

# Introduction - Baptism

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Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? These questions come naturally to human beings. They are good questions. They are crucial questions. However reluctantly, every man or woman will daily exhibit his or her answer by the choices each makes. If every decision serves the goal of pleasure or popularity or power for one's self, then an answer is being expressed, "I am living for pleasure." Or, "I am living to acquire as many possessions as possible."

Underlying so many answers in our day is the assumption that human beings are but a momentary speck in the great evolutionary process. Prestigious university professors like Carl Sagan suggest that we are "here today and gone tomorrow." This answer to "Who am I?" is tragic. It is also false. It daily destroys human beings. Individual lives are ruined or even ended in the womb before birth. Relationships are betrayed, marriages are broken and the truth denied.

Look into the eyes of a lost and lonely culture. Listen to their cries and screams. How tragic for men and women to regard themselves as mere moments!

The church confesses a different answer to the question of "Who am I?" It is the truthful answer. It is the redemptive answer. It is the confession that our identity—who we are—is answered by the Holy Trinity. Where did we come from? From the creative hand of the Holy Trinity. Where are we going? To an eternity before the Holy Trinity. Who are we now? By God's grace in Christ we are called to confess and live the truth. By God's grace in Christ we are called to abandon the false and frivolous answer that human beings are but for a moment.

Our origin in the Holy Trinity imparts infinite significance to each human being. In Christ that significance is sealed by His holy atoning death and His glorious resurrection. There is now "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7).

How do we acquire this truthful identity and life in Christ? We cannot "acquire" it! It is freely given and bestowed by the Holy Trinity in our Baptism! What a treasure we are given! To be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is to know who we are, where we have come from and where we are going.

We confess the truth concerning God's gift of Baptism. Benefit also from the following "Thanksgiving for the Reception of the Sacrament of Baptism" by John Gerhard, one of the Lutheran fathers, who so clearly confesses who he is by virtue of his Baptism: "To You, O eternal and merciful God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I give humble thanks, that You washed me clean from all sins in the holy washing of baptism, received me into the covenant of grace, and appointed me an heir of eternal life. I recognize it as Your gift that, being born of Christian parents, I was brought by them to that heavenly font . . . How great is Your goodness that You found the one who was not yet seeking You; You listened to the one who was not yet praying; You opened the door to the one who was not yet knocking (Mt. 7:7). This Your mercy exceeds all praise, yes, all wonder. I was baptized in Your holy name (Mt. 29:19). Your name was invoked upon me. Indeed, I was received into the heavenly family, [and] was made a son of the heavenly Father, a brother of Christ, and a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is a holy and heavenly washing, therefore in it I have been washed clean and purified from all my impurities. It is a washing of rebirth and renewal (Tit. 3:5), for indeed, through it I have been reborn and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Whatever Christ my Savior

merited by His most holy obedience and by the shedding of His precious blood, this all He entrusted to the salutary font of baptism. Therefore, baptism is likened to being sprinkled with the blood of Christ. The precious blood of Christ cleanses me from all sins (1 Jn. 1:7) and makes me whiter than snow in the sight of God (Ps. 51:7). Through baptism, O eternal God, You established with me an eternal covenant, the return to which always stands open, through true and earnest repentance. You have wedded me into Yourself for eternity in justice and righteousness, in grace and mercy (Hos. 2:19). In baptism You gave to me the guarantee and seal of the Spirit (Eph. 1:14). Therefore, You will not cast me from Your face, but, remembering Your promise, will introduce me to the heavenly wedding celebration. As the heavens were opened at the baptism of Christ, my Mediator and Head (Mt. 3:16), so through participation in the same baptism, You opened to me the door of paradise. As the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ at His baptism, and the voice of the heavenly Father stated that this One is the beloved Son, so through participation in the same baptism, I have been made a partaker of the Holy Spirit and an adopted son of God. For this immeasurable kindness, eternal thanks I give to You, my God. Amen."

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