

# The Grace and Power of Baptism

By Prof. Barry Gritters

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**Bible Text:** Luke 3:1-15  
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## Grace Protestant Reformed Church

O-11225 8th Ave NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

**Website:** [www.graceprc.org](http://www.graceprc.org)  
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In connection with Lord's Day 26 of the Catechism which speaks of baptism, I want to read with you two passages of the New Testament beginning in Luke 3, and then going to 1 Corinthians 10. Luke 3 is the beginning of the preaching of John the Baptist, and notice what John was doing and who was coming to him to receive that sacrament of baptism. Luke 3 begins this way, this is the word of God.

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, 2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. 3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. 7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. 15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were

the Christ, or not; 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

Then turn briefly to 1 Corinthians 10 where the apostle reminds the New Testament Christians in the beginning of the chapter, this is the word of God, 1 Corinthians 10:1,

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

That's how far we read the scripture.

It's on passages like that and others that we have the teaching of the catechism in Lord's Day 26. I said we'd come back to Lord's Day 25, and God willing in a couple of weeks we will do that, but now we go on to Lord's Day 26 because that's the subject of baptism and we have baptism this morning. And question 69 asks,

Q. 69. How art thou admonished and assured by holy baptism that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is of real advantage to thee?

A. Thus: That Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away.

Q. 70. What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ? [And now notice there are two parts to this answer.]

A. It is to receive of God the remission of sins [that's the first] freely, for the sake of Christ's blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross; and also [and this is second] to be renewed by the Holy Ghost [so

remission and renewal], and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin and lead holy and unblamable lives.

Q. 71. Where has Christ promised us that He will as certainly wash us by His blood and Spirit as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned. This promise is also repeated where the scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins.

And now I want to read the first two of Lord's Day 27 also.

Q. 72. Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

A. Not at all; for the blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost, cleanse us from all sin.

Q. 73. Why then doth the Holy Ghost call baptism "the washing of regeneration," and "the washing away of sins"?

A. God speaks thus not without great cause, to wit [that is, namely], not only thereby to teach us that, as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ; but [so first, to teach] but especially that by this divine pledge and sign He may assure us [and there's a difference between being taught and being assured. Baptism by the Holy Spirit assures us] that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really as we are externally washed with water.

When Brother and Sister Van Buren this morning brought little Jett to be baptized, probably if you were thinking about baptism, and we pray that we think about baptism, if you were thinking about baptism, you are asking yourselves the question: what does baptism mean for little Jett? It doesn't mean anything for him. Or you may have asked: what did baptism do for this little baby boy? If baptism does anything, what did it do for him? And especially if you're not accustomed to baptizing infants, though that's the subject in the end of 27, Reverend Daikeler, we'll come back to that, but especially if you are not accustomed to baptizing infants, when you ask those questions you probably are confirmed in your conviction not to baptize babies because your answer is that that sacrament meant nothing to him and did nothing to him.

So that's the question, what does baptism mean for the child, and that question really turns into this question: is there any power in baptism? Is there any grace really in the sacrament of baptism? And I asked that question because we've already seen in Lord's

Day 25, and we've based that on the scripture, that there is power in the preaching and in the sacrament. Both work grace. The preaching is the power of God to work faith in our hearts and baptism and the Lord's supper are the power of God to confirm faith in our hearts. So we've already established, and I assume we all agree with that, that there is a power in baptism and that's really what questions Lord's Day 26 and the beginning of 27 talk about. Baptism teaches us, baptism assures us. Does baptism really wash away sin, though? That's where Lord's Day 27 begins. And so the thinking is this, we see something that took place here, that's obvious, but there is something else that we don't see and there's a connection between what we see and what we don't see, and it's that connection that's the subject of the sermon this morning. What is that connection? Is the relationship that all those who are baptized with what you can see also given what you can't see? Is the baptism with water, the sprinkling with water itself the washing away of sins? Does baptism work grace? The answer is, yes, baptism works grace.

Now I realize that Catechism says, no, in 72 when it says, "Not at all for the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit only cleanse us from sin," but it doesn't stop there. It goes on in the next question and answer to say baptism teaches us and baptism assures us. And that brings us back to what we saw in 1 Peter 3 last time where the Apostle Peter says "baptism doth also now save us." There is a saving power in baptism. We'll come to the question at the very end of the sermon this morning what it did to Jett and what it does to any other little baby that's baptized. But we're going to begin with the conviction that baptism saves his people. How it saves and whom it saves is the hard part of that question, but we will begin with that assertion there is grace and power in baptism.

So there are three things I want to do this morning, first, point out the errors, and I take the lead with errors because that's exactly what John the Baptist was addressing. He addressed them as vipers, "You are coming to baptism for the wrong reason." And then when the Apostle Paul after Christ died wrote to the church at Corinth, he was addressing errors, "I don't want you to be ignorant how that so many of the people were baptized, all of them were, but God was not pleased with them all." So errors, we need to address errors first and truth, second, and calling, third.

Is the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself? Now, why would you ask that question? Is what I did here effective actually to wash away his sins? Why would you ask that question? Well, you would ask that question because you imagine that perhaps if you say yes to that, God has so tied his Holy Spirit to that ceremony as he has tied burning to fire, whenever there's fire, there's going to be burning. Or as God has tied movement to wind, wherever there's wind, there's movement and strength as we all witnessed last night with a great thunderstorm coming through. Is it the case that just as fire always burns and wind always moves so the sacrament always cleanses? That's the question, and if you answer, yes, to that question, and many do, then you realize that there are other questions like is everyone who is baptized with water, whether as an adult or as an infant, whether by sprinkling or as by immersion, is everyone who's been baptized saved? And of course, if you answer, yes, to the first, you need to answer, yes, to the second. Of course, they're saved, but then you may go in two different directions and not a third, there are no other options but these two directions. If baptism has that

automatic power as fire burns and wind moves, so baptism saves, if that's true, then one of two things are possible. First, that everyone who's baptized is guaranteed everlasting salvation. They're going to go to heaven. They will, because baptism saved them. No matter what they do at the end of their life or the middle of their life, as long as they were baptized they're going to go to heaven. And you would go in that direction if you have some sense for the Biblical teaching that once God begins a good work in us he's going to continue it all the way to the end, that God doesn't forsake those whom he has begun to work in. But if you don't go that direction, then you'll go this direction that those who are saved by baptism, and they actually are saved, you say, might later on be unsaved, that is, they may have salvation now and lose that salvation in the course of their life. And you might go in that direction because you have some sense for the biblical teaching that God doesn't save unbelievers and though this man was baptized when he was a baby, he's lived the rest of his life as an unbeliever and I can't imagine that that man is going to go to heaven. So if you answered that first question that there is automatically in baptism a power of salvation and if everyone who's baptized is going to be saved, then either they're saved no matter how they live, or they may lose their salvation.

What do you believe about baptism? What's your answer to the question what does baptism do? That's a very important question to ask. That's not just for people who like to think, it's for people who are members of the church and present their infants for baptism or themselves as adults to be baptized. What do you think about baptism? Now it's important to put this in context and we live in the world where there are a lot of people who want to baptize, and many of them are guilty of very serious errors. If you would live in Southern California where I grew up, or perhaps in Spokane, WA where there's a large presence of Mormons, then you will learn that the Mormons also baptize, and the Mormons baptize even for the dead. The Mormons look at 1 Corinthians 15 and hear Paul's question, why else are they baptized for the dead, and not an easy phrase in the scripture to explain, and on the basis of that obscure passage, say that if there are any of our relatives who died unbaptized, we're going to baptize them even after they die. And that explains why the Mormons have the genealogical records that they do because they want to find out about their ancestors, genealogy very important to them. Why would they do that unless they believed that baptism, no matter what was in the heart of the man or woman or child at the time, actually saves them? And that's in fact, what they believe.

We are more familiar and probably live nearer to Roman Catholics who also have that view, and they call that view baptismal regeneration. Perhaps in Catechism you learned that expression, but it simply means what it says, baptismal regeneration, those are regenerated who've been baptized, that is, baptism actually accomplishes their being born again. And you understand how serious that teaching is, the implications of that. First, it's possible to lose salvation. If you go that direction. Really, lose salvation? Deny the doctrine that the Bible makes so clear of the preservation and the perseverance of the saints, really? You understand if you go the other direction that the salvation, that view depends upon you, something that you need to do. If it's possible to lose regeneration and salvation, the implication is that man must do something upon which the keeping of his salvation depends. And so the sovereignty of grace is denied. Do you realize how serious that is if you go that direction? You wouldn't have waited as long as you did, and I don't

think you waited very long to have this baby baptized, but you probably would have driven straight from the hospital to the baptismal font if you believed that without baptism there couldn't be regeneration. And now your eyes are open to the reality of the priest better get to the hospital if that baby is at risk of dying and quickly baptize the baby because, so they think, there can't be salvation or regeneration without baptism. Even in the early history of Reformed churches in the Netherlands, there was what was called early baptism, and when you read that history, it's probably not tied to the fear that if they're not baptized they won't be saved, but I wonder, I really wonder. As soon as possible, mom may still be in bed, weak and tired, but dad's going to bring the baby to church to be baptized.

You understand the implications of these teachings. What do you believe about baptism? And you young people, if you're dating someone who doesn't go to a Reformed church, or perhaps even if he goes or she to another Reformed church, you ought to know what they believe about baptism because even in Reformed churches there are those who believe that the external baptism with water actually gives grace to the baby that's baptized so that there is for them in reserve a strength to do what they are called to do, and probably that strength to do is the strength to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. There are those who believe that in baptism God signs a check written out to the baby for the amount of salvation in full, and all that that baby needs to do is endorse that check and bring it to God's bank and get the salvation from God. That's one view of baptism, and that little grace that's given to the baby at baptism, you don't believe that, but some do, that little bit of grace given to that baby at baptism is sufficient to enable him to endorse that check, to believe in Jesus Christ, that is, and come to God and have salvation.

So the question it again is what do you believe about baptism? Is it perhaps the case that you assume that those who are baptized in the church, children of believers, are regenerated? That's another view perhaps you learned in Catechism called presumptive regeneration. That big word simply means that you may assume that every baby who comes to the baptismal font with believing parents is regenerated. We just assume that. What do you believe? And the sermon this morning brings you the word of God in Luke 3 and 1 Corinthians 10 that says be very, very careful. Do not use this sacrament out of custom. Do not use this sacrament out of superstition and we are at risk as much as anyone of that danger.

Let's look for a moment at the superstitious use of baptism by some but keep in mind that we're going to come to our superstitious use and the danger there. Jesus addressed in Luke 3 the church of that day. They were all members of the church. And at that time, not Jesus, John the Baptist, and at that time John the Baptist became one who was baptizing, and it seems as though this was perhaps a new thing, a new message that they hadn't heard before, another prophet that was baptizing, and everyone was flocking out across the desert to the Jordan River to be baptized of John. They all wanted to get in on this practice. "You've been baptized with John, and I haven't yet. I'm going to go too." And as soon as they came to John the Baptist, John looked at them seriously and said to them, "What are you doing here? Why are you really here for baptism? What is it that you are expecting? Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Because there is a wrath to

come, but I have a message for you and that is the axe is laid at the root of the tree and those who want to be baptized but not bring forth fruits of repentance, are going to be hewn down by that axe.

These people who were coming to John to be baptized were the Pharisees and the publicans. They were coming to John to be baptized even though they didn't want the righteousness that came from God, they had their own righteousness, their works. They didn't want a sign that taught them that the blood of another needed to be shed to wash their sins away because they didn't really have very many sins. They were Pharisees, after all, they were upright people and yet they were cruel. They were violent. They were greedy. They were adulterous. And that's why John said to them, "The axe now already is laid to the foot of your tree." And so all of Judaism, the majority of the descendants, physical descendants of Abraham, perished and that's what Paul wept about in his writings about his relatives. "I wish they were saved, but they don't have the righteousness of Christ. They've established their own."

Well, what happened in the history of God's people in the Old Testament and in those 400 years of darkness? What happened to them in their generations? Well, they begin to use the sacraments superstitiously. It's a fad. It's the thing to do. It's what everyone who is a member of a church does. In many churches, baptism has degenerated into what's not even called baptism anymore, it's called christening. Doesn't matter whether you're a Christian or not, a member of that church or not, a believer or not, parents want their children to have some sign that connects them to Christianity because they know in the back of their mind that they're going to die, and when they die they want an association with the church and Christianity. So the saying that mocks that view, it goes in Europe this way, they come to church to be hotched, to be motched, and to be dispotched, that is when they're hatched and baptized, when they're matched in marriage, and when they're dispatched at their funeral. That's all the appearances they make in church and maybe once in a while on Christmas or on Easter. It's degenerated into a custom, a superstition. They have no interest in Jesus Christ. They have no knowledge of their sin, though interest in repenting of their sin, they just want a connection to the church and this is the first connect.

And so in reaction to that superstitious use, some people have thrown out baptism of infants altogether, and in churches that historically baptized babies they don't any longer or make it optional. You may baptize your babies or you may wait until those babies make confession of their faith. And what they did in the last hundred years or so, and what Israel did 2,000 years before that is what we can do if we are not careful, thus the warning to the parents at the beginning of the actual ceremony. Listen carefully. Use the sacrament without custom or superstition.

Now there's evidence that we use the sacrament superstitiously when we don't pray for our children. We have them baptized, but we're not daily praying for God to work grace in their hearts. That's evidence of superstition. This isn't automatic. This doesn't do anything for them. You must pray, and if you don't pray for the children of the church, then it's just a custom. If you don't teach the children diligently, reading Deuteronomy 6

as the manner that you ought to live, teach them when you get up in the morning, teach with them when you walk by the way, teach them when you lie down at night, teach them at mealtimes. Teach the children. If you don't teach the children about Jesus, the need for Jesus and their own sinfulness, the beauty of Jesus, that he gave himself for us, if you don't teach the children about Jesus, you're using the sacrament superstitiously and the word of John the Baptist needs to ring in your ears, "Why are you here? What are you doing in your interest in baptism?"

Another sign that we're taking baptism superstitiously or using it out of custom, is that we don't discipline our children, and maybe that happens in the church. But let's think of parents for a moment. They don't call the children to live godly, and if they do and the children don't, they don't discipline them but say, "Well, they've been baptized, and they're probably going to be okay someday." We need to have the whole atmosphere of the upbringing of our children to be spiritual, to be Christ-centered, to be church-focused. And if we don't do that, that's evidence that we are using the sacrament superstitiously. That's just a presumption. It's a rash presumption, "Our children are going to be saved." And if you don't call that presumptive regeneration, I'm not sure what you ought to call it but it sounds an awful lot like that. Babies are baptized, we're members of the church, ever is going to be okay.

And the elders hear a warning from the word of God too. They must never let that happen in this church that baptized children like this grow up and become disobedient, and they turn their head because they know how painful it is to work with those parents of those young people, or how difficult it is to make those visits and warn. And they know what they are called to do if those warnings do not take effect, cut them off in excommunication of discipline. Don't be the vipers, the generation of snakes that John the Baptist spoke to in the early part of his ministry.

What do you believe about baptism? Those are all errors. What is the truth of baptism? Now having seen the errors, we have an idea as to what the truth is but let's spell that out for a few minutes carefully. Is the external washing with water itself the washing away of sin? What's the answer, children? Did Jett's sins get washed away when I sprinkled that little bit of water on his forehead? What's the answer? No. The Catechism which you learn says not at all. When you stop to think about that, it would be foolish to suppose that because only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ washes away the sin.

Now a little doctrine lesson that's very important. A little doctrine lesson that's very important, able for the children even to understand. Look at the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that was shed 2,000 years ago. That blood paid in full the price that God demanded of sinners, and that blood obtained for those sinners the right for them to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and for Jesus Christ to rule them in their hearts. That's what the blood of Jesus Christ did 2,000 years ago, it paid for sin and obtained the right for Christ to rule in us. But now something must happen, and when you read the form for the administration of baptism, you'll read that very important word "applied." Applied, what Christ earned for us 2,000 years ago must be applied to us. It's there for us, it now must be given to us, and it's given to us when the Holy Spirit does two things. 1. He speaks to us and says,



"Your sins were washed away. I don't hold them against you." And that's what we saw in the Catechism and the scripture in the last number of months, the speech of God to us, to declare to us the forgiveness of sins. But then the Holy Spirit needs to apply that salvation in another way, and that is that he goes in us and renews us, regenerates us, so that sin doesn't rule us but he does, so that sin doesn't control us and have dominion over us but Christ controls us. So what Christ earned, to sum up now this little doctrine lesson, what Christ earned for us 2,000 years ago must be applied. That which we have in Christ must be applied to us by Christ speaking to us, declaring forgiveness, and by Christ working in us the power to be godly and not to be ruled by sin but to be ruled by him.

Do you remember when Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6 that marvelous teaching about the wicked people who were living in such unbelievable wickedness he didn't even want to explain it in front of children? Paul says, "That's what you were. You were. But you are washed. Such were some of you, but you are washed." And that's washing, isn't it? Baptism is a washing, and then Paul is going to go on and explain what it means to be washed. You are sanctified. You are justified. Sanctified is what God does to us. Justified is what God says to us. What we have in Christ was given to the church at Corinth. "You were like them, but you've been washed." The blessings of Christ are being applied to you in the name of the Lord Jesus, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6 :11, and by the Spirit of our God. Does baptism automatically save you? No, the blood of Jesus Christ does as it's applied to you by the Holy Spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus through the preaching and through the sacrament.

The Holy Spirit doesn't tie himself to that ceremony and that's why we read 1 Corinthians 10 and a few verses there, because 1 Corinthians 10, as the Apostle Paul bringing up two Old Testament very important realities, and they are both where God created pictures of baptism. The flood and the Red Sea, both were types of baptism. Now think about what happened in the flood. Water was applied liberally, and what did that water do? To most it destroyed them, and even those who were not destroyed by the water but lifted up from the wicked world in that ark, you don't know whether all of them were God's people, whether the wives of Noah's three sons or even all of his three sons were actually believing. Not everyone who receives the picture receives the reality. Not at all. Baptism saves. And then that other reality, the Red Sea. That's even clearer because when the Israelites passed through the Red Sea upon dry ground, by which baptism was signified, that's the point of the form, isn't it? Baptism was being taught there. Israel passed through the sea, and what did they sea do to the Egyptians? It drowned all of them. Every one of them. It destroyed them. They were baptized. But then this is the main point, when Israel went through, they went to the other side and many of them manifested that they weren't believing. That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10. They all ate of the manna that fell in that wilderness, they all drank of the water that came out of the rock in the wilderness, they all passed through the Red Sea, they were all baptized even in the cloud, another picture, but God was not well pleased with every one of them. They perished many of them in the wilderness. Baptism didn't save them automatically.

And then when you think about the New Testament and what John the Baptist said later on in his ministry, he said, "You can't even see the kingdom unless you're born again.

You can't even see it." Now think about that for a moment. Regeneration brings you into the kingdom so that you can see the kingdom, that is, being born again brings you into the sphere where Christ rules and now your eyes are opened, and your ears are attuned to spiritual things, and your heart feels sick when you sin. That's what happens when you're regenerated. Now what comes first in the history of John the Baptist, the seeing of the kingdom or baptism? If you believe that baptism automatically brings you into the kingdom, then John 3 doesn't make any sense at all. When John the Baptist preached many of them said, "What should we do? We're sinners, we see the reality of the kingdom. We see a holy God and we see ourselves as an unholy people and we have a need. We're in desperate trouble. What shall we do?" And then after they saw the things of the kingdom, they saw themselves, they saw Jesus, they saw the holy God, without regeneration you can't even see the kingdom of God remember, then they were baptized, born again first, later on baptized, and that's the way it goes for adults today. So make a distinction between baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit.

So I conclude, here's your calling. 1. Very carefully use the sacraments in the same way that you use the preaching. You're not sleeping, are you? Of course, I'm not trying to wake anyone up, but I'm getting your attention. You're not sleeping are you, assuming that just because you're present in the preaching of the gospel that somehow grace is going to get into you? It doesn't work that way, does it? And we all know that, that grace isn't automatically worked by preaching, that you can put your knee up and lean back and think about something else and, "Well, I was under the means of grace today and I'm being saved and given the blessings of salvation today." You don't believe that for a moment. Well, neither do you believe that the sacrament of baptism is going to work automatically. How is it that the preaching is a saving power? As you receive that preaching by a true and living faith. You heard the words. God gives you faith in your hearts and your hearts reach out and embrace those words and say, "I believe them."

And that's what you must do in the sacrament of baptism. For little Jett, he doesn't know anything about what happened, and when you are called to remember your baptism, you're not supposed to imagine that you can actually remember that a minister some many years ago sprinkled you, you are to remember that one day you submitted to this sacrament and then think about what that sacrament teaches you. It does teach you. It teaches all of us. And the sacrament of baptism saves us. That's the beauty of it. 1 Peter 3. Remember, baptism saves us. The sacrament of baptism saves us in the very same way that the preaching of the gospel saves us because it speaks to our eyes now, and through our eyes to our mind, preaching speaks to us through our ears, and both through our eyes and through our ears we receive by faith the truth, 1) that I need that and I still need that. I needed that as a baby because all mom brought forth was an unclean thing, and I still need that today. "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That's how baptism saves and is effective whether you're baptized as a baby or baptized as an adult. Nothing happened to him today through that. What happened today when he was baptized, what ought to have happened is that all of you and I remember we were baptized. God washes us inside as certainly as a shower washes us outside.

So that's first as to calling, receive the sacrament by faith. And second, be very careful that you don't use it superstitiously. Listen to what Jesus said to all those different categories of people who came to him. The publicans, they were the tax collectors, came to him and said, "What shall we do?" They're baptized, "Now what should we do?" They weren't asking what should we do to be saved? That would be foolish. The blood of Christ alone and the Holy Spirit saved. They asked, "What shall we do," and what John the Baptist taught is, "Now give evidence that you're saved. Show by your life that you've actually been washed by the blood and Spirit of Christ. Don't exact more taxes than you ought," he said to the publicans. And then the soldiers came to him and said, "What shall we do?" And they didn't either mean, "What shall we do to be saved, but to give evidence that we are saved and that we don't use this sacrament in a superstitious way?" Well, be careful with your sword. Do violence to no man. And judge justly. What shall we do to show that this isn't an empty ceremony for us, and God forbid, it become such an empty ceremony that the majority of us say let's dispense with baptism at least of infants. What shall we do when you go home and think about how you give evidence that you did not use this sacrament this morning out of custom or out of superstition? Believe what God said to your eyes and teach that to these children. Amen.

Let's pray.

*Dear Father in heaven who aren't pleased to save us and our children, that is, even as many as thou art pleased to call, not even every one of them we know, and we don't presume that. Dear God in heaven, be pleased to use the sacrament this morning to be a saving power to the little boys and little girls who now are beginning to think and who can understand our instruction of them and use the sacrament of baptism as the saving power to us who are adults, whether we've confessed our faith or not, so that we go home not only taught but also assured by this holy sacrament. And then teach us to ask what shall we do in response, in grateful response, to give evidence that we are indeed citizens of the kingdom of heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*