

## Topics in this series

1. *Baptism and God's Amazing Grace*
2. *Baptism and the Individual before God*
3. *Baptism and Initiation into the Church*
4. *Baptism and the Encounter with Love*
5. *Baptism and Healing*
6. *Baptism and Community*
7. *Baptism and New Life*
8. *Baptism and Social Response*
9. *Baptism and Death*

### *Also included in this folder*

*Introduction and Resource List*  
*User's Guide*



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*Living in God's amazing grace*

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 W. Higgins Road  
Chicago, Illinois 60631  
800/638-3522, ext. 2610  
[www.elca.org/ecumenical](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical)

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# Talking Points



*The Amazing Gift  
of Your Baptism*

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

## *Talking points on* **The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism**

### **Introduction and Resource List**

**“What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”**

**– I Corinthians 1:12-13**

As it was for Paul and the early church, so it is for us today. We are not baptized in the name of the Lutheran church, or the Presbyterian church, or the Methodist church. We are baptized – *all of us* – in the name of Jesus Christ. In the Nicene Creed, we say, “We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” There is one baptism, one faith, one Spirit, one Lord. Jesus prayed, “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one.”<sup>1</sup>

Although we are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, we are welcomed into a particular community of faith, be it Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Baptist. Along with parents and godparents, a particular faith community promises to tend the baptismal journey of its members. And yet, when the faith community promises to tend to the newly baptized, such a promise is for a child of God within the whole body of Christ. This resource on Baptism seeks to help congregations explore

the intersection of their baptisms as children of God in light of the whole body of Christ. In this resource differing yet thoughtful reflections on baptism enrich each community of faith's confessional understanding of this sacrament.

Martin Luther exhorts his hearers: "Ah, dear Christians, let us not value and treat this unspeakable gift so half-heartedly. For Baptism is our only comfort and doorway to all God's possessions and to the communion of all the saints."<sup>2</sup> If we see Baptism as "a doorway to the communion of all the saints," then we can start to talk about how we share an abiding unity for the children of God, a unity strengthened in the particular expressions of faith.

The ELCA's guiding statement on the practice of Word and Sacrament begins with how "Christians continue in the covenant God made with them in Baptism by participation in the community of faith," and ends with Christians "striving for justice and peace in all the world."<sup>3</sup> God claims us at our baptisms, and thereafter the Christian hope for justice and peace is essential to our vocation for the sake of the world. This resource speaks to the amazing journey of God's claim in Sacrament, our response to God's Word, our vocation in the world, and finally our return to the one who has claimed us through death and resurrection. The enclosed *Talking Points* are meant to *point you in a direction* – the conversation *you foster* based from your own confessional heritage, and the reflections you express to others will carry you along your own baptismal journey.

## **Resources**

- ELCA Department for Ecumenical Affairs Web site [www.elca.org/ecumenical/](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/)
- *The Use of the Means of Grace*, a statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. [www.elca.org/dcm/worship/worship/sacraments/umg.html](http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/worship/sacraments/umg.html)
- "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," the World Council of Churches. [www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/bem1.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/bem1.html)

- *Luther's Small Catechism*, chapters on "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism," and "The Service of Holy Baptism" (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))
- *Baptism: More than a Ceremony*. Mosaic Television — view on the Web or order on VHS. [www.elca.org/co/mosaic/fall02.html](http://www.elca.org/co/mosaic/fall02.html)
- From the ELCA Worship Web site, "What Are Appropriate Baptismal Practices?" [www.elca.org/dcm/worship/faq/baptism/practices.html](http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/faq/baptism/practices.html)
- "Baptismal Beginnings --A Rally Day/Baptism Program" from the 2003 ELCA Christian Education Planning Guide. [www.elca.org/dcm/Christian\\_Education/resources/2002CEProgramPlanner/module1/beginnings.html](http://www.elca.org/dcm/Christian_Education/resources/2002CEProgramPlanner/module1/beginnings.html)
- The Episcopal Church Web site: [http://ecusa.anglican.org/index\\_flash.html](http://ecusa.anglican.org/index_flash.html)
- The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Web site: [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org)
- The Moravian Church in North America Web site: [www.moravian.org](http://www.moravian.org)
- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Web site: [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org)
- The Reformed Church in America Web site: [www.rca.org/index.html](http://www.rca.org/index.html)
- The United Church of Christ Web site: [www.ucc.org/index1.html](http://www.ucc.org/index1.html)
- The United Methodist Church Web site: [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org)
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Web site: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

<sup>1</sup> John 17:20.

<sup>2</sup> "The Service of Holy Baptism," *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism*, Augsburg Fortress, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> *Use of the Means of Grace*, Application 17c.

information on back). Additional copies are \$2 each plus postage. The contents of the folder are also available in downloadable form at [www.elca.org/ecumenical/resources](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/resources) Just print out as many copies of each sheet as you need.

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

# *Talking points on* **The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism**

## **User's Guide**

“The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism” is a set of nine leaflets issued by the Department for Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These leaflets are intended to stimulate reflection and discussion about this important sacrament, as well as to offer insight into the ways Christians live out the baptismal promise. They are not theological treatises or position papers, and the writers are not speaking for their denominations in any official way.

These reflections are formulated to help deepen personal faith, broaden understanding, and give insight into the faith tradition of the writers.

Most of the contributing writers deal with topics pertinent to Christians generally. Some, such as the one written by ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson, deal with themes that have been more prominent in the Lutheran tradition. Others express perspectives that grow out of these Christian denominations. For the most part, the points are intended for discussion within congregations, as part of our “homework” for ecumenical encounter. However, inviting guests from other ecumenical-partner congregations will add special insight into the reflections and would provide for rich discussion.

Each leaflet begins with a quotation from Scripture or from a baptismal liturgy and concludes with suggested talking points for discussion.

Each of these leaflets considers baptism through a particular lens and is based on each author's faith tradition. Topics include baptism and the individual before God, baptism and healing, baptism and new life, baptism and social responsibility, and baptism and unity. These are topics of interest not just for

Lutherans, but for Christians of all communions. When we share our thoughts and experiences about these topics, we grow in our own faith and in our understanding of others.

In its constitution the ELCA says that this church “seeks in its faith and life to manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives” (ELCA Constitution 4.02.f.).

The ecumenical vision statement of the ELCA states, “The unity of the Church, as it is proclaimed in the Scriptures, is a gift and goal of God in Christ Jesus. Ecumenism is the joyous experience of the unity of Christ’s people and the serious task of expressing that unity visibly and structurally to advance the proclamation of the Gospel for the blessing of humankind. Through participation in ecumenical activity, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to be open in faith to the work of the Spirit, so as to manifest more fully oneness in Christ.” (Find the entire statement at [www.elca.org/ecumenical/vision.html](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/vision.html) )

Our hope is that those who are participating in this conversation will be enriched and emboldened to live out the promise of their baptism with renewed energy for the mission of the Church and the sake of the world.

## **How to begin**

This Talking Points folder begins with an Introduction sheet dealing with baptism as it is understood and experienced in the Lutheran tradition. For the first session, we suggest you take a few minutes to review the enclosed Introduction with participants.

1.) As you begin each session, take a few minutes to help participants recall their baptism in very concrete ways:

- If you are meeting in the church, gather at the baptismal font and encourage members to dip their fingers in the water and mark their own (or each other’s) foreheads with a cross.
- If you are meeting someplace else, have a large glass bowl filled with water nearby. Members can dip their fingers in the water and mark their own (or each other’s) foreheads with a cross. The water will provide a powerful symbol for your discussion on baptism.
- You may want to light a candle for the session, to remind participants of the candles that they (or their parents) were

given at their baptisms.

- Recite together different parts of the liturgy for Holy Baptism found on pages 121-125 of the *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*. The opening prayer (p. 121) could be used for one session; the “flood prayer” (“By the waters of the flood you...” p.122) for another; the questions (p. 123) for another; the welcome prayer (p. 125) for another; and so on.

- You might consider singing or reading together the following hymns, either at the beginning or end of the discussion: “We Praise You, Lord” (*LBW* 190); “Praise and Thanksgiving Be To God” (*LBW* 191); “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” (*With One Voice* 697); or “We Were Baptised in Christ Jesus” (*WOV* 698).

2.) For some early sessions, consider asking group members to bring specific items (a candle or shell or christening gown) that remind them in tangible ways of their baptism. Ask them to share why that item is important to them.

3.) You might ask if any member has a friend or relative who belongs to the same denomination as the writer of the featured reflection. Ask if anyone has visited a congregation in that denomination.

4.) Start the conversation by having someone read aloud the opening Scripture passage or quotation. Invite others to take turns reading the paragraphs of the reflection. Then choose the questions you’d like to discuss. You may use all of them, or focus on one or two in depth.

5.) End the session with a prayer or by reading a psalm or hymn together.

A few possible contexts for discussion of “The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism” include adult forums, youth group meetings, adult Christian education classes, or a retreat setting. This resource can be part of a Lenten program, as Easter is often a special day for baptisms and renewing our baptismal promises. This discussion would be a great way to help people prepare for that time in the church calendar and experience those liturgies in a fresh or deeper way.

If your congregation has a relationship with any ecumenical partner congregations, consider inviting their members to join in this study.

Up to five copies of the Talking Points folder are available free of charge from the Department for Ecumenical Affairs (see contact

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

# Talking points on # 1 The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

## Baptism and God's Amazing Grace

*By the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the results of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

— *Ephesians 2:8-10*

## Reflection

In the past few years my favorite Bible verse comes to me when I speak with others about one of the essential theological truths important to Lutherans. This verse speaks to you and me, as it does to all Christians throughout the world, saying that through our baptisms, God claims us not by our own doing, and not as a result of our own work. At the baptismal font we are bathed in God's grace, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever. God's claim upon us is a truly *amazing* display of grace. For there we are, having done nothing to earn this grace, and yet here God is, claiming us. We are marked in flowing water with the cross forever. Through our baptisms we live in God's amazing grace.

“Living in God’s amazing grace” is the declaration that abundant life is a *gift* from God freely given. As I reflect upon my years of ministry, my unscientific survey of what draws people to the Lutheran church, or keeps people Lutheran, overwhelmingly reveals the same witness noted above – the emphasis on living in God’s amazing grace. I have heard clearly this witness from Lutherans in nearly every vocation and walk of life. In times when our land is parched and the earth is not forthcoming, the living memory of our baptism calls us back into the giftedness of life.

We live in God’s amazing grace through the gift of our baptism. However, we remain absolutely serious about our own sinfulness. “We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves” begins the Augsburg Confession. There is nothing I can do this day to earn God’s mercy, to achieve salvation, or to make my life whole. And yet, God promises to forgive us mercifully and love us steadfastly. By the power of the Holy Spirit through faith we entrust our whole lives to the promise that God has already freed us in the final verdict on our lives: “not guilty.” We are called forth – innocent not by virtue of what you or I will or will not do, but because of what God in Christ has done for us.

“Living in God’s amazing grace” calls us together in worship. In worship we gather around the means of grace. That is, throughout our lives and at the table, we are nourished by the living Word of Christ’s gracious forgiving presence in bread and wine. From the Scriptures read and the Word proclaimed we hear the good news of God’s amazing grace incarnate in Jesus Christ for you and me and the whole creation.

“Living in God’s amazing grace” frees us for good works. We are what God has made us. Created anew through Christ we are prepared for a “way of life” of good works, of working for the good of the world. How do we follow the Gospel and work for the good of the world? Theologian Joseph Sittler wrote that “change in the spirit of our minds must come about by putting the grace of God behind the eyes with which we look at the world and into the hands with which we touch the world.”<sup>1</sup> In Christ we are

free to witness boldly, serve humbly, and persistently work for justice and peace. Service, praise and thanksgiving become our responses to living in God’s amazing grace.

We are marked in flowing water with the cross forever. Through our baptisms we live in God’s amazing grace. In our vocations, to live in God’s baptismal claim upon our lives means we are saved by grace, alive in Christ, and working for the good of the world.

### **Talking Points**

- 1.) Bishop Hanson writes that through baptism we are “marked with the cross of Christ forever.” Bishop Hanson describes this experience of God’s grace as “amazing.” What words would you use to describe grace? In what ways is grace “amazing”?
- 2.) The “living memory” of your baptism is the life-long recognition that God has claimed you through your baptism. When your “land is parched” and life is difficult, does the living memory of your baptism help?
- 3.) If we are “in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves,” then what does the gift of baptism do for us?
- 4.) How does our worship together assist us in remembering our baptisms?
- 5.) Bishop Hanson mentions “good works,” or turning to work for the good of our neighbors. What is the relationship between your baptism and your work in the world? And what is the relationship between your baptism and your neighbor?

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Sittler, *Gravity and Grace, Reflections and Provocations*, edited by Linda-Marie Delloff, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1986, p. 20.

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Living in God's amazing grace

*Talking points on*

# 2

# The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

## Baptism and the Individual before God

*By the Rev. Dr. Lynn Japinga, associate professor of religion,  
Hope College, Holland, Mich.,  
The Reformed Church in America*

**“It was for you that  
Jesus Christ came into the world;  
it was for you he died and conquered death;  
yes, for you, little one,  
you who know nothing of it as yet.  
We love because God first loved us.”**

*Order for the Sacrament of Baptism,  
Reformed Church in America*

## Reflection

I don't remember my baptism. It was not a dramatic moment. It was not emotional. It was not the result of a conversion or a long struggle or a mysterious encounter with God. It was something that happened *to* me, not something I did.

In the Reformed tradition we baptize infants precisely because baptism is not about human response but about divine initiative. Babies do not know what is happening to them in baptism. They do not choose or repent or believe.

Baptism is a sign of God's grace, which God offers to us before we understand, before we repent, before we decide, before we seek God. It is this gift of divine grace that enables us

to respond to God. Baptism is not, primarily, a sign of our faith. Baptism is not about us. It is about God.

As a pastor I never mind when babies fuss or even wail while they are being baptized, because a cranky baby makes the symbolism even more meaningful. It would not be so difficult for God to look at a beautiful placid baby and say, “There’s a worthy candidate for grace. I’ll pick that one.” But instead God sees a bellowing, red-faced infant who does not want to be there, and God says, “This one needs grace!” Some of us come peacefully into God’s kingdom, and some of us come kicking and screaming and red-faced. Baptism is not about us.

When I baptize babies, I use lots of water. I don’t just dip my fingertip into the water and trace a damp sign of the cross on the baby’s head. I use three handfuls of water, and when I am finished the baby’s head and possibly clothing may be quite wet. This too is a sign of God’s action. We need grace—lots of it. We need washing—lots of it. We need forgiveness—lots of it. A dripping baby is a sign of how much grace God pours out onto all of us. Before we know. Before we understand. Before we repent. Before we believe. God’s grace invites and enables our response of faith and gratitude.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. While we were still oblivious, God was gracious to us. When we knew nothing of it, God welcomed us into God’s family. This is a great source of comfort. It is popularly known that when Martin Luther experienced conflict or doubt he said to himself, “I have been baptized.” John Calvin wrote that when we are baptized “we are once for all washed and purged for our whole life. Therefore, as often as we fall away, we ought to recall the memory of our baptism and fortify our mind with it, that we may always be sure and confident of the forgiveness of sins”<sup>1</sup> (*Institutes*, IV.xv.3).

Baptism is not about us. It is about God. So even if we don’t remember the moment or the details of our baptism, we can remember that we have been baptized and that God’s gracious, welcoming, forgiving love is poured out on us throughout our lives. Thanks be to God!

## Talking Points

- 1.) “I don’t remember my baptism.” Do you remember yours? What happened and what was most meaningful for you, if you do remember? If you don’t remember, what about your baptism has become meaningful for you?
- 2.) John Calvin writes that we should “recall the memory of our baptism and fortify our mind with it.” Why is baptism so important for Christians?
- 3.) If baptism is not about us but about God, does that mean that we do nothing? Are we completely passive at our baptisms? How do we respond to God’s grace? What is the role of faith, repentance, and belief in our response?
- 4.) A new couple joins your congregation. They were raised as Baptists, and when they have a baby they want to dedicate rather than baptize her. How might your church respond?
- 5.) New parents in your church have a baby, but they choose not to have him or her baptized because they don’t want to force anything on the child. They believe the child should be able to choose whether or not to be part of the church when he or she is old enough. Drawing on your personal sense of your baptism, how would you respond to these new parents?
- 6.) A new member was baptized as an infant but raised without any connection to the church. This person has a dramatic religious experience and wants to be baptized again as an adult as a sign of personal faith and commitment. How would you respond to this person?

<sup>1</sup> *Calvin’s Institutes, A New Compend*, Hugh T. Kerr, editor, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky., 1989, p. 158.

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Living in God's amazing grace

*Talking points on*

# 3

## The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

### Baptism and Initiation into the Church

*By Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC,  
Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs,  
National Conference of Catholic Bishops*

**“One Lord, one faith, one baptism...”  
*Ephesians 4:5***

### Reflection

Jesus Christ calls individuals into the community of Christians, his Church, by the celebration of holy baptism, *just as* God led the Hebrew people out of Egypt, from the desert to the promised land; *just as* Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan river; *just as* the apostles brought new members into their number by water and the Holy Spirit; and *just as* Christians today bring new members into their communions of faith, life, and witness by pouring or immersing in water and the invocation of the name of the Triune God. For all Christians who practice baptism this celebration in the Church is the doorway to a rich life of grace and hope, and the opportunity to begin a life of community, mission, and service among fellow Christians.

### **What Baptism as a doorway means for some Christians**

What does baptism mean for fellow Christians? For some Christians, full initiation into their fellowship includes a special anointing and participation in the Lord's Table (Holy Communion, the Divine Liturgy, and the Mass). For other

Christians, baptism brings with it the grace of justification and full membership in the Christian community. For others it is a sign and symbol of the salvation already given to individuals by their born-again experience of redemption in Jesus Christ. For some Christians, the celebration of baptism and initiation into full church membership is the culmination of a long road of prayer, study of Scripture and the Christian heritage, and association with fellow Christians. This baptismal celebration may take place in the context of an Easter worship service, which focuses on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which Christians participate by their baptism. For some Christians, baptism is an intimate family event, where the family brings to the child the faith of the larger church, and pledges to nurture that seed of faith into a full-blown flower of Christian commitment. For others, baptism is a testimony to God's grace already active in the adult believer, carried out before a congregation as witness to the power of God's converting presence in the community of faith.

### **What Baptism as initiation means for all Christians**

Whatever the form of baptism, and whatever the self-understanding of the denomination into which the Christian is baptized, an indissoluble bond is forged between all who confess Jesus Christ and are committed in some way to being an integral part of his Body, the Church. Christians are not only initiated into their local congregation or parish. They become part of a worldwide, history-long thread of believers in Jesus Christ that stretches back to the waters of Jordan. In this bond of baptism, all Christians are integral parts of that thread, fully related as well to those who have lost their lives and given their final witness by taking on the death of Jesus Christ in martyrdom.

### **What Baptism as a thread of believers means for the Church**

Christians today are initiated into their respective communions, and yet they are not yet fully initiated into the full communion together to which they are called by the Gospel. Our common bond through our baptisms calls us all to strengthen the bonds of

communion and to overcome the barriers that keep churches divided. Our lack of communion does not yet allow us to recognize all who confess Jesus Christ as full brothers and sisters in the same church to which he calls us. By baptism, we are pledged to the Church's life of grace and to enter the pilgrimage toward building unity among all who confess the name of Christ.

### **Talking Points**

- 1.) How does your baptism relate you to other Christians? In your own church? In other Christian communities?
- 2.) What signs of reconciling do you see in your community among baptized people? How can you contribute to deepening these bonds of communion?
- 3.) What difference would it make in your community if all who were baptized acted as though they were related in the family of Christ? What stops us from doing this?
- 4.) What difference does it make in your life that you are a member of the Christian Church?
- 5.) What is your favorite Scripture passage that reflects on baptism? How does reflection on baptism deepen your appreciation for what God has done for you and for the world through the Church?

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

# Talking points on # 4 The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

## Baptism and the Encounter of Love

*By the Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, presiding bishop of  
The Episcopal Church*

**“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”**

*Luke 3:21-22*

## Reflection

This Gospel reading vividly brings us back to that moment when the Spirit in bodily form, like a dove, bears down upon Jesus. In that moment Jesus is praying, we are told, and his unique relationship to the Father is brought into full consciousness.

The invitation to reflect anew on the ministry we each have been given through baptism seems particularly timely. Looking again at Jesus' baptism, we can see that as he emerges from the waters of the Jordan, Jesus experiences a deep and all-embracing oneness with God and an overwhelming sense of being the beloved. At his baptism, the love which passes between Jesus and the Father in the Holy Spirit becomes the animating force of his life and expresses itself in a self-giving ministry of

*Excerpted with permission from Episcopal Life, Episcopal Church: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, New York, N.Y., January 2004.*

reconciliation to the world. Jesus' baptismal awareness is expressed with passionate urgency in his words and actions.

Jesus' baptism was the experience of being encountered by love, which is a profoundly personal experience. However, love by its very nature must give itself away. Jesus' baptism opened his heart to the world around him, and impelled him to move about, teaching and preaching. God's reign is embodied in the person of Jesus, who does the work of the Father in seeking to draw all to himself. Ultimately, it is this passionate desire to bring all things together and to break down all walls of division that drives Jesus to the cross.

And what have our baptisms done to us? Through baptism we are bound together with others and declared limbs – body parts – of the risen Lord who lives his life of reconciling love in and through us. God's love becomes embodied in us. Baptism, therefore, is God's act before it is our own. God draws us to himself and takes us out of our presumed separateness into a new web of relationship that unites us with others beyond personal affinity. Questions of whether we like someone or not, whether we agree or not, are no longer relevant. Something far more fundamental has happened: God has knit us together in a body not of our own making, and Christ is the head and consciousness of this body.

The mystery of our baptism is that in Christ we have all been made irrevocably one – beyond all imagining or desire. And, strange as it may seem at times, our lives are ordered in Christ such that we are instruments of one another's salvation. The very unsettling points of view of another person may be exactly the way in which the Risen Christ is seeking to deepen and broaden our experience of his truth. It is important to remember this when strains occur within the body and one limb begins to question whether another body part properly belongs.

A deep and demanding understanding of the mystery of our baptism is desperately needed in our highly polarized world. All about us we see that life is viewed in terms of absolutes that admit

no modification. Rather than listening to the "other" with an undefended heart and a spirit of graced curiosity, people feel obliged to defend their points of view.

As well, within our own community of faith, we are being called to a radical encounter with Christ in one another, which is not easy when the "other" holds views very different from our own. Here the gifts of patience and a willingness to go beyond our fears and opinions to allow Christ to accost us in strange and unfamiliar ways are very much needed. Only as we engage one another in this self-sacrificial way will we be able to encounter the fullness of the risen Christ.

This is not an easy time in the life of our church, and yet it is in times precisely such as these that a deeper, and more costly, understanding of what it means to be limbs and members of Christ's body is pulled out of us by the very circumstances we are called to live as a community of faith.

## **Talking Points**

- 1.) Jesus is the beloved. What does it mean to be beloved, in our own experience?
- 2.) Read where Paul talks about being members of one body (1 Cor. 12:12). What does it mean to be a limb?
- 3.) Have you ever experienced a situation where the "unsettling points of view" of someone who is very different from you have broadened your understanding or made you see things in a new way? How did this experience affect you?
- 4.) What does it mean to listen to the "other" with our "undefended heart"? What is the role of "graced curiosity" in such listening?
- 5.) How do you imagine baptism helping us to overcome disagreement or conflict?

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

## *Talking points on* **The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism**

### Baptism and Healing

*By the Rev. Patricia F. Garner, minister of  
Good Shepherd Moravian Church  
Moravian Church in America, Southern Province*

**“We thank you, gracious God, for the gift of water, which you have created and given to us as a sign of life. . . . Now send your Spirit upon [*this one*] who receives the water of baptism today, so that [*they*] may become a living, growing, and active member of your church, rise to new life, be led and nourished by your word and sacraments, and share in your eternal blessings.”<sup>1</sup>**

### Reflection

The ocean is an amazing mystery. As I pondered writing this article, I sat seaside on one of those rare days when there was very little current. The ocean looked like glass, and gentle waves lapped the shore. Those gentle waves brought to mind baptisms of infants, of times when I had gently poured handfuls of water over the heads of sleeping babies. I remember trying not to startle them into wakefulness that led to shrieks of crying. But how amazing for both pastor and parents, to watch these bright little eyes slowly open in wonder at what was happening to them. They were fully unaware that they were entering the covenant of grace that would, as we Moravians

<sup>1</sup> From the Liturgy for Baptism, *Moravian Book of Worship* ©1995 Interprovincial Board of Publications and Communications, Bethlehem, Pa., p. 166.

declare in the *Moravian Liturgy for Baptism*, allow these little ones to “share in the benefits of our Lord’s redeeming work through God’s grace and the faith of parents, and of the church.”

The ocean is normally not so calm. Neither is life. On normal days the ocean waves roll, roar, crest, and fall. I have sat across from, and listened thoughtfully to, some adults who came seeking baptism. When they spoke to me of being baptized, many felt their lives had been lived outside God’s grace. Like waves of an ocean crashing in on them, their baptisms for them meant a thorough washing away of wasted time and wasted opportunities. In the midst of feelings of shame, guilt, and confusion, they came seeking forgiveness, cleansing, and healing from all that was broken in their lives. Brokenness was washed away, and the healing waters of baptism enabled them to begin life anew in Christ.

The ocean brings healing. The memory of my own baptism, and the soothing reality of water, makes me ever more aware that God uses the ebb and flow of water to heal me from the stresses and cankers of daily life. Through the water our hurts, our regrets, our transgressions of other human beings, and our broken relationships find perspective and offer healing. God tells you – even in the deepest fractures and brokenness of your life – you are a child, claimed and loved. The waters of my own baptism continue to heal and renew me.

The ocean calls us to one another, where through our baptism we are healed for the service that lay ahead. We are all as the ten lepers of Luke 17, where ten were “made clean” and healed. One of the ten saw that he was healed. He came back to Jesus to give thanksgiving. For Moravians and many other Christians, baptism is not a momentary event of healing. It is a life-long process of thankfulness and Christ-likeness. Baptism is a life-long process of healing that makes us whole in Christ. In the *Moravian Liturgy for Baptism*, there is a wonderful moment when all members of the congregation are called to remember their own baptisms:

Question – “*Those of you baptized into Christ Jesus, how were you baptized?*”

Response – “*Into his death ... so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glorious power of God Almighty, we too might be raised to live a new life.*”

The ocean calls us into the world. Not so long ago the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, put forth a collaborative document entitled *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. This document reminds all Christians that “the need to recover baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities.” The point is this: if we explore our baptisms together, if we know we are called out into the world to bring healing, then imagine the kinds of healing we can truly bring together. What we cannot do alone, our baptisms call us to do together. This said, the mystery of our baptism draws Christians closer to two things at the heart of our ecumenical task: we help the world heal and heal ourselves in the same moment. May we continue along in healing.

## **Talking Points**

- 1.) What Bible passages do you think of when you think of water? Give examples of stories that feature water in the Old Testament. What about in the New Testament?
- 2.) In Scripture water is used as a symbol of hospitality (Genesis 18:4, Luke 7:44). In what ways is hospitality healing?
- 3.) How can water be a source of healing? What does it mean to be *healed*? Can you be healed, but not *cured*?
- 4.) What things in our lives, in our communities, in our world, are in need of healing right now?
- 5.) When you think of global healing—the healing of the world—what situations come to mind? How can we as baptized children of God make a difference in those situations?

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

*Talking points on*

# 6

# The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

## **Baptism and Community Life**

*By the Rev. Fritz West, Ph.D., pastor, St. John's  
United Church of Christ, Fountain City, Wis.*

**“This is the water of baptism.  
Out of this water we rise with new life,  
Forgiven of sin,  
And one in Christ,  
Members of Christ's body.”**

***Order of Baptism,  
United Church of Christ***

## **Reflection**

Baptism is an event in the life of both the Church and the believer. For the Church it is a sign of God's initiative and favor, a continuation of the work of the Holy Spirit first apparent on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). For the believer it is a seal of the grace of Jesus Christ, whereby one is incorporated into the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6) and receives Christ's call, forgiveness, and life (Romans 6:3-4).

Of the many aspects of baptism, the United Church of Christ (UCC) celebrates the relationship of community in Christ, especially with respect to each person's relationship to the Trinity.

## **Church**

Through baptism Christ incorporates us into a spiritual unity, the Church universal, the body of Christ, in time and beyond time. We must confess, however, that the historical forms of

denominations and congregations frequently violate baptismal unity. Both the cultural sources of denominations and their theological doctrines have given rise to divisions. Though one in Christ, we are often divided by differences of order, teaching, and worship. Though of one body, we are often divided by class, race, and culture.

The United Church of Christ feels called to confess the sinfulness of division and, by God's grace, enliven and enliven the baptismal unity of the Church. When the UCC was formed in 1957, it understood itself to be not only a *united* church, but also a *uniting* church. In this light, placed on the logo of the UCC is Jesus' prayer from John 17:11 – "that they may all be one."

One fruit of baptismal unity has developed among the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Together these four churches signed a document titled *A Formula of Agreement*, which now helps us to call each other's pastors and eases our abilities to work together in Christian unity. Baptism also bears fruit as local congregations live out their Christian unity, welcoming all persons in Christ, however they may differ, be it by gender, age, or sexual preference.

### **Trinity**

This embrace of Christian unity has yielded insight into the Trinity, in whose name we are baptized. Here two signs of baptismal unity may appear to come into conflict. One sign is the doctrinal unity of the ecumenical Church, to which the traditional Trinitarian language bears witness—we baptize in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Another sign of baptismal unity is the oneness in Christ that transcends all human difference, to which inclusive language bears witness (Galatians 3:28).

In the ritual of baptism, most UCC congregations employ the traditional Trinitarian formula, complemented by a baptismal prayer full of references to *both genders*—from Noah in his ark to the woman at the Samaritan well. A significant minority of congregations strive to honor these two signs by employing the

Trinitarian formula while also using more inclusive language. One such attempt, first used at Riverside Church in New York City, is evident in the following: "I baptize you/You are baptized ... in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all." Just as we are made in the image of God, male and female, so may we use the full language of that image to speak of the Trinity.

The UCC celebrates the extravagant welcome into the community of grace, already present in this world and fully realized in the next, offered by Christ in baptism.

### **Talking Points**

- 1.) What does it mean to be a member of a faith community? How is that similar to being a member of a club, a neighborhood, a school, a workplace, or some other group? How is it different?
- 2.) How did the members of your family and congregation pass along their faith stories to you as you were growing up? Was being part of a faith community an important part of your life as a child? How do you pass along your faith stories to the children you know now?
- 3.) Can you be a member of a faith community without being baptized? Does your baptism change the way you belong to your congregation?
- 4.) Can you see ways that the Holy Trinity is a model for how we live in community together? What does it mean to belong to one another?
- 5.) One of the challenges this reflection raises is how to be inclusive and embrace diversity while staying true to identity and unity. In what ways does this reflection model inclusivity and identity, diversity and unity?
- 6.) What do you think of the reference to God as "Mother of us all"? Why do you, and why would others, find this phrase helpful? Does this phrase change your notion of God?

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

*Talking points on*

# 7

## The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

### Baptism and New Life

*By Dr. Ogbu U. Kalu,  
Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity  
and Missions, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago  
The Presbyterian Church U.S.A.*

**“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.”**

*Matthew 3:13*

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”**

*Matthew 28:19*

### Reflection

Debates have raged among Christians about baptism regarding its meaning, mode, formulae, and age requirement since the early Church. One does not usually connect baptism with new life, except when a baby whines and protests because of the cold water and the embrace in unfamiliar hands. Traditions have mounted barriers that use baptism to exclude and define others. In the mission fields, racism mounted more barriers around the font. For instance, a seeker in some parts of the world must attend a year's class and receive a Western name. We have lost the sense, power, and ethical implications of baptism. We must return, redefine, and re-appropriate what Jesus *did* and *said*. When we know what Jesus *did* and *said*, then we will know about the relationship between baptism and new life.

The dominant imagery of water suggests cleansing, but it also suggests immersion into a life-sustaining, nurturing gift. Jesus had no sin, yet he identified with sinners and celebrated their cleansing. He immersed himself into their search for a new, clean life. He dramatized that God is the giver of the gift of a new life, a renewed life, liberation from the bondages of past ways of life, and reconciliation. To be baptized is to be immersed in the life of the Triune God, to experience forgiveness and salvation, and to become sealed in a new covenant relationship. New life does not end in the event of our baptism. Rather, the event of baptism is only the beginning of a life-long journey. We follow the footsteps of Christ, are continuously sanctified, and are at once a sinner and a saint. As John tells us, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” As Christ was baptized and then gave his broken body and blood, so we are baptized, given, and immersed. Thereafter, we too journey through an unclean world, and also suffer.

The journey of baptism is both personal and communal; this journey touches us and likewise calls us out into the world. Baptism initiates, anoints, incorporates, and sensitizes all of the baptized to the needs of the whole inhabited earth that God created, a world into which Jesus was sent in order to redeem it from the forces of darkness. Baptism is God’s way of building a new community within the world that in its being, saying, and doing, becomes the *sign, witness, representative, and foretaste* of the reign of God.

The journey of our baptisms will take us to places where we are less comfortable truly loving our neighbors as ourselves. Nevertheless, all the baptized, in the name of Christ, participate in God’s battle against prejudices drawn along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, systems that create poverty, and injustices that exclude and degrade both us and our neighbors. Likewise, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls the baptized not just into the so-called “third world,” but calls us out to *all* nations for the sake of the Gospel message.

Through our baptisms we enter a new life and a new journey.

Baptism offers us the newness of community where – under and through divided Christian denominations – we are united in the oneness of Christ.

### **Talking Points**

- 1.) What does it mean to die daily and be born again into new life? Why “new life,” why not just “life?”
- 2.) “We follow the footsteps of Christ, are continuously sanctified, and are at once a sinner and a saint.” What does it mean to be a sinner and saint?
- 3.) The author writes that baptism has also been used to “exclude and define others.” What example does he give to this end? What conclusions does he make about such exclusion and what does he recommend?
- 4.) Have you ever experienced a barrier in a community or social situation? Please explain. How can baptism remove barriers between different people and different cultures?

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

*Talking points on*

## The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

### Baptism and Social Response

*By Dr. Sarah Lancaster,  
associate professor of theology,  
Methodist Theological School in Ohio*

**“The Unity of Ministry in Christ – There is but one ministry in Christ, but there are diverse gifts and evidences of God’s grace in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-16). The ministry of all Christians is complementary. No ministry is subservient to another. All United Methodists are summoned and sent by Christ to live and work together in mutual interdependence and to be guided by the Spirit into the truth that frees and the love that reconciles.”**

— Paragraph 129, *The Book of Discipline*

### Reflection

Baptism is truly an amazing gift. In the Wesleyan tradition, to know oneself as a child of God provides confidence, hope, and a vision for social living. Baptism is a *claim* on Christians and likewise a *call* on us to show the world what it means to be children of God. In terms of *claim* and *call*, the gift of baptism does not end with us; rather, this gift of our baptisms is to be shared in how we live. In short, through our baptisms *who* and *how* we are in the world truly matters. Who and how we are in the world can make a real difference; it can offer tangible contributions.

Christians in the Wesleyan tradition have always acknowledged this double-sidedness of baptism – of claim and calling – through lifting up both personal holiness and social holiness. What do we mean by “holiness?” Holiness as understood in the Wesleyan tradition does not imply a kind of “works righteousness” after baptism. Instead, holiness comes in the baptismal recognition that the power of God’s grace is at work in our lives, and furthermore that we are empowered to conform our lives to Christ. God’s grace through the initial claim on us in baptism enables us to live as God created us to live, and God intends us to be Christ-like in all things, personal as well as social. In other words, the gift of grace that claims us as individuals also calls us into the world. Holiness is thus always a mixture of the personal and social, of claim and calling, and of faith and action.

When John Wesley was living, his was a historical time and place where he was discouraged by how people took their baptisms for granted. His preaching aimed at awakening people to what it meant to be Christian. He was aware that a lively personal experience of God’s grace should translate into a vital, social life lived for God. As the Methodist movement grew, its members became involved in activities such as caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, providing education, and much more.

To this day, United Methodists have brought this understanding forward into our own historical context as expressed in our formal statement in our *Book of Discipline* regarding the ministry of all Christians. Lay ministry has thus been important for us, and so the presence of ordained ministers in the Church should neither take the place of nor devalue lay ministry. Through their baptisms, all Christians are called to a ministry of service, carried out in the world for the glory of God so that human life may be enriched and fulfilled. The role of the Church is thus one of nurturing those who have been baptized into a life of active discipleship, but discipleship that is marked by worship, study, and action. According to the needs of the current historical climate, discipleship will take on different forms in different times and places in order to meet such needs.

Discipleship by its nature implies diversity. The diverse gifts of all the baptized are required at all times in order to meet the needs of the world. Through the diversity of gifts and the variety of their expression, we live in a common commitment: through our baptisms we are conformed to Christ and we offer ourselves to God as a means of transforming the world.

God’s gift of grace *claims* us and draws us out of ourselves in order to *call* us into the world. Through claim and calling, our baptisms are never simply singular events in the past. Although baptism happens only once – and for United Methodists usually as infants – baptism claims us forever. Baptism sets us all on a journey filled with God’s grace, which calls forth our response. God’s grace continually strengthens us, both individually and socially, for the service that God requires of us. As children of God, we remember our baptisms in order to live expectantly into the future, confident, hopeful, emboldened, and envisioning how we may do the work of God in the world.

### **Talking Points**

- 1.) How does your baptism call you to act in the world?
- 2.) What does it mean to have a “life lived for God”?
- 3.) How does this author describe personal and social holiness?
- 4.) Both lay and ordained ministry are important to the life of the Church. How do you live out *your* ministry in the daily life of your congregation?
- 5.) How does baptism call us to service? How do members of your congregation currently “serve” the community and the world? If you could do anything to enhance your community service in the future, what would it be?

## Topics in this series

1. Baptism and God's Amazing Grace
2. Baptism and the Individual before God
3. Baptism and Initiation into the Church
4. Baptism and the Encounter with Love
5. Baptism and Healing
6. Baptism and Community Life
7. Baptism and New Life
8. Baptism and Social Response
9. Baptism and Death

## Also included in this folder

Introduction and Resource List  
User's Guide

*Talking Points on The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism* is a set of nine leaflets issued by the Department for Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to invite conversation about baptism as it is understood by several different church bodies. These are not intended as position papers but as discussion starters with the hope of giving insight and deepening faith as well as fostering Christian unity. These may be reprinted without permission for use in small groups and other congregational settings.

Your ideas about these topics are very welcome. To submit personal reflections or the results of a group discussion, use the accompanying Response and Evaluation form or e-mail [eainfo@elca.org](mailto:eainfo@elca.org)

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

# Talking points on # 9 The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

## Baptism and Death

*By Professor Graydon F. Snyder, Chicago, Illinois,  
First Church of the Brethren*

**“Do you not know that all of us who have  
been baptized into Christ Jesus were  
baptized into his death?”**

**— Romans 6:3**

## Reflection

For all Christians baptism is a death. Regardless of age, baptism is a time when we shift from our birth family to a faith family. In this way, baptism is a death to the old and also a resurrection to the *new*. I was baptized when I was a boy and will never forget the moment I came out of the water. Members of my church greeted me, hugged me and kissed me. I belonged now to them. My birth family was still very much there for me, but I also belonged to the wider family of God. This was an experience that was entirely new.

What makes baptism new? To be sure, for many Jews immersion into water was a cleansing act: Water washed away sin and offered new life. For his part, John the Baptist proclaimed a water baptism for the forgiveness of sins (also anticipating the baptism of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, Mark 1:4-8).

And yet, after the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection, the meaning of baptism took on a profound 'other' meaning. This meaning was as central to the emerging Christian faith of Paul as it is for us today. Consider Paul's words:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*  
(Romans 6:3-8)

For Paul as for us today, being "buried" in the water of baptism marks a death: Death to the old age and its ceaseless cultural demands, death to obsessive self-seeking and its fatal egotism, death to rugged individualism with its lack of concern for others, and death to a sinful way of life that injures other human beings.

For Paul as for us today, being immersed in the water of baptism brings new life: Jesus was raised from death. We also rise up out of the water, reborn to a new life. We have the choice to live this new life as a gift, given for others, a life lived in a new community, and a life free of sin.

We are buried and reborn through baptism. Just as the body of Jesus was buried in the tomb, so we are buried with him in the water of baptism. Just as the body of Jesus emerged from the tomb, we also come out of the tomb. We become a part of his body, with a new life, through the waters of our baptism.

The authors of 1 Peter and Hebrews think of baptism as receiving the cleansing action of Jesus' sacrificial death. Most Christians today affirm this cleansing motif when at baptism there is an affirmation of "the need to confess and receive forgiveness." Through confession and forgiveness of sins, baptism is once more linked to the central tenet of the Christian faith – the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At the end of life, as the Christian comes to the experience of physical death, the reality of baptism takes on a rich meaning, and comes full-circle. In a deep sense the first baptism is repeated. That is, through baptism the believer first died to the old life and was raised in a family of faith. At the time of physical death, the believer is surrounded by this new family, the body of Christ. After burial the deceased comes alive again among her or his family of faith, but in a new way, to a new life. The believer is resurrected from baptism to new life.

### **Talking Points**

- 1) Paul writes, "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death ...." Have you ever thought of baptism this way? What do baptism and death have in common?
- 2) Paul continues, ". . . so we too might walk in the newness of life." Conversation about death is difficult. How does your baptism give you the courage to talk about death?
- 3) In what ways do confession and forgiveness of sins mirror death and new life?
- 4) Have you experienced the comfort of baptism when faced with the death of someone close to you? What does it mean that he or she was baptized?
- 5) When you think of your own death, does the thought of your baptism hold out hope to you?

*Talking points on*  
**The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism**  
**Response and Evaluation Form**

1.) Please indicate whether you are offering these comments as an individual \_\_\_\_ or as a group report \_\_\_\_.  
If it is a group report, please describe briefly the nature of the group and the type and length of the discussion  
(adult education program, a one-time forum, youth education, etc.)

2.) Which Talking Points have you studied? (circle all that apply): All 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3.) What thoughts and comments do you have about the ideas presented in "The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism"? (use additional pages as needed)

4.) Has your study of "The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism" changed your views or increased your understanding of baptism? If so, please explain.

5.) What suggestions do you have for other topics that might be covered in similar resources from the Department for Ecumenical Affairs?

6.) Would you like someone from the ELCA to contact you about other available resources for study of ecumenical issues?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Congregation \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ City & State \_\_\_\_\_

*Talking points on*  
**The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism**

**Response and Evaluation Form**

This form is provided as part of the “Talking Points” packet so that you may submit your thoughts and comments, either for yourself as an individual or as the report of a group discussion. The “Talking Points” are intended to stimulate conversation with an ecumenical point of view, and your input is very much appreciated. Please use this form to send your comments by mail, fax, or e-mail.

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