

# Baptism

*Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast  
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## Scripture

*Baptism saves you . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

1 Peter 3:21

## Sermon

Tonight we are all about Baptism. And it's about time! We have been waiting for this night ever since the quarantine. But what exactly have we been waiting for? Well, we have been waiting for something dramatic. We have been waiting for something real. We have been waiting for something holy. And Baptism is all that, and more.

Through Baptism, we are united with Christ in his death and in his resurrection. Through Baptism, we are washed clean and renewed in the image of God. Through Baptism, we are joined to the family of Abraham and marked with a sign as children of God.

Am I giving too much credit to Baptism? I don't think so. I'm only saying what Scripture itself says. According to Scripture, Baptism is a big deal. You see, here's something we have to remember when we think about Baptism. Yes; Baptism is something the church does. But more than that, Baptism is something God does. And when God does something, the results are real! That's why Baptism is a big deal.

With that in mind, I want to look at one specific Scripture with you. It's from 1 Peter 3. And it can be kind of surprising.

I'VE LOOKED AT PETER'S GREEK, and it gets complicated. Some of his sentences twist and turn. Verse 21 is a good example. But when you sort through that verse, it comes out clear enough. Before he gets there, Peter recalls the story of Noah and the Ark and the Great Flood. He says, "Eight people were saved through water." Then in v. 21, he says, "And it's Baptism, which the whole Flood story prefigured—it's Baptism that now saves you, saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

There are two things that stand out in that sentence, two things that grab our attention, two things that catch us off-guard. First of all, Peter says, "Baptism saves you." Now, that's probably something you don't really believe. And it's maybe something you've never heard. Yet it is what Peter says: "Baptism saves you."

And that's not all. Because Peter also says that Baptism saves you "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." But that's not how we would put it, is it? Because we don't think of ourselves as being saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No; we think of ourselves as being saved through the death of Jesus Christ. Yet Peter says, "through the resurrection."

WELL, LET ME TAKE THOSE TWO THINGS one at a time. First, Peter says, "Baptism saves you." But we rebel at that statement, don't we? Because it goes against all our Christian instincts. Because Baptism doesn't save us. Jesus does!

Baptism is just . . . It's just something we do. It's just something that points to what Jesus did. It's just a way for us to make a public statement that Jesus saves, that he saves you, that he saves me, that he saves all of us. But Baptism by itself? That doesn't save anyone!

BUT HOLD ON A MINUTE. Who ever said anything about Baptism by itself? That's not what Peter says. And besides, when does Baptism ever happen by itself?

Maybe you remember about Philip baptizing the Ethiopian in Acts 8. Well, that baptism didn't happen by itself. No. There was an angel. There was Scripture. There was teaching. There was the Spirit. It's a whole story. And in the middle of it, the Ethiopian is baptized. You see, Baptism never happens by itself. But Baptism does happen. It happens again and again.

BAPTISM HAPPENS IN THE CHURCH. And that's on purpose. Because the church is the Body of Christ. We are a people who are being gathered by the Spirit to proclaim and to follow the way of Jesus. And when new life happens among us, when a brother or sister is being born again, Baptism happens.

Here's an analogy. When a woman's water breaks, it means the process of giving birth is underway. There's still a lot of sweating and pushing and screaming that has to happen. But the process of giving birth is underway. Well, Baptism is the breaking water of our new birth. Baptism is the breaking water of our new birth by the Spirit, our new birth into Christ.

So, yes; Baptism saves us. Baptism is the gateway to our new life in Christ. But Baptism does not save us by itself. Because faith saves us. And the Spirit saves us. And the church saves us. And Jesus saves us. Yet not a single one of those is ever by itself! Jesus saves us. Yes. But not apart from the Spirit. The Spirit saves us. Yes. But not apart from Jesus. And the church saves us. Yes. But not alone, never alone.

No; church and Baptism, Word and Spirit, faith and grace, cross and empty tomb—they all go together. And they all work together, sweating and pushing and screaming—birth is rarely an easy process—and we are saved. They all work together. Not one of them is ever by itself. So, yes; as part of that much bigger picture, Baptism saves us.

THE SECOND THING PETER SAYS is that Baptism saves us “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” And he’s right, of course. But we’re not saved through the resurrection by itself. Because the resurrection is never by itself. The resurrection goes together with the whole story of Jesus, from his Incarnation to his Second Coming.

Read 1 Peter 3, and you’ll see that Peter doesn’t mean the resurrection by itself. In tonight’s Scripture, he tells the larger story. He starts off with the suffering and death of Jesus. Next he mentions a journey Jesus takes to some mysterious prison. From there, Peter moves on to the resurrection of Jesus and to his ascension and finally to his powerful reign as King.

JUST LIKE BAPTISM, then, the resurrection is never by itself. It’s part of an interconnected cluster of events. It can’t be separated out. So our salvation, our salvation in the biggest sense of that word—it doesn’t come only through the resurrection of Jesus. And at the same time, our salvation doesn’t come only through the death of Jesus.

No; our salvation—in the biggest sense of that word, and it’s a big word, salvation is!—our salvation comes through the whole story of Jesus: from the very beginning, when he is with the Father in eternity, all the way to his powerful reign at the Father’s right hand.

SO SALVATION IS BIG. And Baptism is big right along with it. And both Baptism and salvation belong together. It’s there in the old stories. And it’s there in the life of the church.

Maybe you remember the story in the book of Exodus, the story about Israel being saved from Egypt. The Lord brought his people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He rescued them from pharaoh and from his army. He rescued them by bringing them through the waters of the Red Sea.

That was Israel’s baptism, their baptism into Moses. That’s what the Apostle Paul calls it in 1 Corinthians 10. So for Israel, salvation and Baptism went together. They didn’t have the one without the other.

FORTY YEARS LATER, the Lord brought Israel home from the wilderness. He brought them into the Promised Land, into his Kingdom. And he did it by bringing them through the waters of the Jordan River.

That was a celebration, a remembrance, of Israel's baptism. That was Israel going through water again as a sign and a seal of the goodness of God, the God who had baptized them at the Red Sea. And that was Israel claiming the promise of the Kingdom and committing itself to be faithful.

That's why John the Baptist went down to the Jordan to baptize. He was preparing the way for the Kingdom of God by bringing the people back to the river. For Israel, the Kingdom of God and Baptism went together. They didn't have the one without the other.

IT'S THE SAME IN THE CHURCH. Salvation and Baptism—they go together. We don't have the one without the other. The Kingdom of God and Baptism—they go together. We don't have the one without the other.

The church proclaims the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. And by the Spirit, the church follows Jesus in the way of the Kingdom. And the church is the family of God where the sign of new birth is the water of Baptism. It all goes together.

And that's what we're celebrating this evening. We're celebrating the saving work of Jesus, who sets us free from idolatry and sin. We're celebrating the transforming work of the Spirit, who gives birth to new life within us. And we're celebrating the love of God the Father, who welcomes wet and messy newborns into his arms and makes them part of his family forever, who says, "You are my son. I love you. And I am so pleased with you!"

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Glory and thanks be to God:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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