

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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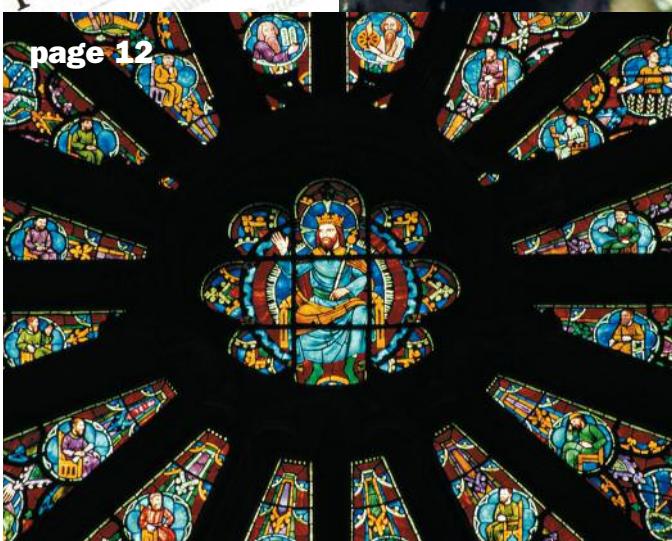
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Cover Photo: The cover photo features the baptism of Renee Lee Knepper, infant daughter of Pam Knepper, Managing Editor of *For the Life of the World*, and the Rev. Grant A. Knepper, Assistant Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Tucson, Ariz.



There are many ways to confess what God has accomplished for us in our Baptism, including the regular use and meditation upon the services of the Church. Perhaps the most beneficial habit by which to do so would be to return to the baptismal rite itself. That baptismal rite, and in particular the Divine Name and life-giving water, is the womb of the Church out of which the Lord resurrected us to new life in Christ.

Have you ever wondered what it must have been like those first nine months of life inside your mother's womb? You must have sensed warmth, security, and love inside the protective and soothing enclave that was your mother's womb. Imagine if you could enter your mother's womb again? In reaction to Jesus' counsel that one must be born again to see the kingdom of God (John 3), Nicodemus reacts skeptically, "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus, of course, was speaking about the rebirth that comes from God through water and the Spirit. To that second birth, to the womb of the Church, we can return—again and again and again!

As Martin Luther indicates in the *Large Catechism*, "Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, to resume and practice what had earlier been begun but abandoned." This repentance, which includes faith and, consequently, the fruits of faith, is worked by the Lord alone. It does not entail a re-immersion in the waters of Baptism, but it

In addition, the inclusion of the baptismal rite in *Lutheran Worship* provides a means for devotional reflection on the nature and benefits of one's Baptism. The baptismal rite could be read frequently allowing the Christian the opportunity to return to the womb of the Church, to the Word, and waters of his/her Baptism. Such reading and reflection upon the baptismal rite would give attention to what is at the rite's center—the Trinitarian Name and the water to which God has bound Himself by attaching His name to it. Christian ritual initiates and molds the Christian into the world view given to the Church by Christ. This is a world view that originates in the Word immersed in the baptismal water. It is a world view that finds its source in a Word and water which "forgives sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe." Thus a baptismal world view is always one determined by the fact that we have been buried with Christ through Baptism into His death, and have been raised by Christ out of the waters of Baptism to new life (Romans 6:4).

Into the Womb of the

does involve a return to the Word—the baptismal command and Trinitarian Name—and the life-giving water that bore that Name. One of the simplest ways to return to our Baptism is to make the sign of the cross with the Trinitarian Name and, to say with Luther in the *Large Catechism*, "I am baptized!"

There are many ways to confess what God has accomplished for us in our Baptism, including the regular use and meditation upon the services of the Church. Perhaps the most beneficial habit by which to do so would be to return to the baptismal rite itself. That baptismal rite, and in particular the Divine Name and life-giving water, is the womb of the Church out of which the Lord resurrected us to new life in Christ. There are many and various ways to re-immerse oneself in the baptismal rite. First, we should avail ourselves of every opportunity to be present at the Baptisms celebrated in the Divine services in our churches. Although the focus remains on the Baptism of that particular child, the baptismal rite provides us with the opportunity to reflect upon our own Baptism and to rejoice in it.

Reflection upon the rite of Baptism leads us back into the baptismal world view. Such reflection should raise questions about how we remind ourselves daily that we have been buried with Christ and have risen to new life in Him through Baptism. Daily rituals and family rituals plunge us back into the gifts of Baptism and into that baptismal world view. Such daily rituals might include making the sign of the cross throughout the day, setting aside water in the home for such signing as a visual reminder of Baptism, reading the baptismal rite aloud as a family (including Luther's baptismally-shaped morning and evening prayers in family devotions), and prominently displaying a crucifix in the home.

As one reads and reflects upon the remainder of the baptismal rite, one is submerged by its words and actions into the various benefits of Baptism. The preparatory and post-baptismal ritual actions are intended to unfold the significance of the baptismal washing in the Word. They should always manifest, and never obscure, the gifts of Baptism. The

preparatory ritual actions function like the reverberations of water in a pond after a stone breaks the water's surface, rippling outward from the Word of God in the water.

The preparatory actions in the baptismal service in *Lutheran Worship* begin with the Word of God—Christ's institution of Baptism and the promises associated with it, the Trinitarian Name, and the sign of the cross. Here the Christian is reminded that Baptism is a divine work which is established upon the Word that is Christ and that flows from His lips. It is that Word that creates the faith by which Baptism is received by all children of God, infants, and adults. The sponsors vow to fulfill the command to teach the child the Divine Name—the faith of the Church. This is a vow that might best be made and reflected upon after the Baptism has been completed. The *Lord's Prayer* is spoken by or for the child as the prayer that flows from the divine promises of Baptism. It is the baptismal prayer that we pray throughout our lives. The baptismal candidate renounces the devil, a confession that through Baptism one is delivered from death and the devil. From that point forward one way in which the baptized return to the womb of the Church is by continually seeking to renounce the devil in word and deed. The *Apostles' Creed* then is confessed by the candidate. This creed, whenever we confess it, is a constant reminder of the Divine Name into which we have been baptized. The request for the child's name, which follows, is a reminder to us that we have no identity, indeed, no life, apart from our Baptism into Christ.

The post-baptismal ceremonies are like a second stone thrown into the pool of Baptism, the water now rippling back into the rite's center. The post-baptismal blessing and laying on of hands (a part of Lutheran baptismal rites since Martin Luther's revisions of the baptismal liturgy) confess the benefits of baptism—rebirth, the gift of the

Spirit, forgiveness of sins, grace, and eternal life. This blessing provides a succinct summary of the baptismal blessings and what it means to be given the Holy Spirit. It is an ideal text for memorization and devotional reflection. A baptismal garment may be placed upon the baptized, extolling the fact that one has in Baptism been clothed in the salvation that is Christ. A candle may also be given to the baptized, confessing that in Baptism one has been enlightened to share in the eschatological banquet of Christ, a banquet that has its foretaste already in the Lord's Supper. The rite concludes with prayers imploring the Lord's continued bestowal of His gifts. So the Christian's desire to use God's name rightly—to call upon Him in need and to praise and thank Him—is kindled in the waters of Baptism. Praying without ceasing is a privilege given in Baptism.

The last act of the service, the dismissal of the baptized, reminds us that our Baptism holds forever, "The Lord bless you in all your ways from this time forth and forevermore." As we reflect upon our Baptism through the rite itself, we hear again the name into which were baptized and the gifts which were bestowed upon us there. The rite leads us to consider ways in which daily we can be reminded of our Baptism. So we enter into our mother's womb—the womb of the Church—again!

The Rev. Kent J. Burreson is pastor at St. Peter Lutheran Church, Mishawaka, Ind.

Church AGAIN

By the Rev. Kent J. Burreson

HOLY BAPTISM

and give thanks for the wrath of God, sin, receive the bread and pledge. Let us then in his words administer and receive

candidates and sponsors (and family) of the Holy Spirit.