



Baptized for This Moment: *A Bible Study*

BY TIMOTHY PAULS

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St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

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Table of Contents

Foreword	i
Introduction	ii
Lesson 1: Baptized	1
Lesson 2: Repent and Be Baptized	7
Lesson 3: Baptized for Witness	14
Lesson 4: Baptized for Mercy	22
Lesson 5: Baptized for Life Together	29
An Afterword	37
Addendum: A Hymn for Each Lesson	39

Foreword

Dear Friends,

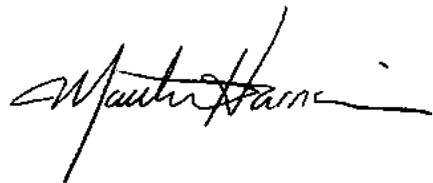
What a joy it is to be “Baptized for This Moment”! That life-giving freedom is the theme for the upcoming 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the banner under which our pastoral and lay delegates will join together in the important work of the Church.

But that theme and that joy aren’t just for those who will travel to St. Louis in July 2013. They’re ours, all of us, each one who has been baptized into Christ. In those waters, the ones combined with God’s Word, we are saved, forgiven, confident and sure.

That’s what this Bible study so wonderfully teaches, and that’s why I urge you to use it in your church and your home, among seasoned Lutherans and youth alike. This study, which explains what it means to be baptized for this time and place, and specifically what that looks like in the life of the Church, will remind you that, as the author, the Rev. Tim Pauls, writes, “You live as one who is certain of God’s favor for

Jesus’ sake. You’ve been joined to His death and resurrection, raised up a new creation. You’re not a servant who hopes to do well enough so that the Lord permits you to stick around for another day. You’re a child of God. His kingdom is yours forever. You know this because you’re baptized.”

Use this study to dive in to God’s Word. Learn from it. Ponder it. Rejoice in it. The Lord blesses, and I’m confident that He will work your study of His Word for good. And as He does, He will prepare us all to go forth together, confident in our bold WITNESS to the Gospel, certain in our works of MERCY and joyful in our LIFE TOGETHER. Truly, we are “Baptized for This Moment”!



THE REV. DR. MATTHEW C. HARRISON
LENT 2013

Introduction

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Divine Service in the Lutheran Church begins with . . . an incomplete sentence. It doesn't have a subject, a verb or a direct object. It is a prepositional phrase. So, what is the rest of the sentence? How does it begin?

Maybe we should ask: Where and when does the sentence begin? I remember a pastor who told me, "You want to know where the sentence begins? It begins at the font. The first part of the sentence is, 'I baptize you.' " As in, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Then he said something like, "For each Christian, the sentence only begins once. But what starts with Holy Baptism is life that continues, life that's sustained and renewed each time we hear the Word and receive the Lord's Supper. So, we keep on hearing the rest of the sentence, which says, 'I was baptized, and I am still baptized.' And we keep on adding our amen."

I am baptized. Amen: Let it be so.

Pretty brilliant, if you ask me. I don't know if that's why the Invocation is an incomplete sentence, but it keeps teaching me that Baptism isn't just a historical moment in the past. Christians live in

their Baptism daily. We are baptized in this moment, for this moment too. To borrow from Dr. Luther, what does this mean?

It means that you live as one who is certain of God's favor for Jesus' sake. You've been joined to His death and resurrection, raised up a new creation. You're not a servant who hopes to do well enough so that the Lord permits you to stick around for another day. You're a child of God. His kingdom is yours forever. You know this because you're baptized.

It means that you live as one set free to serve.

Christians have God-given tasks to do, like speaking the Gospel, caring for those in need and maintaining unity in faith and life together. These aren't chores that you have to slog through so that God will love you more. (He's already given His Son to die for you; how could He love you more?) It means that God gives you the privilege of being His mouth and hands to those around you and that you're set free to do these things. Why? Because you're baptized.

God gives you the privilege of being His mouth and hands to those around you and you're set free to do these things.

It means that you live as one with hope. In a world of strife, persecution, terminal diagnoses and death lurking every day, you live with the joy of knowing that Christ has conquered sin, death and the devil. Because you are baptized, you know that He has conquered these enemies for you. They'll still harass you in this world, but even on the worst of days you can remind yourself, "I am baptized." As one baptized, you know the end of the story: It begins with the resurrection of the dead and continues with

the life of the world to come.

As Luther wrote in the Large Catechism, "So when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say, 'Nevertheless, I am baptized. And if I am baptized, it is promised to me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body' " (Large Catechism IV 44).

You were baptized? And so you are baptized . . . for this moment and forever.

Lesson 1: Baptized

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (LUKE 11:13)

Iwouldn't say my wife and I are experts at parenting, but we made an important decision before our first kid was born.

We decided not to charge our children to be part of the family.

I did give them a bill one time, just for grins. It said something like, "Just a reminder that the privilege of being our child still costs you only \$5 per week. Oh, and you're approximately 613 weeks behind in payments."

If you want to see bewildered looks on the faces of small children, ask them, "How much do you have to pay your parents to be part of the family?" The puzzled expressions are as amusing as they are genuine. Pay to belong to the family? The thought has never occurred to them before. Not once have they received a bill for the privilege of being their parents' children. It's inconceivable. Everything they have has been a gift so far. Pay?

A fun follow-up question is to ask, "Well, if you don't pay to be your parents' kids, then what makes you your parents' kids?" They probably haven't thought about that

one either, but give them enough time and coaxing, and one of them will finally say, "Because . . . we were born?"

Yes!

Kids belong to a family because they were born into the family. At least, that's generally true. But whether they're born or adopted, membership in the family isn't earned. It's given.

Baptism is our birth into the family of God. By the washing of water and the Word, we are made God's beloved children. We haven't earned it; there's no way we could. No, it's given to us solely for the sake of Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification.

One last question for the children: "How do you know you're part of your family?" This can be a puzzler too. They probably don't carry a copy of their birth certificate with them, but the answer is simple. They know they're part of the family because their parents say so. They have their word on it, and they trust it to be true.

This Bible study was written in preparation for the 2013 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod under

the theme “Baptized for This Moment.” We’ll spend some time reaffirming and rejoicing in what a great gift Holy Baptism is. Then we’ll move on to the next question: What does it mean to live in your Baptism?

For now, though, let’s spend some time looking at the gift of Holy Baptism. We’re going to look at two passages with the goals that we:

- Rejoice that Holy Baptism is God’s work and gift to us.
- Better understand how Holy Baptism is foundational to the Christian life.
- Be able to articulate what it means to say “I am baptized” and what it means to live daily in our Baptism.

Born of Water and the Spirit

Read through John 3:1–17 and discuss the following questions.

1. How is Nicodemus described in John 3:1? What do we know about the offices he holds?
2. Nicodemus declares Jesus to be a “teacher come from God” in verse 2. Assuming he is sincere, what does he expect Jesus to teach?
3. When Jesus speaks of salvation in verse 3, His response perplexes Nicodemus. Aside from the physical impossibility of what Jesus suggests, why else would this confound the Pharisee?
4. Jesus expands on what it means to be born again in verses 5–8. What does He say, and what does it mean?
5. According to verses 11–12, why doesn’t Nicodemus understand?
6. John 3:14–17 features one of the most-recognized passages of Scripture. Why does Jesus include this Gospel in a discussion about Baptism? (See also Rom. 6:3–5.)

So far then, here’s what we’ve got about Holy Baptism: (1) Through Holy Baptism, one is born again into the family of God. (2) Holy Baptism — being born again — is not

man’s work, but the work of the Holy Spirit. (You don’t do anything to be born!) (3) In Holy Baptism, you are joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection. (4) Apart from faith, one will reject the gifts given in Holy Baptism. (5) But by faith, you know that in Holy Baptism you’re born again in the family of God.

From Captives to Kids

In Galatians, St. Paul describes the miraculous work of Holy Baptism. Read Gal. 3:23–4:7 and discuss the following questions.

7. How are we described apart from faith in verse 23? What does this mean?
8. St. Paul doesn’t describe the Law as a prison warden. What does he call the Law? What does this mean?
9. According to verses 25–27, our status has changed. How?
10. St. Paul describes our enslavement apart from faith again in Gal. 4:1–3. What delivers us from this slavery (vv. 4–5)?
11. What are we called in verses 5–7? How does this take place?
12. Back up to 3:29 for our last question: According to what are you heirs? What does this mean?

Wrapping Up

We could ask you the same questions we posed to kids in the introduction: How much did you pay to be part of the family of God? If you didn’t pay, how did you get to be part of God’s family? How do you know you’re part of the family of God? The answers are as clear as they are joyous: You didn’t pay anything to be part of God’s family, but you were born into it by means of Holy Baptism. How do you know? Because the Lord says so in His Word.

It is vital to remember always that although you didn’t pay to become a child of God, there was a great cost: the death of Jesus on the cross in your place, for your sin. When Martin Luther extols the priceless worth of Holy Baptism, he writes, “This is

our consolation, that the believer in Christ has been assured and guaranteed that he is an heir of God, not a servant or a maid but a son, who is an heir to all the possessions. To acquire this privilege we should be ready to crawl to the ends of the world on our knees, yes, on our bare feet" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 22). Were that required, it would be worth it. But instead, the Lord made the trek to Calvary, weighed down with your cross, to make you an heir of the kingdom of God.

13. One last question. It's true enough to say, "I was baptized," but it's far more comforting to say, "I am baptized." Why? (Not only is it a comfort, but it is key to Lessons 2–5!)

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God and Father, we thank and praise You that You graciously preserve and enlarge Your family and have granted us the new birth in Holy Baptism and made us members of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and heirs of Your heavenly kingdom. We humbly implore You that You would keep us in our baptismal grace, that according to Your good pleasure we may faithfully grow to lead a godly life to the praise and honor of Your holy name and finally, with all Your saints, obtain the promised inheritance of heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Although you didn't pay to become a child of God, there was a great cost: the death of Jesus on the cross in your place, for your sin.

(Adapted from *LSB*, p. 271.)

NOTES FOR LEADERS

1. Nicodemus is described as a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a sect that appeared in Judea following the Babylonian captivity. Named from the Hebrew word *parash* (meaning “to separate, to make distinct”), the Pharisees sought to separate themselves from any uncleanness or violation of God’s Law by creating additional laws — and lots of them! People are often tempted to view the Pharisees only in negative terms; however, this was a class of citizens seeking to preserve the Jews from manifest sin and the creep of pagan Roman culture. The problem for the Pharisees was that their intense devotion to the Law made them completely opposed to Christ and the Gospel: they believed that one is saved by keeping laws, not by the grace of God.

Nicodemus also is “a ruler of the Jews.” This makes him a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Pharisees, Sadducees and others who later condemn Jesus to death. One more credential appears later on in verse 10: Jesus calls Nicodemus “the teacher of Israel” (whereas Nicodemus calls Jesus only “a teacher” in v. 2). In Nicodemus, we have a heavy hitter, a teacher and ruler who was carefully trained to believe that one is saved by works of the Law.

The reason it is important to discuss these offices is so that we understand what sort of preconceived notions Nicodemus brings when he comes to speak to Jesus, because he filters all that he hears through his beliefs.

2. Nicodemus expects Jesus to teach in agreement with the Pharisees, who clearly believe that they are honoring God with their doctrine and practice.

3. Not only is being born again physically impossible, but it requires no works. It is something done to you (although your presence is certainly necessary!), not something you do. This is the foundation for the disagreement between Jesus and Nicodemus: one is teaching salvation by grace, the other salvation by doing — by keeping the Law.

It should be noted that the word again (in Greek, *anōthen*) carries the double meaning of “from above,” though most English translations make use of the former. This also appears to be how Nicodemus interprets Jesus’ statement.

4. To be “born of water and the Spirit” is to receive Holy Baptism. This is the washing of water and the Word, because the Holy Spirit works by means of the Word to forgive sins and strengthen faith. To be born of the Spirit is to be born again, born from above.

If the leader wishes to incorporate a review of “The Sacrament of Holy Baptism” in Luther’s Small Catechism, this is an excellent time to look at the first and second parts. The first part makes clear that Baptism is “water . . . combined with God’s word” where the Spirit is at work. The second part declares the benefits of Baptism: forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, all of which are given with entrance into the kingdom of heaven. While the first and second parts of the Small Catechism make use of other explanatory texts (Matt. 28:19 and Mark 16:16, respectively), both parts are taught by our Lord in John 3:5.

One more note: invariably when discussing John 3:5 in a group, someone asks whether anyone can be saved apart from Holy Baptism. The answer is yes, and the textbook example is the penitent thief on the cross (Luke 23:39–43). It must be noted that this is an exception and demonstration of God’s mercy, lest we begin to see Holy Baptism as an optional entry into the family of God. Rather than dwell too much on the rare exception, we should instead rejoice in this wondrous truth: “Baptism . . . now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21).

5. Nicodemus doesn’t receive the Word of Jesus because he doesn’t have faith. As long as he trusts in his own abilities and works to please God, he will reject Jesus and the Gospel. This is an important reminder that one is not saved apart from faith — another gift of God that clings to Jesus and the forgiveness He gives. If one does not have faith, he rejects the gifts God gives.

(If the leader wishes to include a review of “The Sacrament of Holy Baptism” in the Small Catechism as part of this study, this is an excellent opportunity to look at the third part. “How can water do such great things?” describes the necessity of “faith which trusts this word of God in the water.”)

By way of illustration, we introduced this lesson with the truth that children do nothing to be born or adopted into a family. Let’s imagine

a child who is adopted at a later age after a tough childhood and now is brought into a loving family. The family tells him that he's safe, he's family, that he can stay. What if he doesn't believe it? He leaves the house. Even though the gift is given, it is rejected by unbelief. So it is also with the gifts of God: Jesus is speaking to give salvation to Nicodemus, but if the latter doesn't believe it, he'll walk away. This remains a danger for the baptized. (See Heb. 3:12–19.)

6. The Gospel and Holy Baptism cannot be separated, because forgiveness is given in Holy Baptism. The one who is baptized is joined to Jesus' death, says Romans 6. This is the same death to which Jesus alludes in John 3:15–17. Thus, it is not incorrect to say that Holy Baptism is the Gospel. Because God sends His Son into this world, lost children of this world are brought into His family by means of Holy Baptism.

If the leader wishes to include a review of "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism" in the Small Catechism as part of this study, this is an excellent time to look at the fourth part, which is based on Rom. 6:4.

7. We are described as captives imprisoned under the Law. That's a word of imprisonment and enslavement, not of family or a loving home. The Law declares that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and we as captives can't escape that death sentence. Unforgiven and under the Law, we can only make the best of things until we are finally condemned for our sin.

8. The Law was given by God as a "guardian." This is a translation of the Greek word *paidagogos*, which was a slave whose job it was to make sure that his master's children went to school and received instruction. In other words, God did not declare His Law as a jailer to leave us despairing, but as a guardian to drive us to the Gospel. A child might feel justified in rebelling against the *paidagogos* (a mere servant, after all!) and refusing to be taken to school, but then he would face the wrath of his father. Likewise, the sinner who rebels against God's Law might feel perfectly justified in doing so, but then he faces God's wrath because he's refused the Law's work of driving him to the Gospel.

9. We are no longer captives under guard, awaiting death; miraculously, we are now sons of God! How has this transformation taken place? For one thing, it is "in Christ Jesus" (v. 26). It is only because of His death for our sins that we are delivered from sin to life. For another, it is "through faith," which clings to the forgiveness and life Jesus gives (see notes on question 5 above). And finally, this is given in Holy Baptism (v. 27); as those baptized, we have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. It is by Baptism that we are born again as children of God.

10. We are delivered by the person and work of Jesus. The Son of God is born of Mary. He is born under the Law of God, and He keeps that Law perfectly for us. Thus without sin, He doesn't have to die for Himself, so He dies for us — to redeem us! It is to this Jesus and His work that faith clings.

11. We are called sons and heirs. Paul says we are adopted as sons, and this has taken place in Holy Baptism (3:27).

A couple of notes are in order for the leader at this point, because this wonderful teaching is sometimes lost in favor of distractions. Some might object to connecting the adoption in 4:5 to Baptism in 3:27 on the basis that these take place in two different chapters of Galatians. It is important to remember that chapters and verses were added to the Bible long after the time of St. Paul (sometimes it's even helpful to print out a text without any chapter or verse numbers), and verses 3:27 and 4:5 are part of the same discussion. Sons become sons by Baptism in 3:26–27, while sons become sons by adoption in 4:5; therefore, Holy Baptism is the means by which we are adopted into the family of God.

Given the sensitivity to terms of gender in our modern society, some might voice unhappiness that St. Paul stipulates that we are sons of God, rather than "children" or "sons and daughters" of God. Some have, in fact, used this verse to demonstrate falsely that the Bible was written to favor men. Such is not the case: the word *son* is a metaphor here. At the time of St. Paul, to be a son was to be an heir. St. Paul declares that all Christians are sons because all are heirs of the Kingdom. It is not a slight against women, but a declaration that both sexes are saved by grace.

Along the lines of gender sensitivity, a

third distraction in our text has been created out of Gal. 3:28, which some have used to argue that women may now be ordained as pastors because in Christ “there is no male and female.” To assert this is to distort a text about justification into a text about vocation. (To carry out this argument to its absurd extreme, one would also have to argue that Christian men are enabled by Baptism to bear children.) We do well instead to stay focused on the Gospel that verse 28 delivers: it is an announcement that Christ has died for all nations, for those of every ethnicity, status and gender.

12. We are heirs according to promise: namely, the promise of forgiveness in Christ. In other

words, we are heirs because God says so. He declares us righteous — that is what it means to be justified (3:24). There is great comfort and security here. If servants are ill or unable to perform their tasks, they are dismissed, whereas children receive ongoing care. Eventually, servants leave a household, but children inherit it.

13. God gives life in Holy Baptism. To say “I was baptized” is to speak of a historical moment in the past. Again, that’s true and good. However, to say “I am baptized” is to say “I am — and remain — alive in Christ.” And if we are alive in Christ, then we are alive to do what He has set us free to do.

Lesson 2: Repent and Be Baptized

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.” (ACTS 2:38–39)

A profound moment in world history is the festival of Pentecost in Acts 2. Often called the “birthday of the Church,” Pentecost lays the foundation for how sinners are made into Christians and how Christians will live in their Baptism. This is important for another reason as well. Growing up as a Lutheran, I often heard a refrain that “the problem with Lutherans is that we’ve become terribly rigid and institutionalized. We have to get back to the doctrine and practice of the Christians in Acts 2.” Is that criticism true? Have we strayed from the Christian faith? A good look at Acts 2 is in order, so our goals for the day are to:

- Gain a greater understanding of the gift of repentance.
- Gain a greater appreciation of the blessings of Holy Baptism.
- Rejoice that Lutheran doctrine and practice is the doctrine and practice of the Christians in Acts 2.

On Pirates and Talents

Several years back, the movie “The Princess Bride” arrived in theaters with a plethora of

laughs and memorable quotes. As the hero Westley makes his way toward fame and fortune, he recounts the years he spent as a captive valet for the Dread Pirate Roberts. Every night, the day would end with the pirate captain saying the same words: “Good night, Westley. Good work. Sleep well.” And, “I’ll most likely kill you in the morning.”

Imagine if families worked that way, if parents sat a child down and said, “You’re our kid, and you’ll be our kid as long as you keep the rules well enough. We’ll review every night. If you’ve kept the rules, you can stay; if you’ve broken the rules, you’ll have to go.”

Yikes! How messed up would that childhood be? The child might be incredibly motivated to keep the rules and get the chores done, but he would be living his entire childhood in fear of his parents. But the relationship between parents and children should be defined by love and trust. Children should be confident that, even if they break the rules, they’re still part of the family. They might be grounded for a while, but their parents will most likely not kill

them in the morning.

While I've not heard anyone declare that the Christian's relationship to God is one of captive/pirate, many seem to think it's more of an employee/boss sort of setup: God has hired you for His company — the one holy Christian and apostolic Church — and if you perform consistently well, He'll keep you on for an everlasting management position. Thus many believe that you're saved by grace alone, but remaining a Christian is solely up to you and your job performance. If that were true, then your life as a Christian would be regulated by the fear of disappointing God, not the joy and security of being His child. You'd be looking to hide your sins from God, not confess them so that you might be absolved.

What joy and security you have because the Lord has said, "I baptize you."

Before we get to Acts 2, we need a quick review of Lesson 1, where we learned the joy of being born and being born again. Remember: Kids are not members of a family because they earn the right or pay for it, but because they are born into the family. So for a brief review, read through Luke 15:11–32. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is rather well-known, but it's incomplete without his older brother.

1. Although they seem like complete opposites, both brothers are guilty of the same sin. What is it? (Hint: Don't look at what they do, but look at what they confess, what they say they believe.)
2. With Lesson 1 in mind, what does this reinforce about our position as sons and heirs of the kingdom of God?

On to Pentecost!

Your study leader will set the stage with a summary of Acts 2:1–35. Then read Acts 2:36–47 and discuss the following questions.

3. When the crowd is cut to the heart, what do they ask Peter and the apostles in verse 37? What is good about this question? What is not so good?

4. In Acts 2:38, Peter first tells the people to repent. What is repentance, and what are they to repent of?
5. Along with repentance in verse 38, Peter tells the people to be baptized. What makes this Baptism significant?
6. Peter says that this Baptism is "for the forgiveness of your sins" and that those who are baptized "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Baptism, forgiveness and the Holy Spirit are inseparable. Read Titus 3:4–8. How does Holy Baptism change the relationship of the baptized to God? Why is this such a comfort?
What joy and security you have because the Lord has said, "I baptize you."
7. As long as we're in Titus for a moment, look at verse 8. For believers, what follows Holy Baptism? Is this found in the rest of Acts 2?
8. According to Acts 2:39, for whom is this promise in Baptism given?
9. In verse 41, what is the result of Peter's proclamation of Law and Gospel?
10. According to verse 42, what do the baptized do?
11. In verses 44–47, what do the believers do in response to the grace they have received? Why do they do these things?

Wrapping Up

The Christians of Acts 2 were baptized. Then they continued in the Word and Holy Communion. They went about works of mercy and maintained their life together. That is the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions. God grant that it be our doctrine and practice too!

Acts 2 certainly doesn't treat Holy Baptism as a one-time ritual, but as the beginning of new life in Christ. No wonder Jesus says in John 3 that we are born again by water and the Spirit. In the Large Catechism, Martin Luther wrote:

“Therefore, every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to do all his life. For he has always enough to do by believing firmly what Baptism promises and brings: victory over death and the devil (Romans 6:3–6), forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38), God’s grace (Titus 3:5–6), the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts (1 Corinthians 6:11)” (Large Catechism IV 41).

Far from a momentary event in the past, you are baptized for this moment. And forever.

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful Father, in the waters of Holy Baptism You have united Your children in the suffering and death of Your Son Jesus Christ, cleansing us by His blood. Renew in us the gift of Your Holy

Spirit, that we may live in daily contrition and repentance with a faith that ever clings to our Savior. Deliver us from the power of Satan and preserve us from false and dangerous doctrines, that we may remain faithful in hearing Christ’s Word and receiving His body and blood. Enable us to find joy and comfort only in Him, to love You and our neighbor, and to bear our cross with patience and joy until the day of the resurrection of our bodies to life immortal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Far from a momentary event in the past, you are baptized for this moment. And forever.

(Adapted from *LSB*, p. 274.)

NOTES FOR LEADERS

A brief review of Luke 15:11–32 has the potential for extended discussion, and the leader will want to budget time accordingly.

1. There are different answers possible here, such as breaking the Fourth Commandment and failing to honor one's parents. However, the sin both brothers share is that they think their work earns them a place in the household. The younger son believes that he can be in the household if he works to earn his place, and the older son believes that he belongs in the household because he's been earning his place all along. Neither son understands that sonship is a gift, not a position that is earned. The father's words are designed to teach both of them that they do not earn the right to be sons.

While *The Lutheran Study Bible* notes that the younger son's request for property is legally permissible, his departure and subsequent waste of his share hardly honors the father or supports the family. Once he has squandered all of it in terribly sinful ways, his plan is to return to his father's house as a servant, not as a son. (Given his sins, even that's a stretch!) He hopes that he can earn a place in the household, which will be an ongoing task for the rest of his life. So, before returning, he rehearses his speech in verses 18–19: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." When he stands before his father, the father lets him speak his confession of unworthiness, but he interrupts him before he can ask to be a servant. The father will hear none of that because his son is still his son, and now he has come home!

When the older son hears that his brother has returned, he refuses to go into the house. He does not want to be part of a household where the younger son is received. Instead, he complains to his father that he has never been rewarded for his years of hard work in the family as the responsible son. With these words, he betrays his belief that he has earned the right to be a son by his labors; but, like his brother, his membership in the family is not something he has earned. It is given to him by birth.

2. Our position as sons and heirs of God's kingdom is a gift given in Holy Baptism. Though

we sin every day, we do not earn our way back in by good works (like the younger son attempts to do), nor do we retain the right to remain the family by our own attempts at righteousness (like the older son believes). Rather, we confess the truth in words like those of the younger son: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21). For the sake of Jesus, the Father declares, "This is true, but you're still My beloved son — not by your works, but because My beloved, only-begotten Son died for you." In other words, this parable reinforces the wonderful truth that our membership in God's family is solely for the sake of Jesus. (God the Father has no desire for us to want to earn our sonship, because that would imply that Jesus' death wasn't enough. This does not mean that God does not desire good works, as we'll see in Lessons 3–5. However, such works do not earn a place in the family. They are only good because we have already been brought into the family by the grace of God in Holy Baptism.)

On to Pentecost!

The content of Acts 2 is enough to fill several hours of study and discussion. For the purposes of this study, the leader will want to summarize Acts 2:1–35 with the following points.

- Jesus has told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they "are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). This is fulfilled at Pentecost with the arrival of the Holy Spirit.
- Pentecost is the Greek name for the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, which took place 50 days ("a week of weeks") after Passover. Like Passover, it was a pilgrimage feast in which every Jewish male was required to journey to Jerusalem. This explains the presence of "Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven" in Jerusalem at the time of the feast (v. 5). Those who were devout would have been well-versed in the Old Testament and would have been waiting for the Messiah to come. In Peter's sermon, they would find out that He had come. They didn't just miss Him, though; they killed Him.
- In the passage, the Holy Spirit arrives with the sound of a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire. However, He will work to gather people into God's family by means of the preached

Word and Holy Baptism.

- Peter's sermon may be divided into the following parts:

Verses 14–21: Peter declares that what is happening is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:28–32a. In doing so, he declares that the Holy Spirit has come and that they are now living in the last days. What is provided to the Church at Pentecost will preserve the Church until Christ's return in glory. This is the Holy Spirit at work in the Word and Sacraments.

Verses 22–23: In connection with the mighty works mentioned in the Joel prophecy, Peter declares that God sent Jesus of Nazareth, who worked many miracles to prove His credentials as Messiah and who was then crucified. In fact, Peter declares that Jesus was “crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men,” for the pilgrims would also have been in the city for Passover. The “lawless men” were the Gentile Romans, who acted at the bidding of the Pharisees — the teachers of the Law.

Verses 24–32: Peter announces that Jesus is risen from the dead and demonstrates that David prophesied of the resurrection in the Book of Psalms.

Verses 33–35: Finally, Peter announces that this is the same Jesus who is ascended to God's right hand and has poured out the Holy Spirit. Just before Peter's proclamation of Holy Baptism, he is preaching the Triune God!

The sermon so far is one of convicting Law; the people have heard that the Messiah came, and they killed Him. Now He is alive and ascended into heaven, but what does this mean for them? After all, the last quote from the Psalms is Ps. 110:1, announcing that Jesus will conquer His enemies. Presumably, approving of His crucifixion would make those in this crowd enemies of Jesus. And if He is now seated at God's right hand forever, there's no getting away. This brings Peter to his final announcement of crushing Law in verse 36, which leads into question 3 of this study: “Let

all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

3. The question is good in that it demonstrates their awareness of their sin and their desire to assuage the wrath of God that they have earned. This is what the Law does. The question, however, is insufficient: “What shall we do?” It is not quite the same as saying, “How can we be saved?” Steeped in the influence of the Pharisees, it is tempting for these hearers to believe that any chance of salvation depends upon their work to make up for their sin. (Imagine the terror if that is their theology! How does one make up for killing God's Son?)

4. Repentance has two parts: contrition over sin and trust that God forgives for the sake of Jesus (cf. Augsburg Confession XII). Literally, repentance (Greek: *metanoia*) is a “change of mind,” to stop thinking one way and to start thinking another. Those in the crowd were already contrite about the death of Jesus, but they also needed to repent of their belief that they could do something to make up for their sins before God.

It is quite possible that someone in the Bible study will object, saying that people must do something to be saved — they must repent! However, Peter makes it clear three times in Acts that repentance — godly contrition and faith — is a gift of God, not a work of man (Acts 3:26; 5:31; 11:18).

5. This Baptism is “in the name of Jesus Christ.” “Be baptized” is a striking exhortation, perhaps far more so to the crowd than to Christians some 2,000 years later. When we hear baptize, we automatically think of Holy Baptism, but the word in Greek simply means “to wash.” When people washed the dishes in New Testament times, they were baptizing the dishes (Mark 7:4). It's striking that this contrite crowd asks, in effect, “Whatever can we do to make up for killing the Messiah?” and Peter tells them to be washed with water. This instruction has a history of angering those who consider it too simple a thing to make a difference (see 2 Kings 5:10–12, where the word for wash in the Septuagint is also baptize). In this case, they are not even to do the act of washing; they are to be washed.

Though it sounds foolish to ears without faith, this is more than simple water. It is water “included in God’s command and combined with God’s word” (Small Catechism, “What is Baptism?”). How can this water do such great things? Because they are washed “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Rather than destroy them for the sin and hostility that led to His crucifixion, the Lord places His name on them and calls them His own. He brings them into His family as His beloved children.

6. Titus 3:5–8a is the text selected by Luther in the Small Catechism to answer the question “How can water do such great things?” and Baptism, forgiveness and the Holy Spirit are all prominent in this text. (So is the Holy Trinity in vv. 5–6!) The transformation is startling: by Holy Baptism, enemies of God are made into His heirs. They are brought into the household of faith (cf. Eph. 2:19–22).

In Acts 2, this announcement of forgiveness is so greatly comforting! Where the people are fearful of what price they must pay to make up for the death of Jesus, Peter tells them that the debt is forgiven — because of the death of Jesus! Where they might be wondering where they must flee to get away from an angry, resurrected Messiah, Peter declares that the Messiah is risen to bring them into His kingdom.

Christians are tempted to take Holy Baptism for granted, yet there are few things that have more comfort when death is near. Failing health and approaching death tempt the dying to believe that they remain unforgiven, haunting them with the fact that their own works are helpless to save them. But Baptism declares that no matter how the grave rages, they are beloved children of God, and as the grave surrendered Jesus, so it must also surrender His people.

7. Holy Baptism isn’t just followed by good works but by devotion to good works. This is found among the first Christians in Acts 2:42–47. It should also characterize the life of baptized Christians today, as we’ll see in Lessons 3–5.

8. This promise given in Holy Baptism is not a one-day, one-time offer for those who happened to be in Jerusalem that day, but it is “for your children and for all who are far off.”

The word for children (Greek: *teknon*) is not age-specific, but about origin. My sons will still be my children in this sense even when they are 50 years old. This does not exclude young children from Baptism by any means, but instead includes them; *teknon* may refer to an adult (2 Tim. 2:1), a 12-year-old (Luke 2:48) or a newborn (Rev. 12:4). “All who are far off” includes both Jews and Gentiles, which would have been striking to those who had been taught that the Messiah was primarily the Savior of the Jews. With verse 39, Peter declares that forgiveness given in Holy Baptism is for all people for all time to come, regardless of age or ethnicity.

Participants using the English Standard Version (ESV) may note that in verse 40, the ESV translates Peter as preaching “Save yourselves,” which would seem to contradict the Gospel that we are saved by grace alone. This is an unfortunate translation by the ESV; the original Greek word is a passive verb, and the New King James Version, among others, is better with its translation, “Be saved.”

9. Three thousand believe and are baptized. It should be noted that some have misinterpreted this verse for applications that are not in agreement with Scripture. One of those misinterpretations is that wherever the Word is preached in a “Spirit-filled” manner, large numbers of conversions will take place; ergo, a congregation that experiences little growth or even loss must therefore be lacking the Holy Spirit. Another worrisome application is that adult confirmation classes may properly be shortened to a very brief instruction because these believers were baptized after one short sermon. Both applications fail to honor the text. Regarding the first, we give thanks to God for the 3,000 who were baptized that day; we also note that there are plenty of examples where the preached Word yielded little more than rejection (John 6:66) or even persecution (Acts 7:58; 14:19). Different mission fields will have different harvests (Matt. 13:3–23), and the Lord commands us to be faithful, no matter the results that we see.

Regarding the second, it should be noted that the Pentecost crowds were “devout men” (v. 5). They were trained in the Old Testament Scriptures and thus knew much about the Messiah already. Peter is filling in the last few

blanks about the person and work of Christ. The goal of instruction is to instruct, not to complete an objective in a minimal amount of time. The author suggests that evangelism of American adults is a far more difficult mission field than Jerusalem in Acts 2, for the Church today is preaching the Word in a highly secularized, biblically illiterate society. In our present time, it is difficult to imagine a pastor and congregation encountering a pool of thousands of such devout people as their mission field!

10. The believers devote themselves to the apostles' teaching; in other words, they devote themselves to the Word of God. They continue to grow in faith and knowledge by means of the Word, where the Spirit is at work to deliver grace and faith.

They also devote themselves to "the fellowship, to the breaking of bread." It has been well argued that this is in reference to the Lord's Supper, since "the breaking of bread" becomes a euphemism for Holy Communion in the New Testament (1 Cor. 10:16; cf. Luke 24:35).

The believers also devote themselves to "the prayers." These are devout Jews who have followed an order of service — a liturgy — in the synagogue throughout their lives. This liturgy included prayers, benedictions, psalms

and other Old Testament readings. As followers of Christ, the believers in Acts 2 don't abandon these; rather, all indications are that they now use these to proclaim Christ! Thus they go to the temple each day (Acts 2:46), and Paul normally begins each evangelism stop with a trip to the synagogue. (See Acts 13:14ff.)

11. Along with the ongoing reception of the Means of Grace, the description of the believers' lives falls into three categories at the end of Acts 2.

First, the believers continue to praise God. As we sing in one of the post-Communion canticles, to praise God is to "tell everyone what He has done" (*LSB*, p. 164; cf. Ps. 35:28.) Throughout the Book of Psalms, songs of praise declare the work of God. In other words, the baptized of Acts 2 continue to witness.

Second, they sell what they have and distribute the proceeds to those in need. In other words, the baptized of Acts 2 continue in acts of mercy.

Third, they continue together in worship and doctrine; as the body of Christ, they go about their life together.

Why do they do these things? Because that is what the people of God do — not because they have to, but because they can. We will look at this more in Lessons 3–5.

Lesson 3: Baptized for Witness

And day by day, attending the temple together . . . [they were] praising God and having favor with all the people. (ACTS 2:46-47)

Good Works: Chore or Cheer?

Imagine a child who has spent several years as an orphan on the streets. For those years, he's banded together with a gang of others, and they've spent their days stealing for survival and committing petty crimes and vandalism to pass the time. One day, he's adopted into a family. Suddenly, he has safety, parents, food, lodging and more. He has the prospect of a long life, rather than sickness and early death on the streets. Overall, the advantages are huge and the deliverance unbelievable!

But outside the house, the old gang is still around, calling him to come back out and mix it up like he used to do. It's tempting at times; he liked the freedom he had over his actions, and he sort of misses the old group. Every day he lives a life of repentance: When his mind wanders back to the streets, he reminds himself that he's not an orphan anymore. He lives in his adoption, with all of its blessings. Thankful for that gift, he seeks to live as one who has been brought into a loving family.

We are baptized into God's family, born again without doing anything. We're adopted by grace (Rom. 8:15), not by works. The devil and world are still lurking around, calling us to leave the family and join

the old gang again; and our sinful nature coaxes us to miss the "freedom" of doing whatever we want. Daily then, we live a life of repentance. We live in our Baptism; we thankfully acknowledge that we're no longer God's enemies, but His children. And so we confess our sins that would eventually coax us to leave the family.

Inside the family, we have things to do. Labor isn't a curse of sin, but a gift of God given before the Fall (Gen. 2:15). As long as we've got that selfish sinful nature hanging on, though, we'll be stubborn kids. We'll be tempted to view the tasks that God gives as no better than chores we have to do so that our Father doesn't get angry — not as tasks we are free to do in Christ.

This is an important point for the next three lessons of this Bible study. For the one living in Baptism, the Law of God isn't something he has to do, but something he gets to do. He is set free from sin to do what God would have him do. The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord does us a great service by summing it up like this:

When a person has been converted, and is thus enlightened, and his will is renewed, then a person wants to do what is good (so far as he is regenerate or a new man). Then that person will

“delight in the law of God, in [his] inner being” (Romans 7:22) and from that time forward does good to such an extent and as long as he is moved by God’s Spirit, as Paul says [in Romans 8:14], “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” This moving by the Holy Spirit is not a coercion. The converted person does good spontaneously, as David says [in Psalm 110:3], “Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power.” Nevertheless, the conflict between the flesh and spirit remains in the regenerate. (Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord II 63–64)

The Solid Declaration then goes on to reference Rom. 7:21–23, 25 and Gal. 5:17.

Discuss this quote and answer the following questions:

1. What should the attitude of the baptized people of God be toward works of witness, mercy and maintaining life together?
2. Does God need us to do these works of witness, mercy and life together? What are the consequences if Christians fail to do what they are set free to do?
3. Read Rom. 6:1–4, 15–18. How does it relate to the quote from the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord? What does Baptism have to do with it?
4. What prevents the baptized from doing such works? What is the solution?

Keeping that in mind, spend a few minutes reading through the Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25:14–30. People often focus on the work of the stewards, but what does it teach about the faith of the stewards? Read through the parable and discuss the following questions:

5. It’s obvious that the third servant’s actions differ from the first two, because he buries the one talent in the ground. But according to verses 24–25, why does he do so? What is his accusation against the master? Does he have any evidence

to support his accusation? What do the actions of the other stewards say about their master?

6. What does this teach us as the baptized — as children of God in our Master’s household?

Now that we’ve got that down, we can finally get to our goals for the lesson, which are to:

- Gain appreciation for the fact that we are set free to do good works, including evangelism.
- Better identify what evangelism is.
- Understand what makes evangelism difficult and what is to be done about it.

The Beatings Will Continue . . .

There’s something missing from the Gospels and the

Book of Acts: there are no witnessing workshops, and the Early Church fails to establish an evangelism committee.

Somehow, though, the Word gets out.

How? It’s astonishing. People don’t have to be told to tell about Jesus; His person and work are such good news that the people won’t stop talking about Him. It’s as if they can’t stop! (For a few examples, see Luke 2:17; Mark 7:36–37; Matt. 9:30–31; Luke 5:14–15.)

This is, I think, reason for some serious consideration. When a young woman becomes engaged to be married, her friends rarely have to coax her to spread the news. New parents do not have to be asked twice to tell you about their baby. Were the Seahawks to win the Super Bowl, the author would speak freely. When we have news that is important or joyful, we’re don’t want to keep it to ourselves.

Yet Christians are usually reluctant to talk about the faith with others. For as long as I’ve been around, this has led to a myriad of resources like books, workshops and committees designed to increase the work of evangelism among Christians. I’ve

We live in our Baptism; we thankfully acknowledge that we’re no longer God’s enemies, but His children.

experienced a few, and unfortunately too many go something like this:

Leader: Why don't you want to witness to others?

Me: I get nervous.

Leader: Well, you shouldn't be nervous, so don't be.

Me: Great. Now I feel guilty about not witnessing and about being nervous.

Leader: That's the spirit! Now get out there and evangelize!

Such attempts to encourage witnessing seem to follow the philosophy of the T-shirt that reads: "The beatings will continue until morale improves." It feels a lot more like a household slave being flogged into obedience, rather than a child who has the privilege of telling what Jesus has done. So we're going to take a different route.

We can learn some important things about evangelism from the Christians in Acts 3–4, one story spread over two days. The first Christians are just getting on their feet, and now there's trouble.

7. Read Acts 3:1–7. Why is it a big deal that the man has been lame from birth? How does Peter heal him?
8. What does the man do as soon as he is able to walk (Acts 3:8)? What do you suppose he is saying?
9. The crowd gathers around Peter and John, and Peter preaches a sermon quite similar to the one on Pentecost in 3:12–26. Read through it if you have time; there are some notes in the leader's section. How does Peter know all the stuff that he's saying?
10. As Acts 4 begins, Peter and John are arrested by the temple authorities and held overnight for trial. The following day, Peter answers their accusers in 4:8–12. What does he say? Why does Peter say these things, and what is especially remarkable about verse 12?
11. The rulers order Peter and John to cease speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus, though they're rightly afraid of

how this will play out with a crowd that desires life and healing. Read the apostles' response in 4:19–20. How do they define evangelism in 4:20? What might be the reasons for their statement in verse 20?

12. When the apostles return to their friends, the believers pray. Read verses 24–31. What do they say about the opposition that they have experienced and will continue to encounter? Knowing that opposition will come, for what do they pray in verse 29? How does the Lord answer in verse 31?

So, here are a few things we've learned from Acts 3–4 about evangelism.

Evangelism is simply telling the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done. Peter and John describe it in Acts 4:20

Evangelism is simply telling the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done.

as telling what they have seen and heard. It is not a sales pitch, nor is there an element of "closing the deal." Bringing people to repentance and faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. While it's wise to be sensitive to the hearer's situation, the Gospel itself is the power of salvation for all who believe.

Opposition to the Gospel is to be expected. It comes from outside the Church from the devil and the world, and it is also to be expected from within, as our sinful flesh doesn't want anything to do with it.

Early believers proclaimed the Gospel because they wanted to. When they encountered opposition, they prayed for boldness so that they might keep speaking.

Discussion

13. What are some common reasons Christians don't like to witness? Is it proper to call these reasons sin?
14. Here's where we want to avoid the beatings until morale improves, because that is not the way of the family of God. (The Law is still to be preached, but so is the Gospel!) If all of these reasons are sinful, then the answer doesn't start

with “Stop doing these things.” Where does the answer begin for the baptized people of God, and where does it go from there?

15. Did you know that you probably witness more and know more than you think? Where/when might you be telling who Jesus is and what He has done on a regular basis?

The answer to question 15 is going to get your old sinful nature whispering, “See? You’re doing enough already; you don’t have to do any more than that.” For most, that will be a seductive temptation. It’s also harmful to your faith. It’s like saying, “I have enough Word and grace in me so that I’m doing OK,” but the Lord would fill you with His Word and grace until they overflow to those around you.

(It probably doesn’t need to be said, but the people of God evangelize with an awareness of vocation and audience. There is a time and a place for witnessing. The office worker who spends her day telling colleagues about Jesus may well be fired, not because she was evangelizing, but because she wasn’t getting her work done. One should also keep in mind that sinners are not ready for the Gospel until they are convicted by the Law, so a Christian may

patiently wait for years before a friend is convicted by trial or illness and ready to hear of the Savior. This study is not intended to drive Christians to preach on every street corner, but to prepare them to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within them when opportunities arise [1 Peter 3:15].)

Remember those people in the Gospels who wouldn’t stop talking about Jesus? That’s who you are as a baptized child of God. The temptation is to believe that the path to such zeal is your work of psyching yourself up. In reality, it is ongoing repentance for those things that work to prevent you from being who you are. It is who you are baptized to be.

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, in Holy Baptism You began Your good work in us, and You have blessed us with instruction and training in Your Word. We implore You to pour out Your Holy Spirit on our hearts and minds so that we might truly love and revere You, confess the faith with joy and boldness, endeavor to live according to Your commandments, and praise and glorify You as our faithful God and Lord, for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Adapted from *LSB*, p. 310.)

NOTES FOR LEADERS

1. Christians should rightly regard works of witness, mercy and life together as joyous tasks that they are set free to do. In fact, the faith that God has given them is eager to do such things.

2. This is a crucial point: God does not need us to do these things, but He gives us the honor of being His instruments. If we fail to proclaim the Gospel, the Gospel will still be proclaimed — just by somebody else (Luke 19:40). If we fail in acts of mercy, God will still provide daily bread to all. If we fail to maintain life together, the Lord will still have His Church.

The consequences of failure are disastrous first of all for the Christians who fail to do them, because they are stifling the faith God has given. There is no neutral ground; whatever work one does or doesn't do is either pleasing or displeasing to God. The one who fails to perform acts of mercy fails to keep the Law of God, and the love of one like this will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). Christians who fail to proclaim the Gospel and thus do not maintain the unity of faith will opt for other messages until they are no longer part of the Church (Rev. 2:5).

3. Baptism has everything to do with it. By Holy Baptism we are raised up to newness of life, and that new life wants to do what God commands. When we hear that God doesn't need us but desires to use us, we're tempted to lazily say, "If God's going to get things done anyway, why should I work at it?" Romans 6 makes it clear that such an attitude is a desire to continue in sin (refusing what God has set you free to do). It is to reject Christian freedom and become a slave to sin again.

4. Ultimately, what prevents the baptized from doing such works is sin. Therefore, the solution is repentance and the forgiveness of sins. This should move the Christian to despair of his own righteousness and cling to Christ all the more. While seemingly obvious, this is often misunderstood. Many will look at their lack of good works and say, "Yeah, I really need to work at witnessing or mercy more." That's true, but it's the cart before the horse; all of their hard work won't get rid of their sin, and the forgiveness they receive strengthens their faith

to go about what God has given them to do.

Note: *Discussion of evangelism, especially personal witnessing, tends to be extensive among participants. Thus, although a valuable reinforcement, the leader may wish to skip over questions 5 and 6.*

5. The third servant acts out of fear (in v. 25, "I was afraid") because he believes the master to be a hard man. In other words, he does not believe that the master is a good man and, not trusting the master, he wants nothing to do with what the master gives. Is there any evidence to support his claim that the master is hard? No. It is simply what he believes.

The other two servants are called "good and faithful." They believe that the master is good; after all, the master has entrusted them with his things before going on a journey. Trusting the master, they make use of what he entrusts to them and they receive his blessing for it. The work of the stewards is determined by their faith in the master. Two of them believe in the goodness of the master and go about his business, while one rejects that the master is good.

6. Our new life as the baptized children of God is not dictated by fear. He is not a hard master who is waiting for an excuse to boot us out of the house. Quite the contrary: "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8); and "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). The life of the Christian is not dictated by fear or doubt of God's mercy. He has given His own Son to redeem us, and He has brought us into His family by water and the Word. Having paid the price of His own Son's blood for our redemption and rebirth, how could He ever want us out of the household of faith?

This can be an elusive truth among Christians, where many have preached God as a hard master waiting for an excuse to condemn.

All Christians are tempted to believe that good works — keeping the Law — is a drudgery that they have to do because they're in God's family. Such a view signals a problem with faith: how can it be a loathsome slog to do what we have been set free to do in Christ?

7. Because the man has been lame from birth and is a daily fixture at the temple gate, it is evident to all that his healing is miraculous. Peter heals him by speaking and by speaking in the name of Jesus. Speaking by Jesus' authority, Peter is saying what Jesus would say to the man to heal him. (In fact, Peter has heard Jesus heal a paralytic with nearly the same words in Mark 2:9.) It may be Peter's voice, but it is Jesus' Word.

8. The man enters the temple and praises God. While we don't have his words, it's a fair assumption that he is praising God for the healing that he has just received. Having been given such a precious gift, he can't help but talk about it.

As a follow-up question, one might ask: If the man had a friend who was lame, what do you suppose he would do? (I'm guessing he would tell him right away [He would spread the Good News!] in the hopes that his friend would be healed too.)

9. Peter knows because he has heard and seen. He sat at Jesus' feet for three years prior to the crucifixion, so he is well instructed in the Word of God. One of the silliest reasons for failing to witness is that we "don't know what to say." At best, this is an excuse. At worst, it betrays that we fail to make use of God's Word to grow in knowledge . . . and faith!

A Quick Summary of Peter's Sermon in Acts 3:12–26

Peter's message of Law in verses 12–18 is an echo of the Law he preached at Pentecost: "This man has been healed by Jesus, the Messiah foretold in the Scriptures whom God sent and you crucified."

Why does Peter say these things? Again, there are a variety of correct answers here. But for the purposes of this study, the leader should focus on the answer found at the end of verse 15: Peter is telling the people what he has witnessed. He is simply telling the truth. Much of this is verifiable to the crowd, namely, Jesus' trial and death, their culpability and the man's healing. The rest is still true. More than that, it is God's true Word, which is how the Holy Spirit works to save (Rom. 10:17; John 16:8–13). In verse 19, Peter calls for repentance. Remember, repentance is both sorrow over

sin and trust in Christ. With the combination of "repent" and "turn again," Peter is calling them to faith in Christ who has died so that their sins may be blotted out, not held against them for killing "the Author of life." This is an extraordinarily gracious announcement. Rather than casting them into outer darkness for their sin, the Lord is present to give times of refreshing, to breathe life into them.

10. Peter declares that the man has been healed by Jesus Christ, who was condemned to death by these very authorities and raised up again by God — alive and able to heal. His death is a fulfillment of Ps. 118:22, further showing the magnitude of the rulers' sin. Verse 12 is remarkable because Peter proclaims the Gospel to those who killed Jesus and wish to harm him, all because Jesus died for them. The proclamation that "there is no other name under heaven" for salvation is to be received with joy, not offense, because the Good News is that there is a name under heaven by which we may be saved.

Why does Peter say these things? There is always the temptation to believe that he is looking to poke the rulers in the eye for their complicity in Jesus' death; but once again, Peter is simply speaking the truth. In speaking the truth, he does so for their good, even if they do not want to hear it, because he is proclaiming to them "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

11. Peter and John define evangelism as telling what they have seen and heard about Jesus. When it comes to the content bearing witness, it is that simple.

The words in Greek for "we cannot" (*ou dunametha*) in verse 20 can also be translated "We are not able." Why are they not able to stop speaking the truth? For starters, it's not that they are no longer capable of lying; they have not been put under some magic spell that forces them to speak only truth. One reason for their determination, of course, is their commission to speak the Gospel (Matt. 28:18–20; John 20:21). There is, however, another reason: this is what the people of God are set free in Christ to do, and they understand both the importance and the joy of the Word that they speak.

12. Opposition is to be expected, for it has been prophesied. The believers note Psalm 2 in their prayer, and Jesus also warned the disciples many times (Matt. 10:21–25; Luke 6:22). Opposition should be no surprise because the last thing the devil, world and sinful flesh want to hear is the Gospel of Christ who has defeated them. The certain comfort of the baptized people of God is that the Christ they proclaim has conquered sin, death and the devil for them.

Consequently, they pray for boldness. There is no hint that they somehow earn God's favor by their witnessing. Knowing that they are the baptized people of God, they simply ask the Lord to deliver them from any fear that would prevent them from doing what the children of God are set free to do.

In answer to their prayer, the Holy Spirit makes His presence known by shaking the place where they are gathered, similar to the fire and sound of wind at Pentecost in Acts 2:2–3. The Christians continue to speak with boldness. This does not mean that opposition ceases, nor does it mean that they are immune from fear. It means that they continue to speak despite opposition and fear. The Holy Spirit does not promise to demonstrate His presence in manifestations like fire or quake today, but then again, fire and quake never gave anyone forgiveness. Far better, we have the promise that the Holy Spirit continues to work in the Word and Sacraments to give the forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

13. Answers will vary, but the reasons tend to fall under three different categories.

Fear: "I don't want to upset anyone" or "witnessing makes me nervous" and so forth.

Ignorance: "I don't know what to say." If true, this demonstrates an urgent need for one to be in the Word.

Sloth: Failing to take the wages of sin seriously, some will not see the need to proclaim the Gospel as a matter of importance. Or taking forgiveness for granted, some forget how horrible it is to be unforgiven and facing the wrath of God.

Any reason that prevents us from speaking

the praises of God is going to be sinful. Such reasons prevent us from doing what Jesus has set us free to do and work to rob us of our place as a child in the family of God.

14. The answer begins with repentance, confession and forgiveness! To determine to do better does not get rid of sin; it leads to the mentality of a servant who sees the Christian life as being about his works, not God's grace. But to live in your Baptism as a beloved child of God is to confess your sin, trusting that you remain God's child for Jesus' sake. Forgiven, you do what the children of God do; and when it comes to evangelism, that means a steady diet of God's Word.

If you are fearful, you know from God's Word that the temptation of fear is designed to convince you that Jesus can't use you to speak His Word. Perhaps it is fear of opposition, as the Christians faced in Acts 3. But you hear the Lord say, "I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

If you don't know what to say, the Scriptures provide. We are able to speak about things that we know well, which is why I can talk about my dogs but not about plumbing. In a very nuts-and-bolts sort of way, ongoing study of the Scriptures provides the content of who Jesus is and what He has done. More than that, however, the Holy Spirit is at work to forgive your sins and to strengthen your faith so that you might proclaim the praises of God.

If it's a matter of sloth, it is wise to meditate upon the Law of God and the wages of sin in Scripture before it's taught by experience. In His mercy, the Lord permits trouble so that we might gain a greater appreciation of our sin and His grace. As a baptized child of God, you know that He is not out to get you but is disciplining you as a father disciplines his sons (Heb. 12:5–11).

15. In worship! Good hymns, the creeds and liturgy all declare the person and work of Jesus; and as you sing and speak them, you are putting the Word of God into the ears of those around you. You are evangelizing them, and the Holy Spirit is at work in that Word for their good. The same texts also give you great material for witnessing. If someone asks you

about what the Church teaches about God, start walking him or her through the Apostles' Creed.

Family devotions are another critical place where evangelism happens, and failure to do so has consequences over which a millstone

necktie is to be preferred (Mark 9:42). As parents teach their children Bible studies and the Small Catechism, they are witnessing to their children so that they might also remain baptized sons in the household of God.

Lesson 4: Baptized for Mercy

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (ACTS 2:44-45)

In Lesson 3, we started looking at what the baptized people of God do, and we did so by looking at evangelism. When it comes to works of witness, mercy and life together, the first is probably the most difficult because the devil and our own sinful flesh hate the Gospel and will do anything to keep it from being heard. The devil isn't nearly as concerned if we're merciful or getting along with each other, because even non-Christians can do such things. It's the Gospel that Satan wants the Church to abandon. The Lord, however, is faithful. He will preserve His people by the grace He won as He defeated Satan on the cross.

In today's lesson, we move on to works of mercy even as we keep last week's discussion of evangelism in mind. Our goals are to:

- Answer some of the common concerns that Christians have when they fail to see good works follow faith.
- Gain a better understanding of what it means to be baptized for mercy from a study of Acts 2 and 2 Corinthians 8-9.
- Consider possibilities for personal and congregational works of mercy, both locally and internationally.

On Love, Labor and Bullies

Here's another quote from the Formula of Concord regarding good works:

Dr. Luther has written that a person's will in his conversion is purely passive, that it, that it does nothing at all. This is to be understood with respect to divine grace in the kindling of the new movements, that is, when God's Spirit, through the heard Word or use of the holy Sacraments, lays hold of a person's will and works in him the new birth and conversion. When after the Holy Spirit has worked and accomplished this, and a person's will has been changed and renewed by His divine power and working alone, then the new will of that person is an instrument and organ of God the Holy Spirit. So that person not only accepts grace, but he also cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the works that follow. (Epitome of the Formula of Concord II 18)

By water and the Word in Holy Baptism, you're already a child in the household of God.

There's work to be done in the house, and it is by labor that we learn love. Many a battle of wills is fought on a piano bench:

parents want their children to learn music, but kids don't want to practice. So the battle begins and some children would rather stare at nothing and cry for half an hour than attempt to play a note. It's not inability at work. It's sloth that doesn't want to work.

The lesson is simple: those who work at piano are far more likely to learn to love it than those unwilling to do the work. (There are always exceptions, of course. There will be those who are extremely gifted and don't need to work very hard, and those whose work is so burdensome that it only frustrates them more.) This is true in all aspects and relationships in life: work begets love, and love begets work. Love and work go together because love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom. 13:10).

It is true in the household of faith. Those who work at witness, mercy and life together will learn to love such things. Those who refuse to work at them will not, and if children do not work and love, then they will hold things in contempt and even despise them. In that case it's not inability, but the sin of sloth or distracting idols. Those who fail to learn work and love are more likely to take their baptized life for granted and drift away because they resist cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

Thus the duet of labor and love begins with repentance — repentance for the sloth, the idols and the failure to live in one's Baptism. The baptized people of God are set free to do what God has given them to do — not because they have to, but because they can.

1. The Formula of Concord says that the Holy Spirit works "the new birth and conversion" without our help. Where does this new birth take place?
2. According to the Formula, what is "an instrument and organ of God the Holy Spirit" for good works? What else is still around?
3. It's tempting to say, "I'm in the family anyway, so why worry about good works?" How would you answer?
4. Here's another temptation to address: Christians may very well find themselves

saying, "The Bible says that since I'm baptized, my faith is eager to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and do good works. But I don't feel any more eager to witness or help my neighbor than I did before. What does this mean?"

5. It's also easy for sincere Christians to say, "When I examine myself, I don't see me doing a lot of good. I had a golden opportunity, but I failed. Am I really a child of God?" How would you answer?

But as we focus on labor and love within the household of God, we never forget that we are children by grace for the sake of Christ. Imagine the child who has finished his chores, including piano practice, and goes out to play. At the nearby park, he runs into a bully who towers over him and wants to pick a fight. "What's going to stop me from beating you?"

he snarls.

If the child says, "Look out, 'cause I know Mozart!" he's a goner. All his careful piano practice isn't going to stop a punch in the nose.

Ah, but this might: "I'm no match for you, but my brother is bigger than you are! You can knock me around, but my brother knows where to find you."

As we go about works of witness, mercy and life together, we are not just in a battle against ignorance, poverty and strife. We're under assault by sin, death and the devil. The grave is a huge bully, always snarling, "What's going to stop me from beating you?" If you answer, "Because I helped out my sick neighbor," you're a goner for good.

You say what a child of God says: "Between my sins and puny works, I'm no match for you. But have you met Christ? I believe you have, and I doubt you've forgotten! You had Him dead and buried as I recall — but then what happened? That's right. He rose from the dead, and He promises to raise me too! So, death, you can slap me around a little bit, but Jesus knows

The baptized people of God are set free to do what God has given them to do — not because they have to, but because they can.

where to find you, and you're no match for Him!"

6. The devil and sin are bullies as well. The evil one will parade your sins and lack of good works before your face and say, "Look at these sins and all you've failed to do! That's not the life of somebody who's really baptized, who's really living as a child of God. You're not a child of God at all!" How would you respond to the accusation?

Acts of Mercy

7. Following repentance and Baptism (Acts 2:38), the early Christians continued in their Baptism with acts of mercy. Did they ever! Acts 2:45 and 4:34 both note that they sold all that they had and gave it to the apostles to distribute to those in need. But the situation doesn't last long, and these verses have been used to make mischief and false doctrine along the lines of "True Christianity is Communism" or "To be a true Christian, you should sell everything you have and send it to the author." What is the point of these verses? For some help from the Bible, read Deut. 15:4-5, where God is speaking to His people. What does He promise? Why? How might this be fulfilled in Acts?

While the practice of selling all belongings and distributing the proceeds seems to fade out quite quickly, the Christians in Acts continue their works of mercy. In Acts 11:28-29, Gentile Christians hear of an impending famine and determine to send relief to those living in Judea. St. Paul writes about this relief effort in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

8. Read 2 Cor. 8:1-5. How have the Macedonian Christians reacted to the call to send relief to Jerusalem? Why is this, according to verse 5?
9. Read verses 6-9. What motivates the Macedonians?
10. Read 8:10-15. Is there trouble among the Corinthians (v. 11)? Is this a danger for us today? (See also Gal. 6:8-10. Why do we

do good works? What is the temptation? Where do good works begin?)

11. Paul expresses his concern about the Corinthians in 9:1-5; then in verse 7, he writes the famous words "God loves a cheerful giver." What makes a cheerful giver cheerful? Who can be cheerful about doing anything for God? What does this teach about living as the baptized people of God? Verses 8-9 show the foundation for cheerful giving.

For Discussion and Application

From here, we can ask a lot of the same questions that we did about witnessing in Lesson 3.

12. What might prevent an individual Christian or a congregation from doing works of mercy? Are there reasons sins or other factors? What is the danger of sins that prevent acts of mercy? *Here's the Gospel: You're already sons of God by Holy Baptism.*
13. For the sins listed in your answer to question 12, where does the answer begin? Where does it go from there?
14. What does one do about the other factors listed in question 12?
15. What other needs do you see that you as an individual or congregation might address?

When Jesus preaches to the crowds in Luke 6, He includes these words about neighbors and enemies: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36). He commands mercy, and He declares that those who keep this Law will be called sons of God.

In our fallen, sinful state apart from Christ, we could never achieve this, of course. But here's the Gospel: you're already sons of God by Holy Baptism. It's a gift

to you because your Father in heaven is merciful — so merciful that He has given His Son to die in your place. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1). And what do the children of the Most High do? They show mercy, not because they have to, but because they can. By repentance and baptismal grace, we are rid of every sin that would prevent us from being merciful, so that we might be the merciful hands of God to those in need.

Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, You make us both to will and to do those things that are good and acceptable in Your sight. Let Your fatherly hand ever guide us and Your Holy Spirit ever be with us to direct us in the knowledge and obedience of Your Word that we may obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Adapted from *LSB*, P. 310.)

NOTES FOR LEADERS

- 1.** While the Holy Spirit may work conversion by means of the Word alone (Acts 8:27–38), “new birth” is certainly baptismal language as one is born again by water and the Word. This new birth is continually fed and renewed throughout life by the Word and Holy Communion.
- 2.** The “new will” is an instrument of God for good works. However, the old sinful nature still clings on.
- 3.** There is need for repentance because this is the work of the old sinful nature trying to suppress faith. This attitude does harm to the body of Christ because it deprives the Church of helping hands and becomes a liability to the body. A more serious consequence is personal: in resisting good works, a person is occupying himself with selfish, sinful work instead. This is refusing to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and serves to weaken faith. But there is still hope, since the Lord calls us to repentance and offers grace even when we resist Him and befriend the world (James 4:4–6).
- 4.** There is need for repentance here, too, because this statement trusts in feelings rather than the Word of God. The sinful nature will do its best to discourage us from good, so we’ll often feel disinclined to work. No matter how we feel, however, we trust God’s Word that our faith desires to do good works. So we repent of judging faith by our feelings, as well as all the temptations that discourage us from doing what God would have us do. Living as the baptized, we then do what we’re set free to do, even if our old sinful nature says we don’t feel like it. And we rejoice: for while we are tempted to such sloth and laziness, the Lord remains faithful to us (2 Tim. 2:13), calling us to repentance and strengthening our faith by His Word and Supper.
- 5.** There is need for repentance because someone like this believes he is a child of God because of his good works, not because of God’s grace. There is Good News for such a person. He is not a servant who must continue to earn his keep, but he is a child set free from sin.
- 6.** When the devil accuses, Christians are always

to point to Christ: “It’s true enough that I’m full of sin and lack good works, and I don’t deserve to be a child of God. But I am a child of God because Jesus says so! I am a child of God because I am baptized. While the devil might put thoughts into my mind as to whether or not I’m really baptized, I know that I am because it was God who did the work and my efforts had nothing to do with it. I know that I am a child of God because He says I’m not guilty for the sake of Jesus who died for my sins, and if God says I’m not guilty, can the devil overrule God? No!” (Rom. 8:31–34).

7. First off, we should note that both verses are descriptive, not prescriptive: they describe what those Christians did, but do not prescribe the same action for all Christians.

In his commentary on Luke–Acts, Timothy Johnson connects these two verses to Deut. 15:4–5, where God promises that “there will be no poor” among those who keep His commandments. In Acts 2, these early Christians are the new Israel, God’s chosen people in Christ. They have heard the voice of the Lord through the apostles, and wearing Christ’s righteousness, they are holy before Him. They are keeping — holding onto — His Word. As an indication of God’s presence and grace, there are no poor among them because the Lord is providing for all. Furthermore, the Lord is providing for all by using the early Christians as His instruments of mercy. They are distributing to those in need because they are set free to be merciful in Christ!

8. The Macedonians have been far from grudging. In fact, they’ve begged to take part and given beyond their means. Paul writes that they “gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” This verse may be misinterpreted by some as proof of decision theology, which says one is saved when he “gives himself fully to Jesus.” But these Macedonians are already Christians. Verse 5 declares that they view themselves as instruments of God to accomplish His will, and so they are eager to participate in the work of providing relief for the Judeans.

9. The Macedonians are doing this for the sake of Christ, who redeemed them by becoming “poor” on the cross so that they might have the

riches of heaven. In other words, they are living as the baptized people of God: set free from sin, grateful to Jesus and eager to be His hands of mercy.

It should be noted in these verses that Paul refers twice to the relief effort as an “act of grace” (literally, “this grace” in the Greek). This is not to imply that the Macedonians are earning forgiveness by their work; rather, the word grace (Greek: *charis*) is in reference to the free gift of relief they are giving to those in Jerusalem.

10. It seems that the Corinthians’ desire for works of mercy is fading, and Paul expresses that concern further in 9:1–5 as he worries that the joyous collection will turn into a grudging exaction. The cross-reference to Gal. 6:8–10 is helpful here. The Christian sows to the Spirit (v. 8), freely doing good works instead of serving the flesh. There is always the temptation to grow weary of doing good (v. 9), which fails to help the one in need and stifles faith. Given our ongoing illustration of the family of God, it is notable that these works of mercy begin in “the household of faith” (v. 10), which leads us toward the topic of “life together” in Lesson 5.

11. The only person who can truly be a cheerful giver before God is one who is certain of forgiveness in Christ. By definition, an unbeliever will think that God operates on a merit system where good works earn salvation and sins earn judgment. Therefore, he will either give grudgingly or out of fear, in the hopes of earning God’s favor and avoiding His wrath. Only a Christian may give freely and cheerfully since he knows that he is already forgiven, enjoys God’s favor and is set free to give and serve. Even then, he is tempted by the sinful nature to covet what he has given and regret the giving; this is part of the meaning of “exaction” in verse 5.

Only the baptized people of God are set free to be cheerful givers because they know that God makes grace abound to them freely, and thus they “abound in every good work” (v. 8). It’s unfortunate that verse 7 is used so legalistically. The author has endured a stewardship sermon based upon this text that essentially declared, “It’s not enough to give to the Church. You need to give cheerfully! You need to give hilariously [the Greek for ‘cheerful’

is *hilaros*]! Only then will God be pleased.” If such is true, we will never be children who delight to go about the tasks in our Father’s house, but we’ll be fearful servants who are never cheerful enough to earn God’s favor. Instead, we rejoice that God is already pleased with us for the sake of Christ.

12. Answers will naturally vary here. Greed and covetousness are rampant in our materialistic society, where we tend to focus on getting the latest gadgets and goods while others are in need. Sloth is another culprit, where we’re content simply to look out for ourselves and pretend to care by joining a Facebook group but offering no real assistance (cleverly labeled “slacktivism”). Prejudice may be a factor, and the acts of criminal scam artists in the world may also lead one who has been cheated to justify an end to showing mercy.

There are other factors that hinder acts of mercy, and they often come down to a lack of funds, personnel, opportunity and resources. (An example might be the desire to open a medical clinic in Sri Lanka. If one is a member of a rural congregation in Idaho and has no medical degree, obstacles may make this desire impossible.) These aren’t sins, just frequent realities in a sinful world.

Sins that prevent acts of mercy are damaging in so many ways. For one, they are sins against neighbors in need. As Luther’s explanation to the Fifth Commandment in the Small Catechism teaches, it is not enough to not harm our neighbor. We are also to “help and support him in every physical need.” For another, a lack of mercy is an offense before God because it fails to show compassion to those for whom Christ has died; and the Church — the body of Christ — is given to demonstrate His compassion. A lack of mercy (not only abject cruelty, mind you, but merely a failure to be merciful to others) does great harm to personal faith too. Sins like greed and covetousness betray false gods as we show more interest in personal pleasure than the needs of those around us. Left unrepentant, we will love and trust that false god far more than the Lord, as the Rich Fool did (Luke 12:15–21). This wars against the freedom we have as children of God and strangles the life given in Holy Baptism. To put it another way, these sins are seeking to rob you of the sonship that you have in the household of God.

13. The answer begins with repentance, with confession and absolution. It begins with confessing these sins — sometimes very dear sins — to be the destructive transgressions that they are and receiving the assurance that Christ has died for these sins too.

From there, the forgiven Christian works to show mercy. He doesn't do so because he has to, but because he can. It would make no sense to continue to encourage the sins that seek to destroy his faith. Instead, he knows that he is one set free to be the hands and voice of Jesus to others. If he doesn't desire to change, then he has some more examination and contrition to undergo.

14. Lack of funds, personnel and resources are frustrating for those who desire to act. But while they will influence how an individual or congregation might show mercy, they should not prevent it. The Lord provides different amounts of resources to different people in different times and places. He calls His people (repentant of the sins of v. 12) to be faithful with what He entrusts to them. There's a reason

that Paul tells the Corinthians to give from what they have, not from what they don't have (2 Cor. 8:12). Lack of resources may tempt Christians to bitterness or frustration. For that, they should repent, and as the people of God, they are set free to be merciful with the daily bread that God has entrusted to them. This may mean more modest acts of mercy or teaming up with others. It may mean different acts of mercy or monetary support for others in a different location. The LCMS Office of International Mission, for instance, does fantastic work around the world and is a worthy line in every congregation's budget. It may also mean that a congregation re-evaluates programs that it already has in place. (Do current, long-standing programs still assist neighbors in need? Do they do what they were originally intended to do? Do they place the actual burden of work upon the pastor and church secretary, but nobody else?)

15. Answers will vary.

Lesson 5: Baptized for Life Together

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts. (ACTS 2:46)

And after such conversion, in the daily exercise of repentance, the regenerate will of a person is not idle, but cooperates in all the works of the Holy Spirit, which He performs through us. (Epitome of the Formula of Concord II 17)

My kids will always be my kids. That's my fervent hope and prayer.

Families are full of sinners, and ours is no different. Our children emulate their parents very well and sin every day, but as we discussed back in Lesson 2, they're still our kids when they do. My wife and I are not dread pirates, and every little misbehavior doesn't result in them walking the plank or getting kicked out of the house.

In fact, there are only two scenarios I can foresee where, God forbid, they wouldn't be family anymore. One would be if they ran away from home because some evil persuaded them that life outside was better. In that case, they wouldn't be family in the sense that they aren't there to be family. The other would be if they rebelled against the family rules so badly that we had to ask them to leave. In either case, there would always be the hope that they would repent and return, because even if they've run away

or had to go, they're still my kids and I'm still their dad, and I would pray that the family that once was might be realized once again.

It is the same with congregations, with the family of God in this place and that. The brothers and sisters in Christ are all sinners, often with a heavy load of luggage to carry. If the Lord were a dread pirate who kicked out everyone who misbehaved on any given day, the Church on earth would be empty.

Daily then, the Lord calls out to His children through His Word: "I paid the price for your salvation with My own blood, and I have brought you into this family by water and the Word. Repent of your sins and remain in the household — the Kingdom is already yours forever!" See, every little sin and temptation along the way is designed to move you toward doing one of two things: running away from home because you desire something that is not part of the kingdom of God, or rebelling against the house rules so much that the family has to ask you to leave. We have fancy names for these, like "self-exclusion" and "excommunication," both of which mean that one who was part of the family of God no longer desires to be. The Lord wills that you inherit His kingdom

forever, but He will not force you to be forgiven.

The Church suffers many runaways. They are not to be forgotten by their mother. In the Large Catechism, Luther calls the Church “the mother that conceives and bears every Christian through God’s Word” (Large Catechism II 42), and so Christians continue to pray for their repentance and restoration, continue to invite them back. Furthermore, their Father continues to pursue those baptized children who have left the household in the hopes that they repent and return before it is too late.

For those who remain in the family, there are going to be family rules. We’re going to gather together for words and meals.

Afterward, we’ll go about our various tasks in our various roles. There’s going to be discipline, repentance and forgiveness because we’re a collection of sinners living together under one roof. Those who have strength and ability are going to use that to look out for those who are weak and in need. While we work for the good of the individual, we understand that this depends upon preserving the unity of the family because if we invite anyone into our family, we want it to be a sanctuary of peace and love, not a crumbling chaos of division and uncertainty.

So, am I talking about my wife and kids? Or am I talking about the Church?

Yes.

Life Together

Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians is all about the Church. We don’t have time to examine the entire epistle, but we’ll give Chapter 4 a good look. Along the way, it is hoped that those studying will:

- Critically examine Lutheran doctrine and practice to see if it reflects God’s Word in Ephesians 4.
- Rejoice that living as the baptized and repentant people of God is foundational for unity and life together.
- Understand that, born into the family of God, the children of God mature for service by means of God’s Word.
- Identify sins that harm unity and life together.

- Identify proper foundations for resolving conflict and disagreement among Christians.

1. Read Eph. 4:1–3. How is salvation described in verse 1, and why is this significant? What good works does it produce in verse 2 for life together? To put it another way, what are you set free to practice in verse 2? Why are these important?
2. In verse 3, Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” “Eager” and “maintain” each say something important about the unity we have as Christians. What do they say?
Daily then, the Lord calls out to His children through His Word: “I paid the price for your salvation with My own blood, and I have brought you into this family by water and the Word. Repent of your sins and remain in the household — the Kingdom is already yours forever!”
3. Paul expands upon this unity by listing seven “ones” in verses 4–6. What do each of these have to do with the unity of the Church? What do they have to do with your Baptism?
4. Perhaps surprisingly, Holy Communion isn’t mentioned in this list of “ones,” though it has much to do with Christian unity and life together. Read 1 Cor. 10:16–17. What does it say about the Sacrament of the Altar and unity?
5. Eph. 4:11–14 provides an important summary of the life of the Church. God calls certain men to exercise the Office of the Holy Ministry (the various titles in v. 11 refer to different callings of the same office). He places them there to do certain things (v. 12) for the accomplishment of certain goals (vv. 13–14). What are the tasks of the pastor in verse 12, and what is his instrument to accomplish them?
6. According to verses 13–14, what happens to the children of God — the sons and

heirs — as a result of the preaching of the Word? How might this counsel one who struggles to delight in works of witness, mercy and life together?

7. According to verses 14–16, from what are mature Christians delivered? What do they do instead? Why?
8. Paul goes on to speak the truth in love in verses 17–19, warning against various sins that “the Gentiles do.” (Are these temptations for the Church today?) Keeping in mind Acts 2:38, what does Paul mean by “the futility of their minds”?
9. Paul goes on in verses 20–24 to contrast the life of the Christian with that of the unrepentant Gentile. What does he say? Where does this first happen (Rom. 6:4–7), and how does it continue? How does this correspond with the events of Pentecost in Acts 2?
10. Paul next warns against several sins that do damage to our life together. What are they, and what harm do they cause to a local congregation? To an entire church body?

Verse 25:

Verses 26–27:

Verse 28:

Verse 29:

Verse 30:

Verse 31:

11. How does Paul sum up life together in verse 32? What hope does he offer?

For Discussion

12. Whether one is at peace with others in the congregation or not, what unites the members there?
13. Where there is conflict among Christians, how should it be handled in light of Ephesians 4? Is there a difference if the conflict is a matter of doctrine?
14. Jesus speaks of life together in Matt. 20:25–28. How are we to regard ourselves? What does Jesus say of Himself?

Prayer

Merciful Father, through Holy Baptism You called us to be Your own possession. Grant that our lives may evidence the working of Your Holy Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, according to the image of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

(Adapted from *LSB*, p. 310.)

NOTES FOR LEADERS

1. Eph. 4:1 describes salvation as a “calling to which you have been called.” This phrase is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it makes clear that it is God who does the calling. Salvation is His work and gift to us, not our work of calling upon Him. Second, calling is a verbal term that reminds us that God saves by His Word, whether proclaimed or joined to water in Holy Baptism. Thus Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed in the Small Catechism says, “The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” That explanation continues to speak of both calling and Christian unity: “In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

Humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love result from the Holy Spirit’s work within us and contribute to life together. Love, gentleness and patience are all specifically listed as “fruit of the Spirit” in Gal. 5:22–23. Their opposites (pride, harshness, impatience and giving up on one another) are all divisive sins contrary to what you are set free to be.

2. We should be eager to maintain unity. “Eager” implies that we make haste and take pains to do so. Current trends in Christianity tend to emphasize diversity; in some cases, the Christian faith is so individualized that it seems each Christian is permitted his or her own system of beliefs, and the only unity is that “we all believe in Jesus.” Paul makes unity a top priority, something that Christians should eagerly and actively pursue. Even in matters of adiaphora, Christians and congregations should be careful that their practices do no harm to the unity among members and sister congregations. Unity is given by God and, therefore, is to be treasured over personal expression or local innovation.

The word “maintain” is remarkable here. The Ephesians do not have to strive to create unity, but only maintain it because it has already been given to them. The unity of the Spirit that is the basis of life together is not the work of man, but a gift of God. However, the fact that they must strive to maintain it also means that it can be lost.

3. Paul notes that there is one body. There is one Church, the body of Christ (see Eph. 4:12, 15–16), and we are brought into the Church by means of Holy Baptism. Ephesians is full of baptismal language. For instance, we are “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13), “members of the household of God” (2:19) and cleansed “by the washing of water with the word” (5:26).

This one Church belongs to the one, true Triune God: “one Spirit” (4:4), “one Lord” (4:5) and “one God and Father of all” (4:6). It is no coincidence that we are brought into the Church by means of water “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” You have been called to “one hope,” namely eternal life in the kingdom of God. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then “your faith is futile” and “we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:17, 19). But Christ is raised from the dead, and we are thus united in the hope of eternal life. This is the shared hope of all the baptized, because they have been joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection in Holy Baptism (Rom. 6:3–11).

There is “one faith.” Although many justify contradictory beliefs within Christianity on the basis that “we can’t really know for sure,” the Lord provides His Word so that we might know what the Christian faith is. The variety of contradictory teachings within Christianity is not because the Word is unclear, but because sinful man often misinterprets Scripture. Sadly, many of these disagreements over different articles of faith (such as original sin, faith, the Sacraments, justification and sanctification, to name a few) put the blessings of Holy Baptism in doubt. The fact that there is one true faith, however, means that the blessings of Holy Baptism are certain. There is “one baptism,” namely the washing of water and the Word “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This Baptism is vital for unity because it is by means of Holy Baptism that sinners are made sons of the Kingdom and united as members of the one body of Christ.

Again, “diversity” and “tolerance” are watchwords of the day. This passage is seen by some to be far too limiting and exclusive. It must be emphasized that this is all a great comfort. Because of our sin, we deserve no salvation whatsoever. But there is one Savior — one more than we deserve, who is also the Savior of all!

4. Paul warns of divisions and speaks of the unity of the Church quite a bit in 1 Corinthians. The “bread that we break” is “a participation (Greek: *koinonia*) in the body of Christ,” and Christ is the “one Lord” mentioned in Eph. 4:5. He is the head, and we are the members of His body (1 Cor. 12:27).

As the one Christ is not divided, neither is the Church to be (1 Cor. 1:13) because there is one faith (Eph. 4:5). First and foremost, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is the means by which the one Lord, Jesus Christ, gives us His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins; and in so doing, He renews the life given in Holy Baptism as He strengthens us in the one true faith. It is, therefore, an expression of unity and life together as Christians. This unity is not a superficial appearance. Rather, it is complete agreement — a common confession — of what the one faith is. A Communion practice that welcomes Christians of different confessions fails to reflect the unity of Eph. 4:4–6. This is why we rejoice to be set free to go about the challenging task of attaining the unity of the Spirit that is given by God (Eph. 4:3), but lacking in man (Eph. 4:13).

5. If members of the Bible study desire more information about the “different callings” within the Office of the Holy Ministry, the note on Eph. 4:11 in *The Lutheran Study Bible* provides a helpful summary. In service to this study, it is best not to engage in a lengthy discussion of the difference between a prophet and an evangelist, but rather to note that the Lord has established the office of preacher so that His Word might be proclaimed to His people.

Regarding the tasks of the Holy Ministry, first and foremost the preacher is to minister to the people of God so that they might be equipped and the body of Christ built up. His instrument is the Word, for it is by the Word that the Holy Spirit works to give forgiveness and strengthen faith. (This naturally includes the Sacraments, where the Lord adds His Word to visible elements.) Verse 12 is all about the establishment of unity by means of the Word so that Christians might continue in life together. This verse is the subject of some debate within even the LCMS as to who does “the work of ministry.” Some argue that the saints are equipped to do the work of the ministry, as the grammar of the ESV supports. Others assert that

“the work of ministry” is specifically the domain of the preacher. This, for instance, is supported by the grammar of the King James Version, which includes a comma indicating that pastors are given “for the perfecting of the saints, [and] for the work of the ministry.” This debate over a comma has resulted in rather heated disunity at times in discussions over the roles of pastors and laity in the Church. In truth, in isolation this text can be read either way. The original Greek has no commas whatsoever, and the word for ministry (Greek: *diakonia*) can refer either in Scripture to general service or the specific ministry of the Word. Rather than seek to define what can't be defined from this particular verse alone, the author notes that there are certain tasks in the Church which are given to pastors according to the Augsburg Confession: “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call” (Augsburg Confession XIV). The author further notes that this hardly deprives the rest of the people of God from works of service, as they are given to all sorts of good works of witness, mercy and life together.

6. As a result of the Word, the children of God “attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” Note that it is “the faith” — Scripture provides the teaching and reveals Jesus. It's been fashionable for the past 200 years to view the Church as a group of like-minded people who establish teachings by mutual agreement and democratic vote and to assert that their majority opinion will then be pleasing to God. But there is no need or place for such guesswork in the Christian Church because the Lord gives pure doctrine to His people in the Word. Furthermore, we're set free as His baptized children to keep it!

It should be noted that the children of God grow up by means of the Word. While they remain sons and heirs, they reach mature manhood. As a man is more able to perform certain tasks than a child, this maturity equips them to go about the tasks of witness, mercy and life together. On the other hand, failure to grow by means of the Word hurts both the individual and the family of God. The one who struggles to live as one baptized may be comforted that the Lord is still at work in His Word to grant them a mature, active faith.

7. They're delivered from false teaching that inevitably divides and destroys unity, whether it be some random bad idea or some cunningly devised deceit. Both do great harm to Christian unity. Instead, they speak the truth in love because the Word holds the body of Christ together. Christians are often tempted to believe that the Word is an instrument to be used within the Church, but that the Church is held together and grown by programs and personnel. This is not so. All programs are to be in service to the Word — either contributing to the proclamation of the Gospel or arising from it in service to others. Where the Word is not the basis for the Church and its unity, the family falls apart or strays from the Word until it is no longer the Church.

It should be noted that not only do Christians speak the truth, but they speak it in love; and the word for love (Greek: *agape*) is that sacrificial love in service to others. While attitude is certainly an element in communication and rudeness should never be excused, to speak in love is not a command to “just be nice.” Speaking the truth in love means working hard to speak the truth: to apply the Law when it is necessary, though difficult, and to persist in proclaiming the Gospel when appropriate to those whom, perhaps, you would rather avoid!

8. Temptations of sensuality, materialism and impurity clearly plague both individual Christians and the Church, as believers are tempted to buckle under pressure to permit infidelity (moral or doctrinal) or are simply worn down until impurity doesn't seem wrong anymore. Regarding Acts 2:38, remember that repentance literally means “change of mind.” The minds of the Gentiles are futile because they are not repentant. Therefore, they do not trust in God's grace, but they either see themselves as outsiders who must earn God's help or as God's enemies because of their sin. Either way, they are not set free to live lives as God's beloved sons and heirs.

9. In Acts 2, the crowd heard of Christ and His death from Peter; and in response, those who believed were baptized and then continued in the faith. This is what Paul describes here about the Ephesians: having heard the Word about Christ, they were baptized. They put off the old sinful self and put on the new self. This is

what happens in Holy Baptism as our old self is crucified with Christ and then we are raised up with Him — no longer as slaves, but as those set free from sin (Rom. 6:6–7) and thus children in the household of God.

Begun at Baptism, this is continued through daily repentance. This is more than the confession of one's remembered sins. It is also the daily confession of faith that says, “I am not a slave anymore, nor must I earn God's love. I live today as one set free by Christ who died for me, and salvation is already mine. That's why I am now free to do what God would have me do.” The one who is thus baptized and repentant can rejoice that he is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness,” because his sins are forgiven and he is clothed in the righteousness of Christ — in Holy Baptism (Gal. 3:27).

10. Answers will vary, but here are some thoughts.

Verse 25: Falsehood, whether spoken maliciously or to be kind, always divides in the end. Paul notes that we are members of one another, joined as the body of Christ. (Christ is the truth as seen in John 14:6.) For the sake of the entire body, we are to speak the truth and speak it in love. This is not the same as “brutal honesty” or speaking truth that doesn't need to be said. It is to speak the Law in love, to call to repentance, to speak the Gospel to grant forgiveness. As Luther writes in the explanation to the Eighth Commandment, we speak the truth regarding our neighbor to “defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.”

Verses 26–27: “Be angry and do not sin” is a quote from Ps. 4:4, which reads, “Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.” (Since we're talking about the people of God in Ephesians 4, it's notable that Ps. 4:3 declares that “the LORD has set apart the godly for Himself.”) There is such a thing as righteous anger; however, unrighteous anger comes easy in families as sinners grow weary of the ongoing weaknesses of others — sometimes sinful weaknesses, sometimes simply inabilities. Such anger festers within the Church. It leads to self-righteousness at the expense of blaming others, and it gives the devil

great opportunity to distract from the work of the Church, divide the people of God and coax believers away from the faith.

Verse 28: Paul addresses theft, and it provides a marvelous illustration of a person who has gone from a futile mind that steals from others to a new creation who works so that he might share with others. Luther reminds us in the Small Catechism that the keeping of the Seventh Commandment requires that we “help [our neighbor] to improve and protect his possessions and income.” This has implications for life together, for sloth tempts every Christian to fail to contribute and thus leave the work and the giving to others. This stifles faith that seeks to serve. On the other hand, those who are set free from sin are set free to go about works of mercy.

Verse 29: Corrupting (the Greek *sapros* means “worthless”) talk comes easily because of the worthless thoughts from within and the sinful messages from the world. It encourages the old sinful nature and tempts Christians either to believe that they should leave the house for seductive sins of the world or else should permit such sins into the household of faith. The people of God are set free to build up others, to speak words with worth that “give grace.” In other words, they are set free to witness.

Verse 30: The Holy Spirit is grieved by impenitence. (“Sealed for the day of redemption” is another reference to Holy Baptism.) Impenitence is a great temptation when there is disunity in the Church because each side in the dispute believes that they are contending for the truth. Therefore, it is easy to justify unrighteous anger, impatience and so on as means to a correct end. The goal of reconciliation is neither compromise nor victory, but submission to God’s Word and thus restoration of the unity of faith.

Verse 31: Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice are all sins of the one who wants to achieve his own objectives rather than conform to the truth of Scripture. Such sins tend to manifest themselves in congregational disputes and church conventions on all sides since they are inherent to our sinful nature and boil over before we might even realize.

11. Kindness, tenderheartedness and forgiveness foster life together among Christians. When Christian unity has been damaged and life together is full of tension, restoring that unity can be frustrating and seem impossible. Yet Paul ends chapter 4 with the reminder that God in Christ has forgiven us, and he begins chapter 5 by reminding us that Christ “loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Maintaining Christian unity begins with the remarkable, humbling truth that Jesus has already reconciled us to Himself by His own death in our place. He has joined us to that death in Holy Baptism. The path to Christian unity begins with repentance, when we repent of our sinful stubbornness and trust in the One who has already taken our sin and reconciled us to God!

12. Answers may vary, but it is absolutely true that everyone there is one for whom Christ has died. God has sacrificed His own Son for their redemption. Along with this, members of a congregation are united by Holy Baptism and are thus brothers and sisters in Christ because God has made it so. There is no room, then, to be dismissive or condescending regarding the faith and welfare of others.

13. Opinions will vary here too. However, it is essential that doctrinal disagreements be settled by means of Scripture in order to preserve the unity of the faith described in Eph. 4:4–6 and to remain submissive to the Lord and His Word. It is a destructive contradiction when one seeks to compromise Scripture to preserve the one faith that joins us to the one Lord. Instead, we rejoice that the Lord unites us and joins us to Himself in that one true faith.

There will be plenty of other squabbles along the way over non-doctrinal matters — be it building plans, poor attendance at work days or people who just don’t get along very well. Such are to be decided not on the basis of power but on the basis of humility and what best serves the family of God in the long run and contributes to the proclamation of the Gospel in that place.

There is a great temptation in the Church today to reframe doctrinal disputes as matters of practice or personality differences; this is done to avoid confrontation, and it fails to address

the true problem and bring about reconciliation. It obscures the true need for repentance. True reconciliation is achieved when all parties are returned to living repentant lives in their Baptism together.

14. This wonderful passage proclaims rich Gospel: Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to serve even to the point of death on the cross. How remarkable! Had Jesus become flesh, sat

on a throne and said, “World, I command you to serve Me because I deserve all glory and honor,” He would only be telling the truth. Instead, He became a servant and least of all, even to the point of sacrificing Himself so that sinners might be forgiven.

Because of His service to us, we are now set free to serve those around us — and since the kingdom of heaven is already ours, why wouldn't we?

An Afterword

During a very bad time a few years after ordination, I stopped by the seminary while on vacation. I caught a professor as he was leaving his office and asked him for some time, which he graciously provided. He listened intently as I poured out my frustrations and how all seemed very bleak. Then he reminded me that God's love for me didn't depend on my "success" as a pastor, but upon Christ and His death for my sins. And as we parted, he gave me a handout from chapel that said at the bottom, "How humble the tool when placed in the hands of the Master."

I think I still have that paper somewhere. That day, the good doctor was gently telling me what it means to live in my Baptism. To live in one's Baptism is really quite simple. We are born into the family of God by means of Holy Baptism. That life and sonship are sustained by the Lord's Word and Supper. We are the people of God because God Himself says so, and His Word is far surer than all the noise that argues otherwise.

As the people of God, we're set free to do good works of witness, mercy and life together. What prevents those works? That old sinful nature that still clings on,

distracting and goading us into serving sin once more. There are days when the good works of the Christian are done with little joy, when we feel as if service to God is a heavy yoke with which we're burdened. So, we live lives of repentance. We confess the sins that distract us from doing good; more than that, we repent of believing that the life of God's children is a life of drudgery and trying to earn His love. We live by faith, faith that we are heirs of the kingdom of God for Jesus' sake and faith that our works are pleasing to God despite the sinful nature's constant attacks.

As for me, I rarely feel like I am living as one set free from sin and rejoicing to do good. I'm still much better at thinking like a hired hand than a child of God. This is why I treasure those gifts of repentance and faith, along with God's promise that I am His beloved child, no matter what the current yammering of sin, death and the devil. Martin Luther sums it up so well in the Smalcald Articles:

We are the people of God because God Himself says so, and His Word is far surer than all the noise that argues otherwise.

I do not know how to change in the least what I have previously and constantly taught about justification. Namely, that through faith, as St. Peter says, we have a new and clean heart [Acts 15:9–11], and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator [1 Timothy 2:5]. Although sin in the flesh has not yet been completely removed or become dead [Romans 7:18], yet He will not punish or remember it.

Such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sins are followed by good works [Ephesians 2:8–9]. What is still sinful or imperfect in them will not be counted as sin or defect, for Christ's sake [Psalm 32:1–2; Romans 4:7–8]. The entire individual, both his person and his works, is declared to be righteous and holy from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and spread over us in Christ. Therefore, we cannot boast of many merits and works, if they are viewed apart from grace and mercy. As it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31); namely, that he has a gracious God. For with that, all is well. We say, besides, that if good works do not follow, the faith is false and not true. (Smalcald Articles III XIII)

Such is the life of the baptized in this sinful world. It will be a life in which all sorts of evil seek to rob you of all joy. But your joy is sure because it is in Christ. You're a child of God, and you know the end of the story.

I'd like to extend a word of thanks to the congregation of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Boise, Idaho — the people of God whom I've been privileged to serve for the past 15 years and among whom I think I'm finally figuring out what it means to be a pastor. They served as the test subjects for this Bible study, and their influence is on every page.

My prayers include all those who are counted among my brothers and sisters in Christ within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Lord has poured out many great blessings upon us, so that we might be His joyful children, humble tools in the Master's hand to a world in dire need of Good News. Even as we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, God grant us repentant hearts that rejoice to be baptized now — baptized for this moment.

PASTOR TIM PAULS

Addendum: A Hymn for Each Lesson

Lutheran hymnody is full of wonderful hymns about Holy Baptism and living as the baptized, and *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* does us the kindness of including a section titled “Baptismal Life.” For each lesson in this study, here is a suggested pairing:

Lesson 1: “Once in the Blest Baptismal Waters” (LSB 598)

This three-stanza hymn is actually comprised of stanzas 8, 9 and 11 of Hymn 598 from *The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH)*, an eleven-stanza hymn tucked away in the “Death and Burial” section. The shorter *LSB* version is a gorgeous marriage of text and tune, which describes the life of the baptized beautifully. The longer *TLH* hymn places that comfort against death’s dark shadow.

Lesson 2: “O Blessed Spring” (LSB 595)

This hymn is more of a poetic treatment of baptismal life than a catechetical hymn. It speaks of God’s faithfulness despite our sins and afflictions; stanza 2, for instance, offers comfort especially for parents who watch children go astray.

Lesson 3: “O Gracious Lord, with Love Draw Near” (LSB 599)

The six stanzas of this hymn succinctly weave together God’s ongoing care for His baptized people in His Word and Supper, all the while offering the prayer that we do what He would have us do until we are delivered to heaven.

Lesson 4: “God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It” (LSB 594)

Keeping the illustration of the little boy and the playground bully in mind, this hymn does a marvelous job of pointing to Christ and Baptism in the face of sin, Satan and death. Against the Christian’s greatest foes, those who sing continue with joyous insistence, “I am baptized into Christ; I’m a child of paradise!”

Lesson 5: “All Who Believe and Are Baptized” (LSB 601)

This two-stanza hymn is probably as well known as it is brief. But in its short lines, it proclaims the unity that we have in Christ and prays that the Lord would deliver us from our infirmities to the inheritance of eternal life.