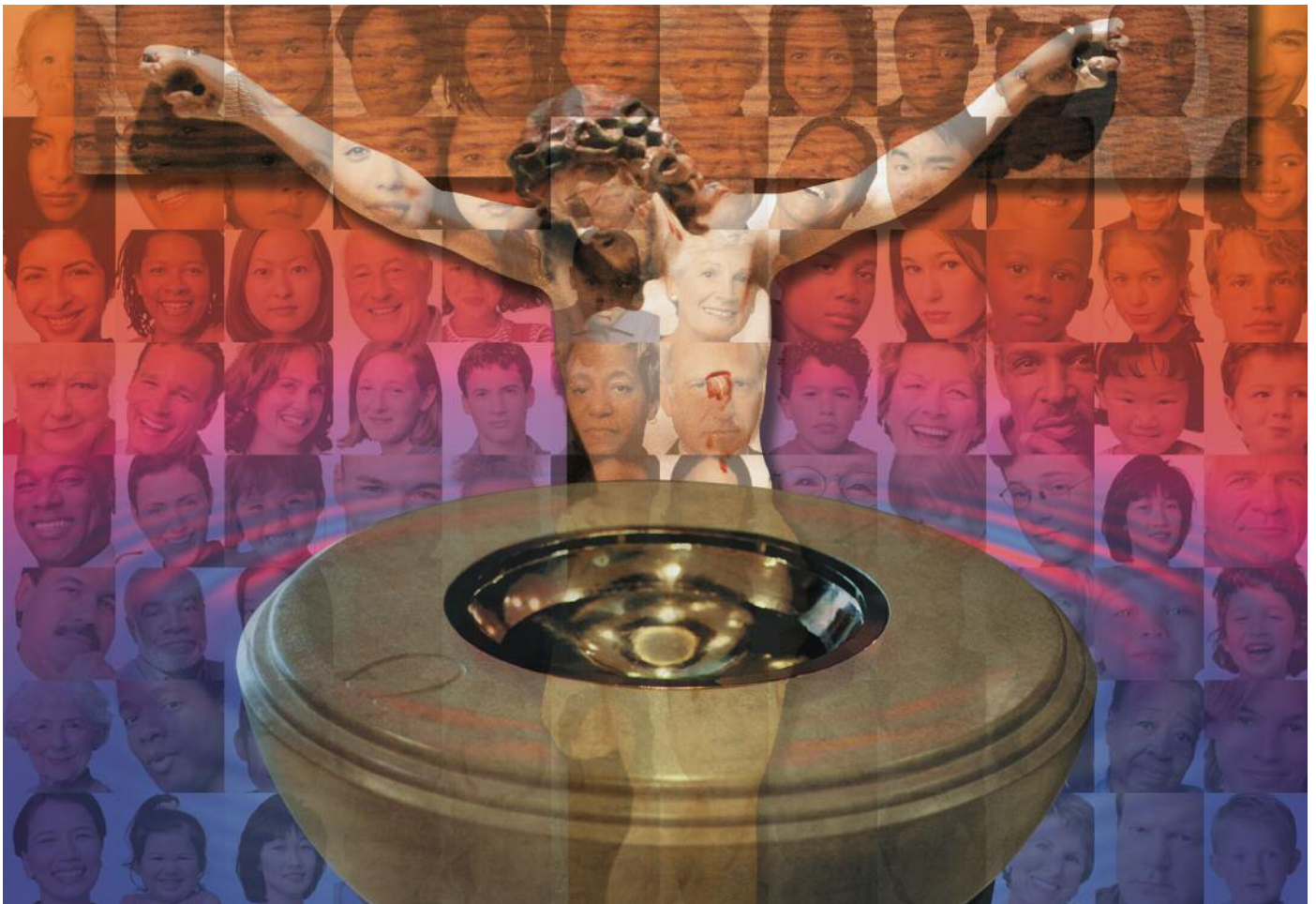


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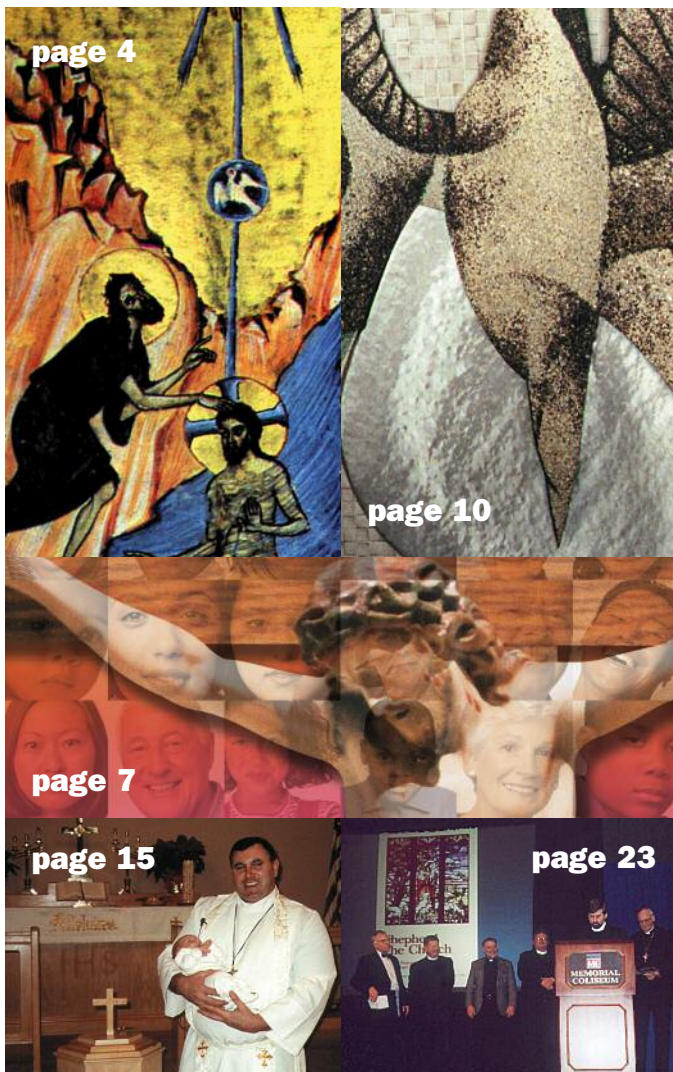


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By the Rev. Herbert C. Mueller Jr., President of the Southern Illinois District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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

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Our True

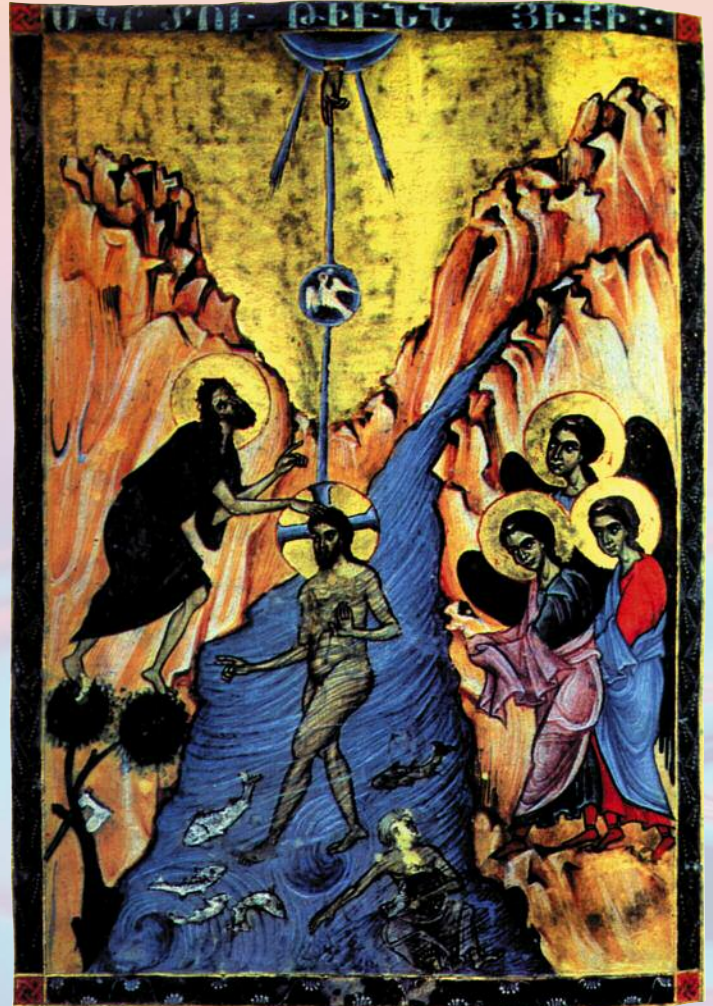
In Baptism, God gives us our true identity, our real life, our Christian vocation, our daily bath, and our eternal destiny. In essence, these gifts of God are each found in Christ, given when we are buried with Christ in His death and raised with Him in His resurrection (in Baptism). As gifts of God's grace in Christ, they are received through faith and are to be lived out in faith *"in the Son of God, who loved [us] and gave Himself for [us]"* (Galatians 2:20).

Our True Identity—In Christ

The root of our sin is that we want to identify ourselves as our own masters, our own gods, to *"be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:5). Biblically, however, any self-created identity ("Old Adam") is only a mask to cover up the fact that we are, by nature, slaves to sin: *"Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin"* (John 8:34).

Our true identity, however, is given in the name placed upon us in our Baptism *"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19). It is shaped by the fact that Jesus calls us His own and has identified Himself with us. *"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death He might destroy him who has the power of death . . ."* (Hebrews 2:14).

This identity is bestowed when we are baptized into Christ's body (I Corinthians 12:13), receiving life and nourishment from Him as our Head (Colossians 2:19). We live out this identity in a vital relationship with Jesus, a relationship given in Baptism, received through faith and enfolded in a life-long teaching and growing in the Word of God. *"As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught . . ."* (Colossians 2:6-7). Christ Himself renews our identity through Confession and Absolution (*"whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"* Matthew 16:19) and refreshes it in His Body and Blood, *"given and shed for the remission of sins."* Who we are in Christ also finds expression in prayer and in the confession of His name before the world. We say what He has said to us, trusting and living in His promises.



Our Real Life—In Christ

Our sinful flesh tries everything to cover up the fact that we are dying, or does everything possible to enhance earthly life by the *selfish* use of creation (things, people, etc.).

Our real life, on the other hand, is the life of our Baptism *"hid with Christ in God"* (Colossians 3:3), the life of Christ given to us, as Paul writes, *"I have been crucified with Christ so that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). This life is the work of God: *"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions"* (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Our real life cannot be touched by death, as Jesus promised,

Identity

By the Rev. Herbert Mueller



“I am the Resurrection and the Life, he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). And this real life is fed and nourished by Jesus Himself: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day . . .” (John 6:53-54).

Our Christian Vocation—In Christ

The selfish desires of our flesh lead us to want to “lord it over” one another, to “have it our own way” at the expense of the other (Matthew 20:25).

Our true calling in Christ is the way of service, *“even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).* It is to live as His children, to love with His love, to be His body, a people set apart for God’s possession. So that what? In the words of the Gospel: *“that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47).* This is God’s plan, *“that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known . . .” (Ephesians 3:10).*

All this is given in Holy Baptism to all believers to be exercised according to their station in life as a spiritual priesthood before God. St. Peter is describing the entire baptized people of God when he writes: *“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).*

What do we “do” as the “royal priesthood”? Whatever our station in life, God calls us to *“present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).* What does that include? Prayer; encouraging one another; bearing witness to Jesus; doing our daily work in Christ’s name; being faithful as a mother, father, child, employer, employee; caring for those in need; bearing the fruit of the Spirit; teaching and admonishing one another in all humility; serving in the Church; etc. The point is, God in Christ has made holy, not only what happens on Sunday, or what we do inside the church building, but for the baptized all of life is holy, that is, covered by Christ’s forgiveness and dedicated to God.

The heart of our Christian vocation is our priestly proclamation of God’s wonderful deeds for our salvation. *“The lips of a priest should guard knowledge and men should seek instruction from his mouth.” (Malachi 2:7)* Priests are consecrated for the sake of the world. They are placed next to people in a specific time and location. God puts them into a family, a community, a

place of work, a congregation. They are to teach and instruct people with whom they rub shoulders. The priests are sent. *“As the Father sent Me, so I send you.” (John 20:21)* *“As you go make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19)* *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15)* *“. . . repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47)* The priesthood is to speak to people in their daily conversation, for and on behalf of God. The baptized are instructed, *“In your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (I Peter 3:15).*

The greatest gift or offering the priesthood brings into God’s presence is people, unbelieving people. But no gift is acceptable to God until it is holy, sanctified. The unbelieving are sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel by which they are brought to faith and justified. Therefore they also will have a share in the eternal destiny of the priesthood in the One who *“loved us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and made us a kingdom of priests to His God and Father” (Revelation 1:5-6).*

What happens when we fail? That’s where our daily bath comes in.

Our Daily Bath—In Christ

All human beings have the Law written on their hearts (Romans 2:15), but left with only the Law the flesh, in its self-serving opinion, alternates between self-righteousness and despair. In self-righteousness it imagines that we can obtain God’s favor in some way by what we do. At other times under the Law, perhaps hearing that *“out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder . . .” (Mark 7:21ff.),* we despair of ever being “good enough.”

Our Baptism gives us a daily bath in the *“washing of regeneration and renewal” (Titus 3:5),* that *“the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity*

We live in this baptismal rhythm, dying to sin, rising to life in Christ. Every day, then, our Baptism sends us back into our daily calling (not just what we usually think of as “church work”). Where has God placed you? As a mother or father? Husband or wife? Student, worker, or employer? That’s where you are called to live out your faith. Christ is actually at work through you. He is alive in us to work through us to serve others.

forever” (SC IV, LW, p. 303; Romans 6:1-11).

Our real life is our life hidden in Christ. Our real identity is found in His cross and His resurrection. Christ Himself applies this to us every time we confess our sins and hear the word of absolution. We live in this baptismal rhythm, dying to sin, rising to life in Christ. Every day, then, our Baptism sends us back into our daily calling (not just what we usually think of as “church work”). Where has God placed you? As a mother or father? Husband or wife? Student, worker, or employer? That’s where you are called to live out your faith. Christ is actually at work through you. He is alive in us to work through us to serve others.

Paul explains more of this baptismal rhythm:



Put to death *therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all (Colossians 3:5-11).*

Our Baptism gives us an eternal destiny in Christ. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

In daily repentance we count as dead all that belongs to the old way, because God has killed it together with Christ on His cross. The “old Adam” wants to use our gifts and abilities for our own pride and self-created sense of self-worth. Christ and His Spirit (who make us alive in Baptism) use our gifts and abilities for the glory of God. This is what we are to put on each day:

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another, and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the

word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:12-17).

Christ has clothed us. Christ forgives us. We are God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved in Christ. Everything flows from what He has done for us and is renewed by His daily forgiveness. Christ sets us free from sin, death, hell and their power to destroy us or separate us from God. His cross sets us free from the Law’s curse (do this, or else you’ll die!). In Christ we are now set free to serve Christ in all those around us needing our love and care. The Law is no longer obligation, but our heart’s desire in Christ. Because we still live in the flesh, we must every day return to our Baptism to put our sinful flesh to death (by repentance) and, hearing Christ’s forgiveness, rise again each day to the new life.

Our Eternal Destiny—In Christ

Our sinful flesh either ignores eternity altogether (believing only in a “heaven or hell that you make for yourself on earth,” as someone once told me), or expects that human beings will themselves find the solutions for the future (or destroy ourselves and our planet, if we are in a pessimistic mood).

Our Baptism gives us an eternal destiny in Christ. “*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*” (Colossians 3:1-4)

Our destiny is bound up with Christ’s. “*In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” (I Corinthians 15:20) That is what we proclaim at the grave side of every Christian: “[Christ] will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power which enables Him to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:21). He lives to prepare a place for us. He lives to take us to Himself, to “lose nothing” of what the Father has given Him, “but raise it up at the last day” (John 6:39). His intent is to make us “a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” forever (Revelation 1:6).

All of this is given in Baptism, and then is reinforced, fed, and given again in the Body and Blood of Jesus and in His Word of promise. 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.

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