



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for The Baptism of Our Lord
January 8, 2022

God's Own Child

Matthew 3:13–17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Baptism is one of the most despised and forgotten gifts that God gives to us, His children. Many who call themselves Christian doubt that Baptism means anything at all. It's just an outward show; it doesn't do anything, as far as they're concerned. The only way you're saved, they say, is if you put some effort into it. If you show and prove your piety and work at your salvation, then God will bless you.

This view is held by most of American Christianity. In many, many Christian churches today – sadly even in some Lutheran churches – Baptism is something you do to infants, or an occasional adult, but it doesn't really mean anything in your life. The baptismal fonts are stuffed in a corner somewhere, or even hidden in a closet. The idea of remembering your baptism or trusting in God's promises given there is smiled at and tolerated, but then folks go their merry way of believing that salvation is all about what they do. They live with their guilt and fear of never being good enough for God, of having to work out their own problems, and of quietly suffering without God's intervention.

Why is this the case? Why is it that even in Lutheran Churches we can so easily forget God's promises in Baptism and act as if they don't matter to us anymore?

Very simply: We don't believe that the unbaptized are missing much. But how does that jibe with our text when it says that at Jesus' Baptism – which establishes and sanctifies *your* baptism – the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven, saying: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” which is exactly what God says to you in your baptism?

Those words will mean nothing to you if you don't believe that heaven is closed to you without them. If you believe that you're basically good enough for God, if you believe that God is fairly satisfied with your meager attempts to follow His commandments, if you truly believe that you're at all able to gain heaven on your own, well, then you'll think you don't need baptism.

And you hear that message every day of your life. We live in a world and in a culture that tries to teach you that the most important thing to do is to forgive yourself. Be



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at peace with yourself. Improve yourself. Make things better for you. And when you can be happy with yourself, and forgive yourself of your own little foibles and faults, then all is right with the world. At least, that's what the world wants you to believe.

But, there's a problem with that. You *can't* forgive yourself. Forgiveness, by definition, must come from outside of you. Oh, you can lie to yourself or try to convince yourself that you can be happy and satisfied with your faults, but there's no lying to God! He sees all and knows all. There's no hiding from Him. And He demands perfection, which you cannot possibly accomplish. Dear friends, repent of your so-called self-forgiveness and "affirmation" and trying to make God's forgiveness irrelevant. Repent.

When you find yourself, finally, by the grace of God, on your knees in repentance, suddenly baptism takes on a great deal of significance. When you realize that you have rebelled against God and are in the clutches of sin, death, and the power of the devil, then God's Word to you this day is sweeter than anything else you've ever heard. For God says to you: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Make no mistake; that's God's work! Not yours or mine or anyone else's.

The only way you can be saved; they only way you can be in a right relationship with God, is because He pours His great love over you in your baptism. This is the holy bath that washes away your sins and presents you spotless, clean, and perfect before His heavenly throne. This great work – which He does for you – literally opens heaven to you. It's your key to the door of eternal life. As Peter says in his first letter: "Baptism saves you" (1 Peter 3:21).

Think of everything that comes with this great reality! Your sins are washed away. Satan is crushed under your feet. Even death itself has no power over you! You can stare into the open maw of the grave without trembling, because Christ has opened the door to paradise. Amazing!

But isn't that the nature of the God who made the universe? His nature is one of love, where He gives and gives and gives of Himself until there's no room for more. And then He gives you His very flesh and blood to eat and drink for your salvation. Who else would sacrifice so much for you? Who else cares that much for you? No one. No one but Jesus.

And He does care for you that much. That's the beauty of Holy Baptism. Look upon those waters as proof that God loves you and wants only what's best for you. And when your heart and soul doubt God's love, look to your baptism. And when Satan tempts you to abandon Christ, look to your baptism. And when death and the world have their tentacles all around you, you can say to them: "Be gone! You have no hold over me! God has purchased me with His own blood!"

There is nothing worth comparing
To this lifelong comfort sure!
Open-eyed my grave is staring:



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Even there I'll sleep secure.
Though my flesh awaits its raising,
Still my soul continues praising:
I am baptized into Christ;
I'm a child of paradise!
(LSB 594:5)

Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen