

By New Means

1afterEpiphany

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Romans 6:1-11

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we celebrate the baptism of our Lord Jesus. We might even consider singing the baptism celebration song: “Happy, happy Baptism Day, when your sins were washed away. Happy, happy you will be, live with God eternally.” Yet to sing that song would raise questions.

What sins did Jesus have to be washed away? Is that not the same question John asked in the Gospel of Matthew? John the Baptist said to Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?” Yet Jesus was baptized by John and, in so doing, took on the sins of all of humanity.

The next line of the song says “live with God eternally.” Isn’t Jesus Himself God? Yes, He is. So Jesus must have been baptized for another reason, since He was already living with God eternally. In other words, the God who hates sin was manifested in the flesh; and He took on your sins and my sins and the sins of the entire world for all generations by being baptized by John the Baptist. He did this so that He might take away the punishment for all those sins on the cross of Calvary. Jesus died on the cross and the punishment has been taken away.

So now we are baptized to have our sins washed away. As we celebrate Jesus’ baptism today, then, let us look at how His baptism, and indeed, life, death, and resurrection, affected not only our own baptism, but also our own lives.

Verse 1

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Hopefully you know, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that you were baptized into our Lord Christ Jesus’ death. You are no longer alive to sin but alive in Christ Jesus. You have died to sin, spiritually. And now that you have died to sin, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, is at work in you so that you no longer desire to sin.

If the Spirit is at work in you so that you no longer desire to sin, then the idea of “(continuing) in sin” is, to use Luther’s word, “repugnant” to you. Whatever sin or sins you had formerly enjoyed, you no longer want to do. This concept is implied by Paul’s words to the Romans. He had written asking them “How can we who died to sin still live in it?... (A)ll of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death... We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death... in order that... we too might walk in newness of life.” The desire to no longer sin and to consider it “repugnant” is all tied up in the phrase “walk(ing) in newness of life.”

Paul chastised the Roman Christians for thinking in human terms, desiring to continue in sin so that, somehow, “grace (might) abound.” That is not what the newness of life looks like. He answers his question with “By no means!” Instead, he encourages them to live by *new* means—walking in the newness of life of the Holy Spirit that they had received in their baptism.

You also, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, have been baptized, you also have died spiritually, and you also are being instructed through the Holy Spirit through the Word that by your baptism, you have been brought to newness of life, so live by those new means, by no means continuing in sin.

Verse 2

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

We have been united with our Lord Jesus Christ’s death by means of His baptism and our own. In His baptism, He took our sin upon Himself to kill it on the cross of Calvary. Now that He has died, removing the punishment of our sin, when you and I were baptized, we were connected to His salvation, giving us His life in exchange for the sins we had once desired to walk in.

By your baptism, your “old self was crucified with him in order that (your) body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that (you) would no longer be enslaved to sin.” In your baptism you died with Jesus so now you are “set free from sin”—from the desire to do it and to live in it. What does this look like? In Luther’s words, it looks like “zealous pursuit of the new life.”

Your old sinful nature will obviously not desire to pursue the new life; but the Holy Spirit whom you received at your baptism for the sake of Jesus’ death and resurrection does. And through Word and Sacrament, your desire to do the same is maintained and strengthened through the work of the Spirit.

Verse 3

“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

This Epiphany season, we are considering the God who was manifested among us in His Son, Jesus Christ, His birth, life, death, and rising from the dead. Though He was only manifested among us for a short time, the effects of His manifestation are far-reaching—throughout all of humanity, and throughout all of time. As true God, He only had to die once to pay the price of sin for every human being who had ever lived, who is currently living, or who ever will live.

“(T)he death he died he died to sin...but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Just as your baptism into Christ works in you the desire to view sin as repugnant and to live without it, so also your baptism into Christ connects you with His resurrected life. Death no longer has dominion over Him, and because it has no power over Him, and since you are in Him, death no longer has dominion or power over you either.

You receive that power as you hear God’s Word and receive the sacraments—both being baptized which connects you to Christ in the ways we have just heard, as well as the Sacrament of the Altar. In that Supper, you receive the forgiveness that Christ won for you as well as the strength to continue in the one, true faith. That’s what the sacrament does. It gives you forgiveness and strength from the “once for all” death of our Lord Christ Jesus. That’s why we don’t need to sacrifice Him over and over again, as others do without Scriptural reason.

Through both Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar, you are strengthened in your new life and by the new means the Spirit is working in you for the sake of Jesus Christ, God manifested in human flesh. In Jesus' Name. Amen.