

We glorify You, O God, our most merciful Father in heaven, because You have given us a Savior of whom we know that He is able to save even the greatest of sinners, and because in Him You have made a covenant that shall endure forever. Because You have so graciously received us into the covenant through Holy Baptism, grant us also grace to walk therein, and to reach the end of faith, the salvation of the soul. Amen. (Concordia Psalter, CPH p.206)

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." Jesus, when He began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli.

In Christ Jesus, true God and perfect Man bathed in the waters of holy baptism, who made all waters used in every holy baptism a cleansing washing unto life even to this day, dear fellow redeemed:

John, the baptizer, knew who Jesus was, and therefore questioned the need for Jesus to be baptized. John was the sinner. Jesus was the Holy One sent by God. Baptism was and is for sinners. Yet, as Jesus explains, His baptism would fulfill all righteousness. But it was more than just fulfilling the command to be baptized; doing what we need to do. Jesus, the sinner's holy Substitute was baptized to give power to the waters that would be poured over us in this holy sacrament.

Jesus was never the baptizer, but He is named among the baptized. It was significant that the heavenly Father identified Jesus at His baptism as His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. This holy brother of ours was sent by the Father, so that He might be pleased with us. So we are taught to look upon our baptisms as a gracious water of life, with the result that we, the baptized, are **Perfectly Cleansed in the Name of the Son of God and of Mary.**

### I

Jesus' origin is no small matter. With the declaration of the Father we hear that Jesus is the Son of God, true God from eternity. But also revealed to us in our text, Jesus was about thirty years of age. He was the Son of Man, true man, born into this world. But His manhood was not conceived through a male, mistakenly thought by some in our text to be Joseph. No, Jesus was true Man as the Seed of the woman alone, namely, the Virgin Mary. Just as the Holy Spirit

came down like a dove at Jesus' baptism, so the Spirit came upon the Virgin conceiving in her the sinner's substitute.

It is here where Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah and serves us as the everlasting father. He makes the waters of holy baptism for us regenerative. We who were born in sin, are now born again in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not some empty ritual symbolizing something we need to contemplate upon and be convinced about. Not at all, it is as Jesus told Nicodemus the act of God whereby we are born again by water and the Spirit.

This holy water, made so by the passing through of it by the Holy Son of God and of Mary, is what saves us; just as Noah and his family were saved by passing through the waters of the flood. The Apostle Peter clearly states that baptism saves us, cleanses us, not by removing dirt from our bodies, but by uniting us with Christ Jesus, who was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. He brings us to God cleansed, holy and righteous, for the sake of His suffering, death and resurrection.

We might ask about all those who had been baptized before Jesus was baptized, were they cleansed? Or was it just a symbol for them? They too were cleansed through Jesus, since the promise in Christ always brought forgiveness, life and salvation to all believers, even for those who lived from Adam to Mary. When God promises something, it is an accomplished fact for a believer. It was like the disciples receiving the true body and blood of Jesus, which He declared was the same body given and the same blood shed, but it was the night before it would be given and shed on the cross.

## II

Do you value your baptism? Or have you succumbed to the temptations to think highly of yourself apart from that work of God? We struggle with our sinful natures, which proudly seek credit for our exalted position before God in heaven. The devil and the unbelieving world can so distract us from this great gift from our Lord that in our minds we reduce it to some empty ritual, which happened to us according to some churchly law. Then sadly we are led to find value in our daily living as we compare it with others, crediting it with earning eternal life for us.

Such sins are not some minor infraction, which is overlooked in the courts of heaven. They are mortal sins earning death, eternal death. Such sins of self-righteousness war against faith itself. We may think of those who refuse to be baptized as despisers of baptism, but even the baptized, who dismiss it as just an action taken to comply with some churchly law, are despising what God has done for them.

Do you need to repent here, my fellow baptized sinners? Yes, we all need to make such a confession and seek forgiveness. We have all taken the blessings of our baptism for granted.

By God's grace in those cleansing waters of life you have forgiveness for all sins, even of despising what God has so graciously and freely given you. The blood of the Holy Son of God and of Mary has cleansed you from all sin. You are clothed in the robe of righteousness of the Holy Son of God and of Mary. Your baptism, performed upon you perhaps decades and decades ago, still bestows these very blessings upon you through Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Throughout the week you take repeated showers or baths to remove the dirt and bacteria from your bodies and that repeated activity performed by you for now is required throughout the rest of your lives. But this holy bath in Christ is a once in a lifetime cleansing. It was not your action. It was done for you by Christ's Church at the command of the Lord of the Church. Not even our holy Substitute administered this holy bath for Himself. It was done to Him by His humble servant, John, by the will of the Father in heaven. It was done to Him for you and me and all sinners.

If a sinner is not cleansed by this holy bath, he stinks and is repulsive before God. But having been cleansed once, the life of a believer in Christ is a sweet smelling sacrifice with which the Father is well pleased. Yes, we repeatedly soil ourselves with all sorts of sins of thought, word and deed, but the cleansing we have received through the water blessed through the holy presence of the Son of God and of Mary by the Word continues to cleanse.

It was this holy Son of God and of Mary who was made repulsive before the Father on account of our sins charged to Him (cf. Is. 52:14-15 & 53: 2-3). He was made to reek with an eternal stench before God who forsook Him in our repulsiveness. But by rising again, He remains our sweet smelling Substitute seated at the right hand of God. Eternally the heavenly Father declares Jesus to be His beloved Son and through Him declares us to be His beloved children, coheirs with Christ. For the sake of this Holy Son of God and of Mary we please our Father in heaven now and forever.

Your baptism is a big deal. You were perfectly cleansed in that holy bath which lasts for all eternity. Frame your baptism certificate and put it in a prominent place, where it will constantly remind you of your holy status before the Father in heaven. If that's not doable, you could begin and close every day with Luther's morning and evening prayers in which he instructs us to first cross ourselves using

the baptismal words used to place the Lord's name upon us – “In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” Value your baptism as much as you value the Lord's holy supper. In the name of the holy Son of God and of Mary you are blessed everlastingly with His forgiveness, life and salvation perfectly cleansed for all eternity. Amen.