

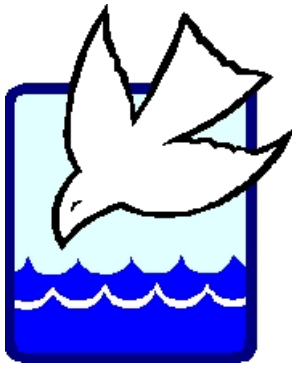
The Doctrine of Holy Baptism

Proof Texts from Holy Scripture

Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 1:8, 10:38-39; Luke 3:3, 7:30 20:3; John 3:5-6, 3:22-23, 4:1-3; Act. 2:38-40, 16:15, 16:33, 22:16,38-40; Rom. 5:8-10, 6:3-11, 8:7; 1 Cor. 1:16, 2:14; Gal 3:24-27; Eph. 2:1, 3:3-4; Col. 2:10f; Titus 3:4-7; Heb. 9:19, 10:22-24; 1 Peter 1:10-12, 3:20-21.

Confessional Citations

A.C. IX; Apology IX; S.M. Part IV; L.C Part IV; E.P. XII; S.D. XII.



After His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ commissioned His apostles to go and make disciples of all people. One translation of Matthew 28:18-20 records Christ's words in this way; "***Go and make disciples of all people by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and by teaching them to pay close attention to everything I have commanded you.***" (GWN)

Disciples of Jesus Christ are made in two ways: by baptizing and by teaching. While these are different methods of making Christians, they are tied to each other and both are essential for the Christian life. This teaching and baptizing is the fundamental task of the Church. Christians are only created through the means of grace. This is the only place God has promised to be. Lutherans mean the same thing when they say the task of the Church is to correctly preach and teach God's Word and rightly administer the sacraments. It is only in the Church that forgiveness of sins and eternal life are given.

While the Lutheran Confessions avoid giving a concrete number to the sacraments, traditionally Lutherans have recognized two sacraments; Baptism (tied to this is confession and absolution - sometimes called the "third sacrament") and the Lord's Supper (also called Holy Communion or Eucharist - "Thanksgiving"). Lutherans believe that three things are needed in order to call something a "sacrament."

1. Direct command of Jesus Christ Himself.
2. The Word of God is used together with physical element (i.e. water, bread and wine).
3. God gives forgiveness of sins in and through the physical element, which are joined to His Word.

The preaching and teaching of God's Word, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are the

only three things in the New Testament that fill all three of these requirements.

The word “baptize” means to apply water, to wash, dip, or immerse in water. As we have seen already, the Scripture teaches that in our natural state human beings are in bondage to sin, spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), spiritually blind, (1 Cor. 2:14), and are enemies of God (Rom. 5:8-10; 8:7).

Reformed Churches believe that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are merely outward symbols of our obedience to Christ. When people decide to be baptized or celebrate the Lord’s Supper they believe it is a visible way to demonstrate their spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ. In this view the sacraments are an act of law.

Baptism, they teach, is an “*outward act symbolizing (signifying) an inward reality.*” Baptism is something sinners do to offer a public testimony of the “decision” the sinner has already made for Christ. Baptism is not a means by which God actually claims a person for His own. In their view, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper do not have the power of God’s Word contained in them. The use of the sacraments may point to repentance, faith, forgiveness, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and oneness in Christ, but they do not actually bring about repentance, forgiveness, faith, the new nature, oneness, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the sacraments are not an essential part of the Christian life. The sacraments are secondary to the commitment and works we do.

Lutherans on the other hand, teach that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not merely symbols of an inner reality, but through them God actually conveys the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

Baptism has within it the full power and benefits of the Gospel. God is the actor in Baptism. Baptism is an act of God. It is God’s act of adoption and initiation. The sinner being claimed by God passively receives the gifts of God offered therein. In the waters of Baptism, God gives forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, the new nature, the gift of faith, oneness in Christ, eternal life, and sets us free from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Lutherans teach that the sacrament of Baptism is the sacrament of initiation, that is admission into the Christian faith, life, and Church. It is one of the two ways by which people, young and old alike, are brought into the Church, made God’s children, and receive all the blessings and powers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Baptism lacks nothing according to Romans 6:3-11. All that is present in the person and work of Christ and all that is present in the Gospel proclamation is present in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Properly understood one can say that.

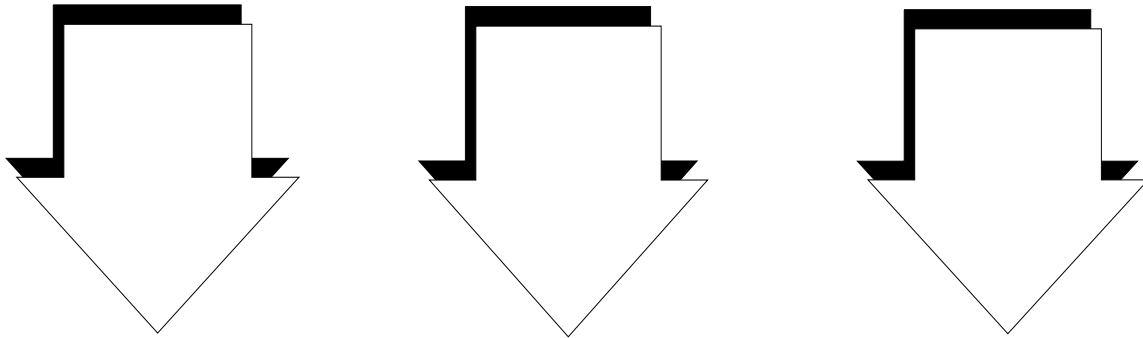
HOLY BAPTISM = THE GOSPEL

True Baptism rests upon and gives all that is in the Gospel. Without the Word, “baptism” is just water. It is for this reason that Lutherans are unwilling to compromise on the Bible’s teaching on Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Connected to both is the very power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To withhold a child from baptism is to withhold the Gospel and all its wonderful gifts. To withhold Baptism from a child is to withhold the Church and Jesus Christ Himself from the child!

Biblical Foundations For The Lutheran Doctrine of Baptism

In order to grasp the full significance of this great gift of God, it is important to draw the doctrine of Baptism from the entire body of biblical material. In the New Testament the doctrine of Baptism is to be drawn from the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Epistles. A failure to consider the entire biblical testimony will result in a fragmented and incomplete view of Holy Baptism.

THE GOSPELS	THE BOOK OF ACTS	THE EPISTLES
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THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

From the Gospels

The New Testament Baptism originates in the ministry of John the Baptist. The Gospels teach the following regarding John's Baptism and Baptism's relationship to the person and work of Christ.

1. John the Baptist's baptism actually gave forgiveness of sins. It also had divine authority and power. In other words, John's Baptism was a **means of grace**, because in it God actually gave the people forgiveness of sins through the Baptism of Repentance. Baptism was not an outward sign of the people's sincerity toward God. Rather it was an act of God. The Gospels are very specific about what was given in this sacred act.

“John the Baptizer lived in the wilderness and preached that people should repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.” Mark 1:4

“He [John the Baptist] went into the whole Jordan Valley and preached the Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Luke 3:3)

John’s Baptism was of divine origin and authority. It carried with it the power to forgive sins. Jesus Himself teaches this when He asked, **“I also shall ask you a question, Tell Me, John’s Baptism-was it from heaven or from men?”** (Luke 20:3) The correct answer, of course was that John’s Baptism was from heaven, thus from God and a human work merely symbolizing or teaching something.

2. As stated above, the practice of baptism was held in high esteem by Christ Jesus. It was considered important in the conversion process. So important was the Baptism for the remission of sin that Jesus and His disciples took over the practice of baptizing from John the Baptist and made it a vital part of their work during His own ministry.

“After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the country of Judea and there He was spending sometime with them and baptizing. John too was baptizing in Aenon, near Salim, because water was plentiful there. People came and were baptized.” (John 3:22-23)

“When the Lord found out that the Pharisees had heard that He was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus Himself was not baptizing but His disciples, He left Judea and went back toward Galilee.” (John 4:1-3)

3. The Baptism of John, Baptism for the forgiveness of sin, was taken up into the person and work of Christ in Jesus’ own Baptism, but more was added to it. John’s Baptism came from and led to repentance and forgiveness of sins. But when Jesus Christ was baptized by John, Jesus was baptized into His saving ministry. His whole saving work becomes a work of washing and cleansing (baptizing) those whom He will call. The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, by virtue of Christ’s Baptism, now includes all the work and benefits of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself. John the Baptist recognized this when he said, **“I have baptized you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”** (Mark 1:8)

Jesus told Nicodemus, **“I tell you the absolute truth, if anyone is not born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, but what is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** John 3:5-6.

Christ Himself spoke of His saving work in sacramental terms. He spoke of His earthly ministry of atonement as a “baptism and the cup of suffering” (The Lord’s Supper). He also tells His disciples that they will indeed partake of the same cup of suffering and baptism in due time. **“Can you drink the cup which I am drinking or be baptized with the baptism with which I am being baptized?”** `We can,’ they told Him. `You will drink the cup I am drinking,’ Jesus told them, `and be baptized with the baptism with which I am being baptized.’” (Mark 10:38-39)

From the Gospels we learn that John’s Baptism is a sacrament that prefigures the full Christian Baptism in Christ Jesus. It calls people to repentance, it empowers them to repent, it brings the forgiveness of sins, and it points to the person and work of Jesus Christ. We learn in the Gospel that Jesus’s entire ministry is a Baptism into His death and resurrection. We are taught that in time more will be added to Baptism, namely the Holy Spirit, Himself.

4. From the command of Jesus in the Great Commission, we learn that Baptism is

essential to the work of making disciples. ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all people by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to pay close attention to everything I have commanded you--And remember I am with you always, even until the end of time.” (Matt. 28:19-20).*** We also learn here that all people (no ages designated) are to be baptized and instructed.

From the Book of Acts

Those who reject Baptism as a means of grace and the practice of baptizing infants claim support for their view from the Book of Acts. They claim that Baptism is a work we do. It is a work that symbolizes a visible act of repentance (believed to be a human act of the will), in which a sinner shows the world or makes a commitment (a promise) to God to be faithful. But the Book of Acts does not support such a doctrine.

1. In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus taught that a person must be born again of the water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven, the true Church. We learn from the Book of Acts that in Baptism it is God who gives promises and we receive. Peter tells the people of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, ***“Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this promise is made to you and to your children and to all who are far away and whom the Lord our God will call . . . Those who accepted what he said were baptized.”*** (Act. 2:38-40)

It is God who makes the promise (commitment), not the other way around. ***“For this promise is made to you and to your children and to all who are far away and whom the Lord our God will call.”*** God makes the promise and God calls whom He will to saving faith.

2. Spiritual rebirth is present in Baptism and children are included in this promise of forgiveness. Peter told the people, ***“For this promise is made to you and to your children and to all who are far away and whom the Lord our God will call.”*** (Act. 2:38) Just as was true in the Old Testament, children of all ages are included in God promises.

3. We see in the Book of Acts that Baptism has spiritual power to wash away sins. ***“Get up and calling on His name, be baptized and have your sins washed away!”*** Act. 22:16



4. The Book of Acts shows the close relationship between Baptism, repentance, and faith. So important is Baptism to the Christian, that time and again immediately upon an adults conversion by hearing of the Word of God and his confession of sin, the person is immediately baptized. These acts simply flow together. That which is given in Baptism is received in faith. As we shall see by other Scripture passages these various gifts of God are distinguishable but inseparable. Based on the Book of Acts there can be no question about the immediacy of Baptism following an adult’s conversion. When an adult comes to faith in Jesus Christ, Baptism is to follow.

Immediately upon following the proclamation of the Gospel, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to the hearer. ***“And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. And as they went***

along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.” (Acts 8:35-38) The response of the eunuch can only mean that the proclamation of Jesus and the proclamation of Holy Baptism were tied together in Philip’s treatment of the Holy Scripture.

After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, St. Paul heard the Gospel from Ananias and was immediately baptized. Showing again that the proclamation of the Gospel included the *kerigma* (the Greek New Testament word for proclamation) of Holy Baptism. That pattern would be repeated throughout the New Testament Church (Acts 10:48; 11:12ff; 16:15; 18:8; 19:3-5; and 22:16). Preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in the crucified and resurrected Jesus is the fundamental proclamation of the New Testament Church. It should be the fundamental proclamation of any authentic Lutheran Church.

5. Baptism also played a key role in the selection of Judas’ replacement. When the apostles filled the Apostolic Office vacated by Judas, the candidates for the office had to man *“who went in and out among us--beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us”* (Acts 1:21-22).

From the Epistles

The Epistles treat the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as the Sacrament of Initiation into the entire person and work of Jesus Christ. In the blessed sacrament the one being baptized is grafted into Christ’s Holy Church through which every blessing and benefit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is given daily.

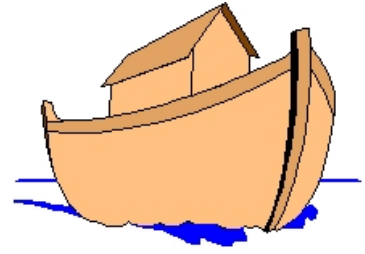
Baptism is nothing more or less than the pure Gospel in liquid form. It requires no “pre-evangelism.” It does not require the kind of extensive catechesis that is necessary for admission to the Lord’s Supper. In this respect the two sacraments are different. Unlike the Lord’s Supper, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism cannot be administered in a harmful way to the one being baptized, at least not in the same way as the Lord’s Supper.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism lacks nothing. It is to be administered in conjunction and immediately following the public proclamation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is to be done in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as water is applied to create the new Christian. One would not be wrong to say that the proclamation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified should be done through the proclamation of Holy Baptism. This is what is done time and again in the Epistles of the New Testament.

1. In their epistles to the Christian congregations of the first century the apostles regard Baptism as something that contains the full authority and power of the Gospel. In Baptism everyone is taken into Christ and receives all the benefits earned by Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Thus, a connection can be made between Jesus’ words in Mark 10:38-39 and Paul’s words in Romans 6:3 ff.

“Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Now when we were baptized into His death, we were buried with Him

so that, as Christ was raised from the dead with the same glory as the Father's we too will live a new life. If we were united with Him also in the likeness of His death, then we will be united with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection. We know that our old self was nailed with Him to the cross to render our sinful body powerless.” (Rom. 6:3ff)



“For you are all God's children by believing in Christ Jesus because all of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal 3:26)

2. Baptism washes away sin, gives us a new birth, and imparts the Holy Spirit. ***“He saved us by the washing in which the Holy Spirit gives us new birth and a new life. He poured a rich measure of this Spirit on us through Jesus Christ our Savior.”*** (Titus 3:5-6)

3. Without this new birth there is no forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Baptism is essential to the Christian life. When a person is baptized, the Holy Spirit is imparted and a new nature is created. The Believer is given a Helper who dwells within. ***“Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the absolute truth, if anyone is not born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, but what is born of the Spirit is spirit.’”*** John 3:5-6.

4. Baptism saves! There should be no question about the saving power of Baptism. Scripture clearly teaches that Baptism actually gives salvation and guarantees us a good conscience before God because it is tied to the death and resurrection of Jesus. ***“In this ark a few, that is eight persons, were saved by water. In the same way also, Baptism now saves us, not by washing dirt from the body, but by guaranteeing us a good conscience before God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*** 1 Peter 3:20-21

5. There is only one Baptism in the Christian Church for all people. ***“There is one body and one Spirit—even as you have been called to share one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.”*** Eph. 4:5

6. There is no age limit for Baptism. All people are sinful and unclean from the moment of conception (Ps.51:5). “Children of wrath” Paul writes. If one allows the text to speak clearly, people of all ages: adults, children, and infants are to be included in Baptism. As we have learned Jesus Himself said, ***“that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”***

7. Baptism replaces the Old Testament covenant of circumcision in which infants were included. ***“In Him you also were circumcised, not by human hands but by putting away the sinful body by the circumcision of Christ, since you were buried with Him in Baptism and raised with Him through faith produced by God, who raised Him from the dead.”*** (Col. 2:11)

Just as circumcision was the means (the way) God included children in the Old Testament covenant, Baptism is now the way by which God claims even the youngest human beings for His kingdom, with an even greater gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that God took circumcision very seriously. So serious was God about

including children in the covenant that God almost killed Moses for not circumcising his son. Moses was spared only because his wife took the matter into her own hands (Ex.4:24-26). It also displeased God when circumcision was neglected by Israel in the wilderness (Joshua 5:7-8).

8. Entire households were baptized (Acts. 16:15; 16:33; 1 Cor.1:16.) It is unreasonable to deny that infants and young children were not included in these households and the burden of proof that children and infants were not among those in these households rests with those who would have us believe that the households, or families (depending on translation) spoken of in the New Testament did not have little children in them.

Resolving a Problem

Any discussion on the new life in Baptism must also be careful to include an explanation between faith and the sacrament of Baptism. Admittedly, this is one of the most difficult aspects of the Christian faith to explain because we are dealing with the divine mystery of conversion.

But we must again submit our human reason and preconceived notion on this doctrine to the Word of God. Dr. David Scaer offers the following explanation of the relationship between faith and God's work in Baptism in this way.

Scripture uses very strong language in describing the benefits of Baptism and perhaps a superficial reading of them would indicate that Baptism gives blessing irrespective of faith...Baptism is always an activity of the Triune God. Baptism is something that God does and belongs to His work. Faith on the other hand, though created by the Holy Spirit, is nevertheless a work of man, but not a meritorious work.¹ God never believes, but it is always the individual. Baptism is God instrument for appropriating grace to mankind...In Baptism and faith, God and man meet. Baptism is not absolute grace in the sense that Baptism is the source, origin, and manufacturer of grace. Whatever Christ did for our salvation are put by God into Baptism....a casual reading of the New Testament will show this joint activity of both Baptism and faith. (1) "He who believes and is Baptized will be saved." (2) "Repent and be Baptized...so those who receive His word were Baptized." (3) "But when they believed Phillip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God...they were baptized." (4) "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul and when she was baptized..." (5) "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved and he was baptized at once...."²

There are four major theological sections in the New Testament on Baptism. They are Romans 6, Galatians 3:24-27, Colossians 2:10f, and Hebrews 10:22-24. In all of these cases, there is a direct reference to faith and Baptism. "Thus, whenever the blessings of Baptism are discussed they are discussed along the side of faith. This is not

¹. Faith is a gift of God. It is created by the work of the Holy Spirit and resides in the new nature. Yet, just as a gift becomes the property of the recipient, so faith becomes the property of the believer. He or she can nurture it, or allow it to starve to death. But it is the believers faith.

². Life, New Life, and Baptism, Dr. David Scaer, Concordia Theological Seminary Press. pp. 26-27.

to give the impression that the blessings present in Baptism are in any way dependent of faith, but the reception of these blessings are dependent on faith.”³

Faith receives all that Baptism gives. It does so before, during, and after the act of Baptism. But Baptism is not dependent on the act of faith. God is the actor in Baptism. God bestows upon the baptized the gift of the entire Gospel. Baptism gives; faith receives. Yet, at the same time faith is a gift given by God.

Summary and Conclusion

Our walk through the New Testament regarding the doctrine of Holy Baptism has demonstrated just how powerful and dynamic this particular means of grace is. The results can be summarized in this way:

Baptism in Gospels: John’s Baptism of Repentance is for the forgiveness of sin. John’s Baptism comes from God in heaven, not men; Jesus in His earthly ministry takes over the act of baptizing and baptizes more than did John; Christ Jesus speaks of His entire work as a baptism into which the disciples and all believers will be baptized; The Holy Spirit will be given in the new Baptism; the church is commanded to make disciples by baptizing and teaching people from all nations.

Baptism in the Book of Acts: In Baptism, God gives a promise to even children; faith and repentance are immediately followed by Baptism (they are tied as closely in time as circumstance permits); in Baptism sin is washed away; The Holy Spirit is given; entire households, families are baptized.

Baptism in the Epistles: In Baptism, we are buried with Christ in His crucifixion, we are raised in His resurrection; our sin is washed away; Baptism now saves us; Baptism replaces circumcision; Baptism is the washing of regeneration-a new nature is created; it unites in Christ; unites in one faith, one Lord; there is only one Baptism.

The Holy Spirit creates the miracle of faith in young and old alike, even infants, through the Word and through Baptism. There is no “magical age of accountability” at which time one must come to Jesus Christ. And more importantly there is no magical age at which time the Gospel will come to a person. It comes to people in every place and of every age. The Gospel claims who it will and when it will. God has chosen to use the very means of grace given to the Church to make our adoption complete. The Word rightly preached and taught and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are God’s tools of conversion.

³. Scaer, p. 31.

Human beings contribute nothing to their own conversion. Salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, for Christ's sake alone. As people grow up in the Church, they learn what God has done for them in Christ on the cross and how He applied His justifying work to them in the Word and Sacraments. The work begun in Baptism is lived out in daily repentance. Christians are no longer in bondage to sin. *"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."* (Rom. 6:18)



In Baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings — victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts. In short, the blessings of Baptism are so boundless that if timid nature considers them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true. Suppose there were a physician who had such skill that people would not die, or even though they died would afterward live forever. Just think how the world would snow and rain money upon him! Because of the pressing crowd of rich men no one else could get near him. Now, here in Baptism there is brought free to every man's door just such a priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of all men.⁴

[IV] The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

in the plain form in which the head of the family shall teach it to his household

What is baptism?

Answer: Baptism is not merely water, but it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's Word.

What is this Word of God?

Answer: As recorded in Matthew 28:19, our Lord Christ said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

What gifts or benefits does Baptism bestow?

⁴. Large Catechism, Baptism, Tappert Ed. 41-43.

Answer: It affects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare.

What is this Word and promise of God?

Answer: As recorded in Mark 16:16, our Lord Christ said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

How can water produce such great effects?

Answer: It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water. For without the Word of God the water is merely water and no Baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul wrote to Titus (3:5-8), “He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. This saying is sure.

What does such baptizing with water signify?

Answer: It signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God’s presence.

Where is this written?

Answer: In Romans 6:4, St. Paul wrote, “*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*”⁵

⁵. *Small Catechism*, Book of Concord, Tappert ed.