

I will never forget my son’s baptism Sunday. Dean was six months old and I had entrusted his care and arrival to my family since I had to be at church early that day. I had prepared for this moment. Nelson had chosen the baptismal outfit, it had been laid out and ready to go, my mother-in-law had given me the shoes that Nelson wore at his baptism and I had tried them on Dean’s feet the week before and they fit perfectly. I had made sure that Dean got a good night’s sleep and had packed his bag full of milk and snacks and toys for the possibility that he would get fussy in church.

To my delight, my family arrived on time, but to my dismay Dean was not wearing Nelson’s baptismal shoes, but some ratty brown socks with stars on them. It was obvious I was not a fan of this wardrobe selection, and when I asked Nelson what happened he told me that Dean’s feet were too big for the shoes. So, we just went ahead and took his socks off and he was baptized with bare feet.

Looking back now, maybe the socks were more fitting than I realized. After all last week we talk about the light of the star on Epiphany Sunday, and that Jesus Christ is the light that came into the world to offer us hope and everlasting life.

Overall, Dean was remarkably well behaved and did not even cry as he was baptized by me and the other two pastors at Culpeper UMC. It was such an emotional moment for me as I walked him around the church and saw love on the faces of so many people in the congregation. I could tell they already loved my child and they wanted to nurture him in his faith.

On this special Sunday, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ and remember our own baptisms and give thanks to God. I was baptized as an infant, so I do not have a memory of the moment that I entered into this covenant with God. How many of you were baptized as infant, youth, or adults?

In The United Methodist Church, we participate in infant baptism recognizing that the Holy Spirit is already at work within the child’s life. Then the parent’s take the baptismal vows on behalf of the child, vows that they will raise them in the Christian faith, then my favorite part happens. The body of Christ also enters into this covenant with the child saying they also will help the child as they grow in their faith. It is a beautiful moment. Then the child is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then comes the prayer of the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit work within you that by water and the Spirit you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.”¹

By water and the Spirit, we become members of the household of God. I think this is what John was trying to explain to the people in our Scripture for today...that Jesus Christ had come into the world to continue this covenant that God had made with the Israelites so many years ago. Baptism is a beautiful symbol of our faith.

In The United Methodist Church we do not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. We take the Scriptural approach in Romans 10:9 which says: “...If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” We see a moment like this happen when a thief is on the cross with Jesus Christ and he said: “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus Christ replied: “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23: 42-43).

This is why we have confirmation for youth. When they are baptized as infants, they are not able to profess their faith for themselves and their parents take the vows on their behalf. Confirmation is an opportunity for the youth to profess their faith in Christ and have this moment of salvation and to take responsibility for their own faith.

All the while the Holy Spirit is working in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity responsible for God’s prevenient grace, the grace that comes before we are able to fully understand who God is. Infant baptism is a beautiful example of God’s prevenient grace.

As we profess our faith in Christ, we have the moment of justifying grace, this is the moment we enter into salvation: a relationship with God that never ends. Then we go on to sanctifying grace, a time in our faith where we continue to pursue discipleship and sharing the good news.

The reason we celebrate Baptism of the Lord Sunday every year is because it gives us the opportunity to remember our baptism and be thankful. It gives us the opportunity to recognize that God is still at work in our lives through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It gives us an opportunity to once again repent and ask God to wash us clean of our sins so we may continue to live into the new life that Jesus Christ offers us each and every day.

The reason we should be baptized is because Jesus commanded us to do so. This is why we consider Baptism a sacrament. It is something that Jesus Christ showed us to do by example, through our Gospel lesson today, and through “the great commission”:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”ⁱⁱ

So, the question is why should we not be baptized? The question is what are we waiting for? This is a beautiful symbol of our faith and the covenant we are called to enter into with God our Creator who Isaiah 43 tells us created us, and formed us, and redeemed us. The same God who is with us in the floods and fires of this life and who through the Holy Spirit continues to lead and guide us each and every day. What an amazing God we serve.

As we celebrate our baptism through the Holy Spirit today may we remember our own baptisms and be thankful.

The moment of any baptism is incredible. It marks a dying to ourselves and being raised to new life with Jesus Christ. In The United Methodist Church we do this by three modes: sprinkling, pouring, and immersion all which signify the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon our lives.ⁱⁱⁱ The water symbolizes us being cleaned of our sins. How were each of you baptized?

When we remember our baptism each year, this is not a time for rebaptizing, because God is the one who baptizes through the power of the Holy Spirit and when we go through that once it is enough. So, to not get the action of remembering our baptism confused with rebaptizing we always say: “Remember your baptism and be thankful.” We can do this through touching the water and making a cross on our forehead or hand or we can do it through the way we will participate in today. In a moment when we participate in a time of remembering our baptism, after I ask the Holy Spirit to bless the water in the baptismal font, I will take a branch and dip it in the water and try to aim the water to fall on each and every one of you as we remember the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The good news for our lives today is the same Holy Spirit that was active at Jesus’ baptism is still active in our lives today. May we be attentive to the working of the Spirit in our lives. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

- FH, WC: Baptismal Remembrance - S: After prayer time.

ⁱ The United Methodist Hymnal. P. 42.

ⁱⁱ Matthew 28:19-20.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/is-sprinkling-the-only-way-that-united-methodists-baptize>