

Name: _____

Abiding Savior Free Lutheran Church Confirmation

Baptism: Part 2

After completing the lesson, the student will be able to:

- Know the historic practice of baptizing infants
- Know the covenantal significance of circumcision and how it relates to infant baptism
- Describe what faith is, and why even an infant can have faith
- Know why baptism is still significant for you today

Now if you thought that the phrase “Baptism saves” was controversial, just imagine how saying “baptism saves infants” can be downright explosive between many church denominations. In fact, this one baptismal difference is often the subject of many theological debates, and it sets apart those in the Lutheran faith from the Baptists and others with similar beliefs.

HISTORICAL VIEWPOINT

If you were to take the time to really study the history of baptism in the church, you would discover that baptizing infants is not a new idea. In fact, the earliest references of infant baptism are found in letters that were sent from first century church leaders. At the time these letters were being sent, it appears that baptizing infants was a normal practice within the early church.

If the earliest church records offer support for the baptizing of infants, when and where did the concept of *preventing* infants from being baptized come from? That idea belongs to a guy named Tertullian, who was born in 145 AD. Tertullian understood the Bible’s teaching that baptism saves by washing away sin (like we as Lutherans do), but he argued that we shouldn’t baptize infants. Instead, baptism should be held off until a person is as close to death as possible to wash away all the sins they committed during the course of their life. (Just to be clear, we agree with Tertullian that baptism washes away sin, but we disagree about the timing of Baptism. We believe that God’s work in baptism is sufficient for all sin committed, whether the sin is committed before, during, or after the person is baptized.)

Another historical figure that offered his view on infant baptism was Justin Martyr. Justin wrote around 148 AD that he has seen many Christians around 60 and 70 years old who were made “disciples of Christ from their infancy and continued undefiled all their lives.” If we remember from our study last week that baptism both saves (I Peter 3:21) and creates disciples (Matthew 28:19), then it makes sense that the phrase “disciples of Christ from their infancy” from his quote is about infant baptism.

Other early church leaders like Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, and Augustine agreed on two points:

- Baptism is regenerative (makes us spiritually alive)
- Infants of believers were baptized

So, we have already established that infant baptism was the practice of the earliest Christians, but are there any reasons from the bible for why we should baptize infants? Let’s take a look!

CIRCUMCISION

First, we are going to look at how baptism is truly a covenant God has made with His people. Looking at the pages of the Bible, you will notice that God deals with his people through covenants or promises. For example, Abraham was promised in the book of Genesis that all nations would be blessed through him (Genesis 15, 17, 22, & 26). As long as Israel maintained their part of the covenant by following God's Law, God would continue to bless them (if you'd like to read more, check out Exodus, Leviticus & Deuteronomy). In this "old" covenant, we see that the two parties involved are God and His people.

This covenant was sealed with circumcision. Circumcision was the external sign in the old covenant of belonging to God's community. When boys turned 8 days old, they were circumcised. Anyone who was not circumcised was to be "cut off" from God's people, and excluded from the covenant and promises made between God and the Israelites. However, because of sin, God's people were not able to keep their side of the deal. They turned away, rebelled against God, and broke the covenant.

But, as a result of His love towards mankind, God entered into a different covenant. This "new" covenant was not between God and His people like the first covenant was, instead it was only between Himself and His Son Jesus Christ. In Christ, we find a new and better covenant. As it says in the book of Hebrews, this covenant "stands on better promises." The new covenant is better than the old, because it doesn't involve us. God does not say, "I will save you if you do this..." Rather, he swore, by Himself and on Himself that He would make a way of Salvation through Jesus and He would draw all people unto Himself.

So why did we just spend three paragraphs talking about covenants and circumcision in a lesson about baptism?

1. Read Colossians 2:11-13 and explain what Paul means by the phrase "the circumcision made without hands"? What means of grace is specifically mentioned?

As you read in the verse above, circumcision has been replaced by baptism. Where God had commanded Israel to circumcise infant boys as a sign of the old covenant, He now has given Christians baptism to be a sign of the new covenant. Since infants received the sign of the old covenant (circumcision), it would not make any sense to stop them from receiving the sign of the new covenant (baptism). Baptism can and should be given to the infants of believing families, as well as anyone who becomes a Christian later in life.

OUR NEED FOR BAPTISM

If you recall from the previous lesson, we talked about how baptism saves. It's through the water and His Word that God comes down to us to give His forgiveness for our sin. So, when we begin the conversation about who should be baptized, we need to ask the question, "Who needs their sin forgiven?"

2. Read the following passages that show how even infants need to be baptized.

Romans 3:23 (How many people sin? Are babies included in this?)

Romans 6:23 (What is the penalty (or “wage”) for sin? Does this verse exclude infants from this penalty?)

Psalms 51:5 (From when does this verse say we are in sin?)

Ephesians 2:1-3 (What are we “by nature”?)

CAN AN INFANT HAVE FAITH?

Throughout scripture, we see that we are saved through faith. But what is faith? And how do we get it? Let's start with a definition. You can define faith in one word: trust. In faith, we *trust* that God, through Jesus' death on the cross, will keep His promise to save us from the consequences of our sin. But is *trust* something that an infant can do? Yes, it is! From the moment they are born, we see how they rely completely (or *trust*) on their parents to love, care, and provide for them. When they cry, often the only thing that will calm them is when their mom or dad comes to comfort them, change their diaper, feed them, or snuggle with them. In fact, trust is about the only thing a baby *can* do. If they don't trust their parents, they won't get changed, fed, or cared for. They need to trust that they will be provided for.

In the same way, we trust that God will save us and forgive our sin. Trusting in Jesus isn't something that we understand with our mind or create by our own will, but it is a condition of our heart that has been changed by God. He is absolutely able to change any heart to trust in Him -- even an infant's. Now, let's look at where trust (or faith) comes from:

3. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. What does this verse teach us about where faith comes from. Is faith something that comes from us or that we earn?

4. Read John 6:44. What does this verse teach about how we come to Jesus? Do we go to Him ourselves?

5. Read Luke 18:15-17. Who did Jesus say should be brought to him? Whose kingdom belongs to infants?

As you can see, the reason we have faith in Christ is because of a gift God has given to us and because of a work He has done for us. This is not limited to adults or only those who understand with their mind, but God is able to do this work in anyone's life. He is, however, specific in *the way* He gives the gift of faith, and *the way* He works salvation in our lives. He does this through His means of grace, like baptism. If you have been baptized, God has given you the gift of faith, has adopted you into his family, and has washed your sins away!

It is good to know that there are a few Christian denominations that disagree with infant baptism. Some would say that a child must reach the "age of accountability" before God will hold them accountable for their sins. They would say that an infant can't understand their sin, and therefore can't choose to believe in Jesus. It's clear to see that these denominations think that baptism is a good work that *we* do, not a work that *God* is doing for us. Once we understand that *God* is the one working in baptism, we can have full confidence that the promises He makes are good for anyone who is baptized, regardless of their age.

BAPTISM'S SIGNIFICANCE

Baptism is a one-time event in our lives, so there is never a need to be re-baptized. For example, let's say you were baptized as an infant. Years later, when you come to understand your sinfulness and the need for your sins to be forgiven, there is no need to be re-baptized. Instead, you should look back to that day when God baptized you. Once you are baptized -- either as an infant or an adult -- it's done and it's over. As long the baptism was done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it never needs to be repeated.

Now that you have been baptized, it's good to understand that your baptism is still significant for you today because it gives you *comfort* and *confidence*. Have you ever doubted if you are really saved? Or have you ever wondered if God has really forgiven your sin... even those awful, terrible sins that you've never told anyone else about? If you have, all you need to do is remember the promises that God made to you in your baptism. Take a look! In baptism, God...

- ...made you his disciple (Matt 28:19)
- ...forgave your sin and gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:28)
- ...put Christ on you (Gal 3:26)
- ...sanctified and cleansed you (Ephesians 5:25-27)
- ...saved you, regenerated you, and renewed you with the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-6)
- ...saves you (1 Peter 3:21)

So much of our lives are spent striving to establish our own sense of identity. We make posts on Snapchat or Instagram to make ourselves look funnier, prettier, or smarter than we feel. Our parents, bosses, and teachers grade us on how well we do on our chores, assignments, or school-work. But when it comes to our relationship to God, you should not look to your work. Instead, you need to look to something outside of you - the promise God has made to you when He baptized you. Your identity is not based on how you feel about yourself, or how well you do at your chores, school work, or assignments. Instead, your identity is in your baptism, where you have been identified with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... you are God's!

6. In your own words, describe why being baptized is significant for your life today.

STUDENT & PARENT QUESTIONS: *for the student and a parent to discuss and answer together*

1. Read the list of promises God makes to us in our Baptism at the top of this page. Which promise is most encouraging to you and describe why?

STUDENT & PARENT SIGNATURE:

By signing below, we affirm (1) this lesson is complete and that (2) we completed the "Student & Parent Questions" section together

Parent Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____