

“Baptized into Christ”

Let me ask you a serious question – Who are you? Are you defined by your job – by what you do, or do not do – by your success in life – your marital status – what you see in the mirror?

Do you not know that you are “baptized into Christ Jesus”? More than anything else – this is what defines you – and directs your life. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” So how can you – who have died to sin – still live in it?

Honestly, I think most of us just make our way through life – and our sinful nature has its way with us. If we desire something, we take it, or do it. We selfishly think everyone else should be serving us – centering their lives around what we want.

Daily we sin much – but we don’t make much of it. “I know it’s wrong, but Jesus will forgive me” seems to be our motto, our excuse. So, the Apostle Paul asks the question. “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound” – as if that’s a good thing – that more sin just means more grace?

Μη γενοιτο, he screams. “By no means!” This is the most emphatic way to say NO in the Greek language. Absolutely not! That’s not how any of this works! That’s not who you are!

Like John the Baptist, Paul calls us to repent of thinking and living this way. You are not baptized into Christ so that you can continue to live in sin. Rather, you are baptized into His death and resurrection so that you “might walk in newness of life.”

A new life, a new creation – living as God created you to live – without sin and the death and destruction that it brings to you and your neighbor. God does not want you to live in sin – abusing others and then being badgered by guilt – dragging around the sins of your past – never sure where you stand with God.

You are baptized into Christ in order that you may live a “new life” – not one in which your sinful desires call the shots – where the devil stirs up all kinds of wickedness – seeking to separate you from God – dragging you away from Christ so that he can torment you forever in the fires of hell.

You are baptized into Christ so that your new life might be lived in faith toward God and in fervent love for one another – not living as if sin is no big deal – as if Christ was born, and baptized, and died for nothing.

To be baptized into Christ is to be united to Christ – that is who you are! You have been joined to Christ in His death, so that you may die to sin – and you are bound to Him in His resurrection, so that you too might walk in newness of life – here in time, and in the life to come.

“We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” Our sinful nature, with all its evil desires – has been crucified with Christ – but as Dr. Luther would say, and as you well know – “the old Adam is a good swimmer.”

Your Old Adam was drowned with Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism – but each day it bobs to the surface, trying to lead you into all kinds of wickedness – seeking to enslave you and run your life. And the honest truth is that sin does rule over us – that we are enslaved and addicted to sin. It’s who we are apart from Christ.

So that you, God’s good creation – might not be lost forever – God’s own Son has taken on your human flesh and blood – to rescue you from the threatening perils of your sin. That’s why Christ is baptized – not for Himself – but for you.

Jesus steps into the waters of the Jordan River – and in His Baptism – He soaks up into His flesh the sin of all creation. In His Baptism – He who knew no sin became sin “for you” – so that He might take your sin and pay its price – lugging it to the cross where He is drowned to death by God’s wrath at sin --- and all of this, “for you.”

Dearly beloved, that is who you are – a baptized child of God. All your sin – even those sins you are not aware of – even those sins you have not yet committed ---- Jesus has taken them all away from you, and buried them in His death.

By yourself – you are a sinner – deserving of God’s wrath and punishment. But baptized into Christ – you are a saint, a holy one – sinless in the eyes of God.

At the Baptism of Jesus the heavens were opened – thereby showing you that heaven is open to you – in Christ Jesus. There at the Jordan, the voice of the Heavenly Father loudly and proudly proclaimed: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” In your baptism – you are declared to be the beloved child of God – well pleasing in His sight – because in Jesus, all your sin is washed away.

So let me ask you once again, who are you? Are you a sinner? Of that, you can be sure. Your sinful nature will hang around your neck and fight against you as long as you live in this sinful flesh and sin-fallen world. But more than anything else – you are baptized into Christ. Therefore, God says, “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

In Holy Baptism – you continue to die to sin. When your Old Adam surfaces in your life and seeks to enslave you – he is put to death in repentance. Don’t deny, or trivialize your sin – confess it to God your heavenly Father – for you are His beloved child.

And Christ’s forgiveness resurrects you to a new life – a good life, the life God desires for you – as the Holy Spirit who descended on you in baptism, and remains on you – leads you in the way of the Lord. The Holy Spirit tells you what God desires you to do, and not do – and He repents you when you go your own way.

That’s who you are – baptized into Christ Jesus – led by the Holy Spirit – a beloved child of God. So, let us consider ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.