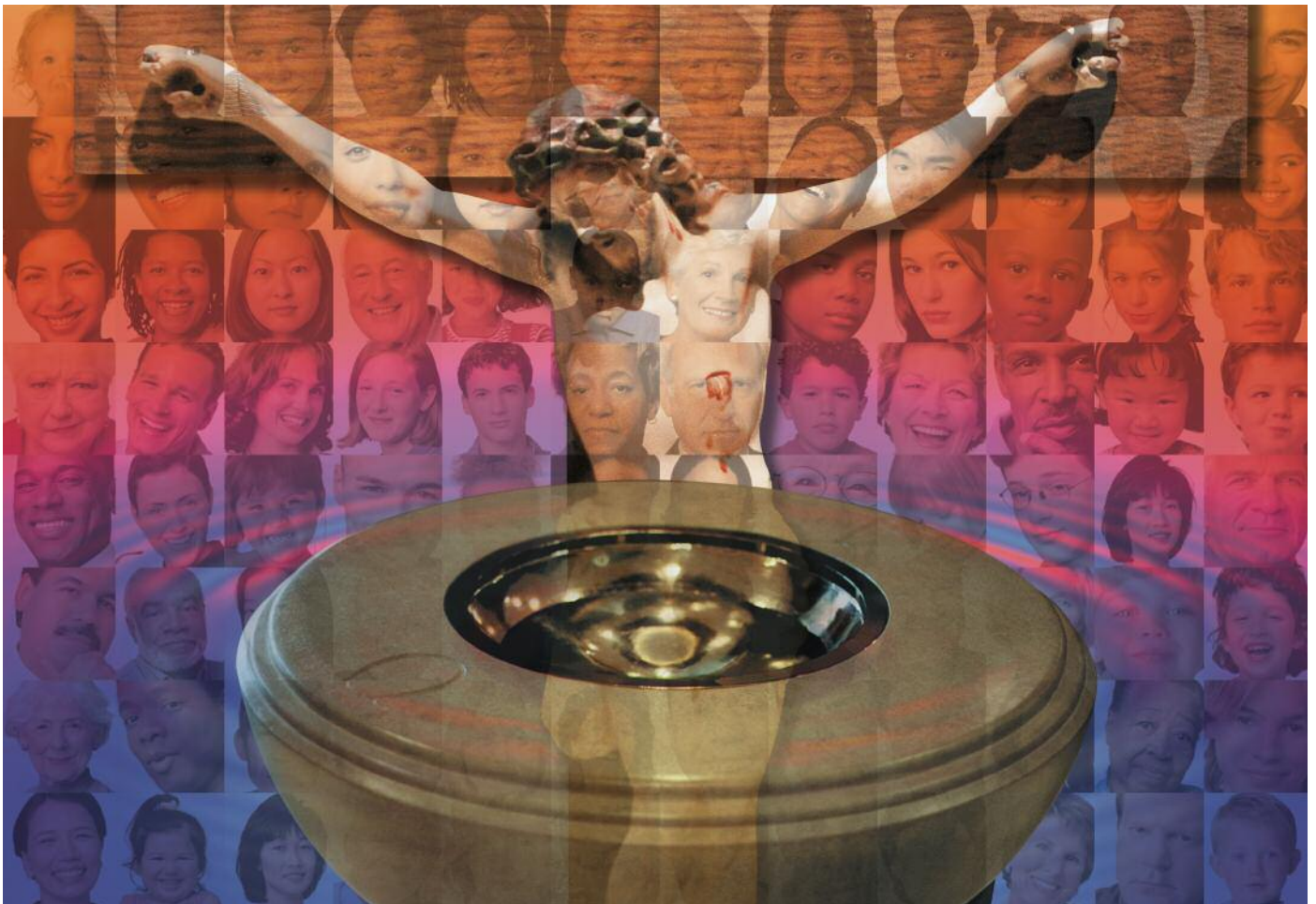


For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

April 2002. Volume Six, Number Two



**Our True Identity - p.4**

**Baptism—Past, Present, and Future Tense - p.7**

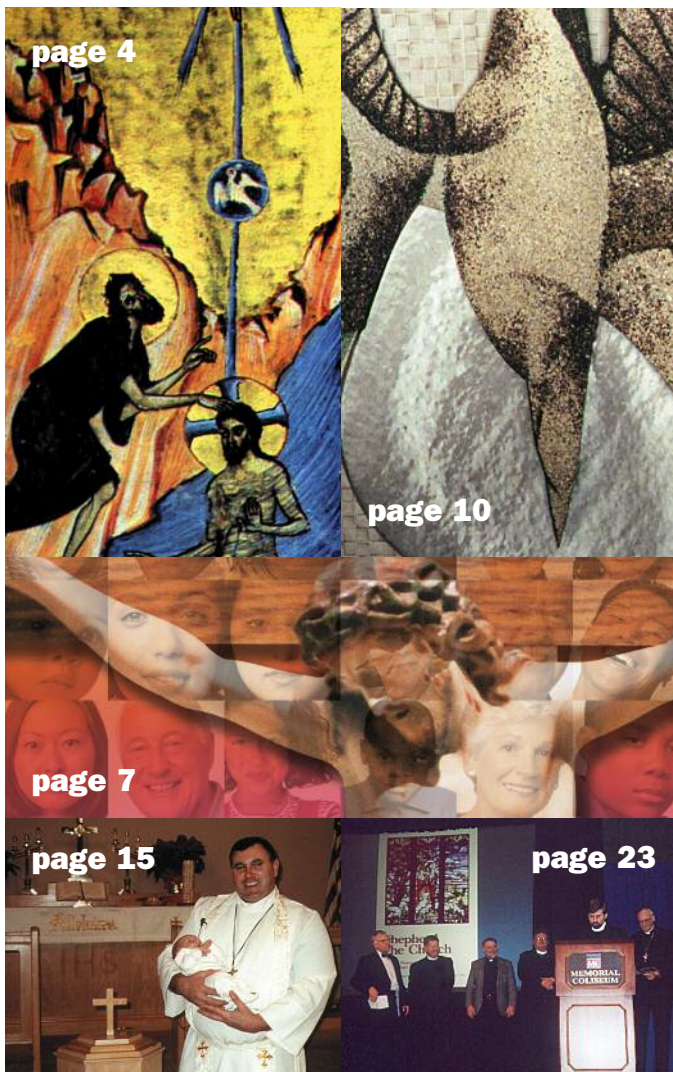
**Baptism in the Public Square - p.10**

**In the Field - p.14**



  
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# CONTENTS



## For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

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## FEATURES

### 4 Our True Identity

By the Rev. Herbert C. Mueller Jr., President of the Southern Illinois District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

In Baptism, God gives us our true identity, our real life, our Christian vocation, our daily bath, and our eternal destiny. In essence, these gifts of God are each found in Christ, given when we are buried with Christ in His death and raised with Him in His resurrection (in Baptism). Jesus shapes our identity, gives us our real life, calls us to a life of service, daily cleanses us, and assures us we are His forever.

### 7 Baptism—Past, Present, and Future Tense

By the Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer, Professor and Chairman of Systematic Theology, Holder of the David P. Scaer Chair of Systematic and Biblical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary

The New Testament knows of only one Baptism that can be administered only once. This one-time act continues to offer the blessings of salvation, even when those baptized no longer have faith. Without faith, these blessings cannot be received, but they are still there. Since Baptism is an act of the Triune God who is present in the water, this Sacrament remains the firm foundation to which all who are baptized can return to find salvation. It creates, confirms, and works through faith, but it does not depend on it.

### 10 Baptism in the Public Square

By Jennifer L. Hamer, Member of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Riverview, Fla., and Teacher at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Brandon, Fla.

Is Baptism necessary? In conversations with friends or family members, I am sure we have all encountered statements such as “I am going to let my child decide if he wants to be baptized” or “I believe in God; I do not need baptism.” Baptism is God’s seal on this child for all of eternity, never to be outgrown or cast aside. Baptism is not dependent on the knowledge or emotions of the child, nor the child’s ability to make a decision. Nor is it necessary in the case of infants for faith to precede baptism. It is enough that the parents answer on behalf of the child.

### 14 In the Field

By Monica Robins

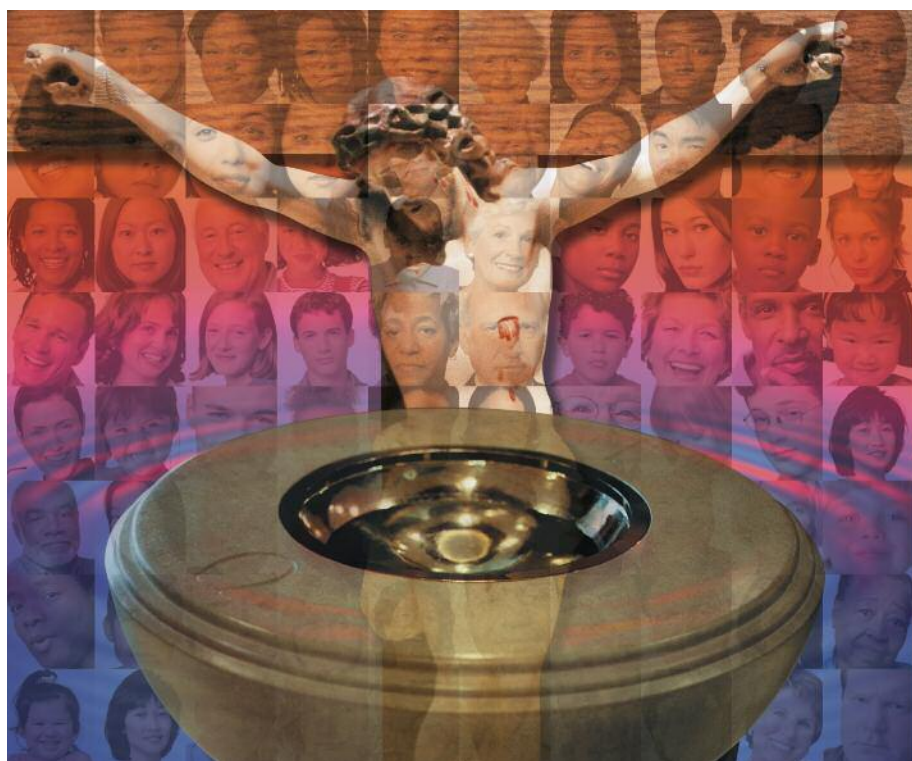
Featuring the Rev. David M. Young, Pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Eyota, Minn.

# Baptism

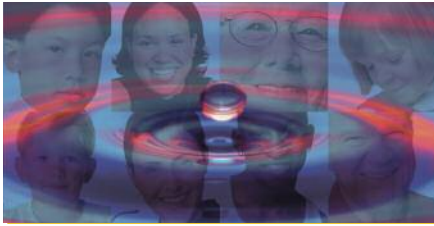
## Past, Present, and Future Tense

By the Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer

**For Lutherans the baptism of an adult is less frequent than a baptism of an infant. So when we speak of Baptism, we naturally think of Infant Baptism. It was not always that way. Until the fourth century, Christianity was a missionary religion and baptizing adults was as common as baptizing infants. They baptized children along with their parents. When Christianity became the official religion, first of the Roman Empire, and then of all European nations, adult baptisms became the exception.**



**M**any of us only know of Baptism as a ritual administered with water in the name of the Triune God to infants to grant them salvation and to make them members of Christ's church. Baptized children are members of the church and Christ's body, just as older children and adults are. Adults are also admitted into the church through Baptism, but for Lutherans the baptism of an adult is less frequent than a baptism of an infant. So when we speak of Baptism, we naturally think of Infant Baptism. It was not always that way. Until the fourth century, Christianity was a missionary religion and baptizing adults was as



**Baptism's effect lasts our entire life. It is, after all, God's work and not ours. Our salvation is not based on a decision we make for Christ. After we have sinned and fallen from grace, Baptism remains the sure foundation to which we can return to find Christ. This is not to undermine the importance of Confirmation, but this ritual derives its meaning as a remembrance and re-celebration of Baptism.**



common as baptizing infants. They baptized children along with their parents. When Christianity became the official religion, first of the Roman Empire, and then of all European nations, adult baptisms became the exception. That of the infants became the more common practice. For more than a millennium and a half, baptized adults have had their children baptized shortly after birth, and this has remained the common practice. Larger fonts once used for adults were soon replaced by smaller ones to adapt to children.

The Reformation era Anabaptists who refused to baptize infants challenged this custom. For them Baptism was not as God's gracious act upon sinners, but the pledges of faith made by committed Christians. Anabaptists held Baptism was a human act, something that Christians did to please God, an act of obedience to fulfill His command. No longer was Baptism God graciously working through the water to save believers. They saw it as law. These opponents of Luther questioned the validity and value of a baptism administered in infancy and required that those baptized as infants be baptized again. "Anabaptist" literally means "to baptize again."

The New Testament knows of only one Baptism that can only be administered once. This one-time act continues to offer the blessings of salvation, even when those baptized no longer have faith. Without faith, these blessings cannot be received, but they are still there. Since Baptism is an act of the Triune God who is present in the water, this Sacrament remains the firm foundation to which all who are baptized can

return to find salvation. It creates, confirms, and works through faith, but it does not depend on it. Though pastors administer Baptism, it is God who baptizes. Our faith does not contribute to anything God does and cannot take away what God has given. Today's Baptists are not the descendants of the Anabaptists. Like them, they insist that Baptism can be administered only to fully-conscious persons who have reached what they have decided to be the age of reason. Since for them Baptism is something we do, a person can be baptized several times. For Luther, multiple baptisms were sacrilegious, since this mocked God. Children do not fit into the Baptists' definition of a fully-conscious and reasonable human being, so they refuse to baptize infants and younger children. Lutherans have no use for the Baptist argument that children cannot hear the Word of God and believe; however, even for children, their salvation and that of the adult rests alone on Baptism and not on their faith. Baptism is not an autonomous ritual, but an act in which the Father-Son-Holy Spirit is present, incorporating the baptized into Himself. In this He works and confirms faith. Many reject this gracious work, but unbelief does not nullify what God has done. Infant Baptism is not a recent custom invented by pious Christians who were concerned about the fate of children who died in infancy, as some scholars hold.

Lutherans belong to that long line of Christians who, since the days of the apostles, have baptized children. The vast majority of Christians who have ever lived and the great saints of all times were baptized as children, as Luther pointed out in the Large Catechism. In baptizing children, we are not blindly following a custom that provided both a religious and social structure to Europe. We do it because Christ promises to children and all believers the blessings that are contained in this Sacrament. Jesus gave us the assurance that children can believe and held up their faith as an example for the rest of us to follow.

Today we are facing a problem that was not anticipated a generation ago. Often, non-church-going children of pious Lutherans are members of churches that do not baptize children or do not attend any church. These adult children see no need to have their own children baptized. In these cases, the grandparents rightfully use every means at their disposal to persuade their children to have their grandchildren baptized. Until this tension is resolved, tension between parents and children remains. In urging children to have their grandchildren baptized, these grandparents develop a fuller understanding of the arguments of why infants must be baptized. Unfortunately-

ly, and sadly, often these grandparents cannot convince their children to have the grandchildren baptized. Faithful members of the Lutheran congregations do not need to be convinced about the importance of Baptism for their newborns. Pastors have the pleasure of making arrangements for the Sunday on which the child will be baptized. This is always a happy day for the pastor, congregation, and parents. Often a celebration follows to welcome the new member into the family and, more importantly, into the church.

This good Christian practice can have a down side. Our enthusiasm for Infant Baptism can give the impression that this Sacrament applies only to we Christians during our infancy and childhood. Baptism is *something* for children and not for adults. We mistakenly think that we outgrow our Baptism and often see Confirmation as the defining moment of our Christian lives. Some make decisions for Christ at evangelistic rallies. This is unfortunate, because Baptism's effect lasts our entire life. It is, after all, God's work and not ours. Our salvation is not based on a decision we make for Christ. After we have sinned and fallen from grace, Baptism remains the sure foundation to which we can return to find Christ. This is not to undermine the importance of Confirmation, but this ritual derives its meaning as a remembrance and re-celebration of Baptism. Baptism can be administered only once, but it is coterminous with the Christian life. Being a Christian means being baptized. This Sacrament informs and gives shape to our lives as Christians. It is that *something* in our lives to which we come back continually. Our baptismal certificates list the pastor who administered it and the date and the place where it happened; however, we are as close to the time and place of our Baptism as if it just happened yesterday. Though we may have been baptized many years ago, in Baptism we meet God to confess our sins and faith in Christ and so we are forgiven. In the Small Catechism, Luther says that Baptism is something of which to make use every day of our lives. Really, we should use it often each day. The old man—that part of us that is still a sinner—is daily drowned in the waters of our Baptism. Out of its waters emerges a new and pure person totally committed to Christ. Every day, we die to Christ in our Baptism and are resurrected. Christians are in a state of conversion from sinners to saints, from doubters to believers. This Sacrament is administered. Nevertheless, it is to be used and practiced every day. Baptism requires and makes a constant regeneration possible. Just as all are born from their mothers, so all who are baptized are born from God on high. This Sacrament is not the start of a long journey into Christianity, but the place where we became Christians. To it we must constantly return and, by God's grace, remain! We possess no holiness before we are baptized, and any holiness we possess after Baptism is Christ's and not of our own doing. Baptism does not allow us to measure our spiritual progress, because we are always going back to the font to drown our sins.

In the early and medieval church, Baptisms were administered in special buildings called baptistries, of which the most famous is the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Lutherans often place the baptismal font in the front of the church as a reminder that we gather as a congregation because we are baptized. So we begin with the baptismal formula, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," then proceed to the confession of sins, which concludes with the Trinitarian formula. All this is a commemoration of our Baptism. Some churches have the baptismal font at the back of church. To enter the nave we have to walk around it and the font becomes a teaching device, a catechism not in words, but in a concrete object. Many churches where some of us were baptized no longer exist and their baptismal fonts are lost. This does not matter. Every font becomes the place where we can find the Triune God who baptized us. In the water of Baptism we must remain and when we leave it, we must return to it. Here Christ waits for us.

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