Jesus WOV 698

Sacrament of Holy Baptism

P: In Baptism, God has brought us into his family and calls us His own. By Baptism, God gives us the gifts of Faith, Love, Life, Forgiveness, and Strength and asks us to respond in faithfulness to him and in service to others.

Answering the question, “What gifts or benefits does Baptism grant,” the Catechism responds: “It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.”

We are also told in the Catechism in answer to “How can water do such great things,” that “without the word of God the water is plain water, ...but with the word of God it is baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a “bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit,” ...This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

And in answer to “What then is the significance of such a Baptism with Water,” the Catechism says, “It signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and ... a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”ⁱ

Into this relationship with God, we now affirm ourselves and seek the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and the spirit of joy in the presence of Almighty God.

Profession of Faith
(Rubric 10 – LBW, p. 123)

p. 229

(After the Profession of Faith, the congregation is called forward for the rite of reaffirmation – Using oil and a shell symbolizing Baptism, the minister of Word and Sacrament anoints the forehead of each person with the words – “Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.”)

Prayer

P: Merciful God, we thank you for these people whom you have made your own by water and the Word in the reaffirmation of their Baptism. You have called them to yourself, enlightened them with the gifts of your Spirit, and nourished them in the community of faith. Uphold these your servants in the gifts and promises of baptism and unite the hearts of all whom you have brought to new birth. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Offering	<i>Thy Holy Wings</i>	Choir
Offertory Hymn	<i>Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ</i>	ELW 674 WOV 754

Prayers of Intercession (*may be changed as the Liturgical cycle indicates.*) (*An additional baptismal prayer may be added to the prayers as well.*)

Holy Communion		p. 172
Great Thanksgiving		
Preface		
Holy, Holy, Holy		p. 173
Words of Institution		
The Lord's Prayer		
Invitation to Communion		
Lamb of God		p. 174
<i>Baptized in Water*</i>		ELW 456
<i>Baptized and Set Free</i>		ELW 453
Blessing		
Amen		
Sending Song	<i>You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore</i>	ELW 817 WOV 784
Dismissal		
Go in Peace, remember your Baptism		
Thanks be to God		

*Those not using the ELW may find alternative hymns for this section.

ⁱ Luther's Small Catechism, p. 44.