

## Holy Baptism Is A Means Of Grace.

Text: Mat 28:19-20, Gal. 3:26-27

1) Is Evident From Its Institution

Suggested Hymns:

2) Is Evident From Its Blessings

602, 276, 609, 280, 279, 277

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The texts for our sermon today are Matthew 28:19-20, <sup>19</sup> *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* <sup>20</sup> *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the [world].*”

And Galatians 3:26–27, <sup>26</sup> *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* <sup>27</sup> *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The closing words of the Gospel for today<sup>1</sup> and our first text are about making disciples. *And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”* God uses *“the means of grace”* to do this.

The expression, *“means of grace”* refers to those means, or mediums, by which God offers, conveys, and imparts to the children of men His grace, that is, His love, His forgiveness, and related blessings.

There are three such “means,” as we see in the light of the Scriptures, namely, the Gospel, Holy Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.

Today Amelia has just been baptised and it is fitting for us all that we realise that Holy Baptism is a *“means of grace.”*

Let us also note that Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are called Sacraments. Studying what Scripture says of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and listing the features which these two sacred acts have in common, we come to the conclusion that they are totally unique and in a class by themselves.

Accordingly, the following definition of a Sacrament is given in our Catechism: *“By a Sacrament we mean a sacred act — A. instituted by God Himself; B. in which there are certain visible means connected with His Word; and C. by which He offers, gives, and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins which Christ has earned for us.”*

This definition applies only to Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper and places them into a class by themselves. Hence we speak of only two Sacraments.

What we are especially interested in at this time is the teaching that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are *“means of grace.”*

On the basis of the two texts before us, and with a prayer for divine guidance, let us consider *Holy Baptism a Means of Grace*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

## **1. That Holy Baptism A Means Of Grace Is Evident From Its Institution**

Holy Baptism was instituted as a means of grace. Let us keep this thought in mind as we now turn our attention to the first text to learn several important truths pertaining to its institution.

### **By Whom and When?**

The Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, instituted Holy Baptism. The passage from Matthew makes this very plain. Baptism is a divine institution and should at all times be regarded as such.

If a mere man, or even the Church, had introduced Baptism, we would have reason to think less highly of it and even question its validity and value. But when we hear Jesus say: *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth,”* and then read His command in the very next verse, which is our text: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them,* we should at once be impressed with the fact that we have here, a rite which was instituted by God Himself.

This fact alone gives to Baptism a rich significance and a wholesome purpose. The time of its institution by Christ is likewise worthy of note. The work for which Jesus came into the world had just been completed. He had

suffered and died on the Cross and thereby procured the redemption of the world from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil.

He had gloriously risen from the dead to prove Himself the Victor over death and the grave. And before He ascended into heaven, He told His disciples among other things: “*Baptize.*” Christ, the God-Man, who by His death and the shedding of His blood redeemed the world, has commanded: “*Go ... baptizing.*”

### **To Whom Addressed**

To whom did Christ address this command? To His followers. They had accepted Him in true faith as their Lord and Saviour. To them He said: “*Go ... baptizing.*” And from the promise which He attached to the command — “*Lo, I am with you always ...*” — we conclude that His followers, the believers, the Christian Church, until the end of time should administer the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

If the Church would ever fail to carry out this command, she would not be true to her charter. Baptism has been instituted by Christ, and it is to be administered by the Church, His believers.

### **How to be Performed**

How is Baptism to be performed? The word “baptize” partially answers this question. It means to apply water. The use of any substitute for water would invalidate the rite.

On the other hand, we must not think of this water as special water; it is simple water, ordinary water, such as is used by us every day for various purposes.

Let us note in this connection too that the Lord does not specify any particular mode of application. All He says is “*Baptize.*” We therefore maintain and teach that water in Holy Baptism may be applied by sprinkling, pouring, washing, or immersing.

What we should be especially concerned about is that Holy Baptism be performed “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” Every Christian knows and believes that this is a clear reference to the Triune God, who is the only true God.

These words are spoken as the water is applied to the person who is receiving Holy Baptism as you have seen this morning.

*“In the name”* stands for, by authority of, and in communion with, the one and only true God, who is the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Any substitution for the names of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity — like “faith, hope, and charity” — makes of Baptism a sham, a deceit, and a blasphemy and, therefore, is an offence to God.

According to Christ’s own institution, then, Baptism is to be administered by the application of water *“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

### **Who Is to be Baptized?**

Christ answers another very important question for us in His institution of Holy Baptism, namely, who is to be baptized? We read: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them.”* The word “nations” is all-inclusive. Men and women, children and infants, are to be baptised.

There are those who reject Infant Baptism. Over against their claims we teach on the basis of Holy Scripture that also little children should be baptised. Our reasons are chiefly the following: 1. They belong to “all nations;” 2. They need Holy Baptism, because they are flesh born of flesh; 3. They were certainly included in the families or households mentioned in Scripture as having been baptised by the Apostles.

A worthwhile book to read on this topic is *“Baptized into God’s Family”* by A. Andrew Das.

Accordingly, we believe in and practice Infant Baptism and urge parents to have their children baptised as soon after birth as possible. The words are plain: *“Go ... all nations, baptizing.”*

### **“Make Disciples ... Baptizing”**

All that has been said so far concerning the institution of Holy Baptism should serve to emphasise that it is by no means an empty sign, or symbol, without real value. Its true worth and value is evident from these words of the Saviour, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them ... teaching them.”*

This means that after an infant baptism the child is to be taught the Christian faith. We read in Ephesians 6:4, *4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

Jesus tells His disciples, and us also, that Baptism should be used as a means of grace recruiting disciples for Him. We know what He meant by disciples. A disciple is a pupil, a learner, a follower. Through Baptism, then, Christ wants His Church to gather from all nations those people who accept Him in true faith as Lord and Saviour, accept His teachings and live unto Him. Christ, therefore, instituted Baptism as a means of grace.

Surely, what we have heard concerning the institution of Holy Baptism should increase our appreciation of this Sacrament as a means of grace.

## **2. That Holy Baptism A Means Of Grace Is Evident From Its Blessings**

We turn now to the real and precious blessings which Holy Baptism, as a means of grace, offers and gives to man.

The blessings of Holy Baptism should already be apparent from the fact that Jesus in the passage from Matthew speaks of making disciples by means of it. To be a disciple of Jesus means in effect to be in possession of all the treasures which He earned for sinful man through His suffering and death on the Cross. But there are other passages of Holy Scripture which speak of the blessings of Holy Baptism more specifically and directly.

In our second text, St. Paul is specific on this point. He summarises, as it were, all of the blessings which flow to those who have been baptised: *26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

### **In Baptism We “Put on Christ”**

What does it mean to *“put on Christ?”* It means to be clothed with Him in a spiritual way, to be covered with His merits, His righteousness, which He earned on the Cross of Calvary.

Thus we see how important it is fully to understand the significance of the Cross of Christ. In the light of the Scriptures we see Him, the God-Man,

hanging there in the sinners' stead, with the sins of the whole world imputed to Him, suffering the pangs of eternal death, the punishment for those sins, satisfying the holiness and righteousness of God, procuring salvation, sonship with God, and bliss in everlasting life.

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:19–21, *God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, ...* <sup>21</sup> *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

All the blessings which Christ earned through His vicarious suffering and death, God now makes available to the children of men. And He uses Baptism as a means for this purpose.

### **Baptism Bestows Blessings**

But let us make certain that we fully understand and appreciate the many rich blessings which Christ earned and which are dispensed through Holy Baptism.

Here is a partial list: forgiveness of sins, sonship with God, strength to live a holy life, patience and courage in the face of trials and tribulations, peace in the hour of death, and the hope and assurance of everlasting life.

Thus Baptism, although performed but once in a lifetime, is a lifelong source of comfort, consolation, and courage for those who know and believe the words of the Apostle: <sup>27</sup> *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

But how does God bestow all these rich blessings through Baptism? Let us note that the text says: <sup>26</sup> *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* Faith in Christ, the Saviour, brings the baptised sinner into personal possession of these blessings.

But there again Baptism plays an important role: It actually produces that faith, as Paul also teaches in the text before us when he speaks of putting on Christ through Holy Baptism. That is why in his Letter to Titus he calls Baptism *“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”*<sup>22</sup> What a comfort as we bring our infant children to Holy Baptism!

So today, even though Amelia cannot understand the words that are spoken, the Holy Spirit created that faith in her heart, and by that faith she lays hold of

the forgiveness of sins. We learn from Ephesians 2:8 that faith is given by the grace of God.<sup>3</sup> Faith is entirely the work of God.

In the case of adults, who are first instructed, and by the Gospel have already been brought to faith, Baptism serves to strengthen their faith through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Power in Baptism**

What gives Baptism such power? Not the water, not the faith of the one who administers it, not the mere performance of the act, but, as Luther declares in his Small Catechism: *“How can water do such great things? It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water.”*

The word of God which is in and with the water gives Baptism such power. Paul therefore also speaks of *“the washing of water by the Word.”*<sup>4</sup>

Truly, Baptism is a means of grace. Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, instituted it for that purpose and by means of the water comprehended in God’s command and connected with this Word the rich blessings of His vicarious suffering and death are offered, conveyed, and sealed for those who are baptised.

So remember your own baptism often. Baptism unites us into Christ’s death and His resurrection as we learn from Romans 6:3–5.

So it is with much joy that Amelia was baptised today. Let us conclude with the words of Mark 16:16, <sup>16</sup> ***He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*** There is no greater blessing than eternal life. May God grant this to us all. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 5:10–11

<sup>2</sup> Titus 3:5

<sup>3</sup> See also Baptised into God’s Family, p 29, A. Andrew Das, NPH, 1991

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:26