

You may recognize the words that are on the screen. They are from the Baptism Service. Usually we ask parents if they will – do these things for their children’s sake. Today we are going to ask ourselves where we are at in the promises we have made in the presence of God. Please recite the words on the screen with me...

I will attend the services of God’s house.

I will grow in the Christian faith through learning the Lord’s Prayer, the Creeds, the 10 Commandments, and holding the Scriptures in my hands.

I will live in the covenant of my Baptism.

I will live in communion with the Church.

I will seek to live a godly life.

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Well, it is 2007. I hope in 2007 you will always be gellin’, with good friends like Kevin and Helen, and thinkin’ of heaven, and always be home by eleven in 2007.

How many of us, in the first 7 days of 2007, have written 2006 on checks or other documents at least once? How many have written 2006 at least 3 times? You need help; serious help.

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We all need help. Where do you feel like you need help in 2007? Personal relationship help? Financial management help? Tutoring help? Meal planning help? Parenting help? Organizational help? Or maybe with those words we quoted at the beginning of this message – in your relationship with the living God?

For the next five weeks we are going to reflect on the gift of Holy Baptism. We begin by noting that Baptism is a gift of God to people who need help. We all need help.

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Did you hear about Little Johnny? Seems Little Johnny had been misbehaving again and had been sent to his room. Johnny emerged a couple minutes later and informed his mother that he had thought things over and had even said a prayer. Things were OK now, said Johnny.

Little Johnny’s mother was delighted with this result of the time-out time. She said, “Johnny, if you asked God to help you to not misbehave, God will help you.” Johnny replied, “Oh, I did not ask God for that! I asked God to help you put up with me.” Johnny still needs help!

We need help spiritually, emotionally, physically. The person of faith says, *“I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”* [Psalms 121:1-2]

In Baptism God helps us. Martin Luther said that the water of baptism “along with God's Word is a grace-filled water of life, a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit.” [ML, Small Catechism]

We are going to be focusing on that in this Sermon Series called “Rivers of Grace.” The Bible says, *“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”* [John 7:38]

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Paul Harvey was interviewed by Larry King back in 2003. Towards the end of the program a caller asked Paul Harvey about his faith. Paul Harvey said:

*I went to a little tiny church in Cave Creek, Arizona, the oldest town in Arizona. I sat about 10 rows back. A little visiting clergyman gets up, and the first few words out of his mouth... Well, the [family] with me thought I going to walk out of there, because the clergyman’s grammar was atrocious.*

*But he began talking about baptism. He explained baptism – the cleansing and the recovery from the cleansing – in a manner in which it had never been described to me before.*

*I was the first one on my feet at the end of his message. The clergyman arranged to have a little church down in the valley use their baptismal pond. I went there with a few friends and was baptized. And boy, that's when the fun begins, when you stop tearing yourself in half.<sup>1</sup>*

What a wonderful way to describe the baptized life: “when the fun begins.” When did the fun of Baptism begin for you?

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There are three main models for Baptism. Here they are:

- **Models of Baptism: adult individuals being baptized.**

This is the most common model in Acts. An adult comes to faith, and then is baptized. A few examples:

- There is the story of the Treasurer of Ethiopia, who was told the Good News by Philip. They were riding in a carriage by a body of water. The Treasurer said: *“Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?”* They stopped and the Treasurer of Ethiopia was baptized. [Acts 8:26-39]
  - There is the story of Paul. Jesus appeared to Paul, and Paul was blinded. Paul was baptized after his vision was healed. [Acts 9]
  - There were the people baptized on Pentecost Sunday. Peter told the gathered people that they must confess their sins, turn to God, and be baptized. 3,000 were baptized on that one day. [Acts 2]
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There are people who have never heard about Jesus as a Savior. There are still people like the Treasurer of Ethiopia, Paul, and the crowd of 3,000.

- Some need to hear the story of Jesus in a clear way.
- Some need to feel the love of God meant for them.

We need to do all we can to share the old, old story with those who have never heard and understood. The church that is faithful in evangelism and invitation will always have adult baptisms. The Bible proclaims, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ....”* [Acts 2:38]

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- **Models of Baptism: households being baptized.**

For some, the fun of the Baptized life began early in the household of faith. There are several of these household baptism stories in the Book of Acts.

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- There is the story of the wealthy woman named Lydia. She heard Paul and Silas sharing the Jesus story. The Bible says that she was baptized along with other members of her household. [Acts 16:11-15]
  - There is the story of the Jailer watching over Paul and Silas. He hears the Good News and asks what he must do. Paul says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.”* [Acts 16:25-34]
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- Then there is the story of Crispus. The Bible says that Crispus and everyone in his household believed in the Lord... and were baptized. [Acts 18:7-8]

One of the reasons we baptize infants in our tradition is this model of the household baptism. When the head of the household came to faith, then everyone in that household was baptized. It was understood that the message of Jesus would be heard and the life of Jesus would be imitated in these households.

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The other reason we in our tradition baptize children is because the Bible says that little children were brought to Jesus.

And – this is very important concerning infant baptism – the Bible says that Jesus blessed those infants.

When the Bible says that Jesus blessed the children it means that Jesus accepted them into a relationship with him.

For many of you the joy of the baptized life – your relationship with Jesus – began in the household of faith. Mom or Dad held you as God claimed you. You grew in that household of faith to call on the name of Jesus.

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- **Models of Baptism: preserving Baptism until there is a profession of faith.**

In some traditions infants are dedicated to God. The children are then brought up and encouraged to profess their faith. After the child reaches a certain age and makes a profession of faith, they are then baptized.

As mainline traditional churches continue to lose membership, and as evangelical churches and community churches continue to grow, this has grown as the model for Baptism.

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In the last few years I have had several conversations with people about our baptismal practices.

- Once it was a husband and wife where one believed in preserving baptism until profession and the other believed in the household of faith model.

- Once it was a couple where both grew up with the model of preserving baptism until profession, but they had appreciated our worship services. They were struggling.
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Maybe some of you struggle with questions of Baptism. Your children... Some of you have children who have continued to observe the model of the household of faith.

But many of you have children who have joined churches where the model is preserving baptism until a profession of faith. You are struggling to understand.

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Let us be clear about these things about Baptism as we begin this series:

1. Baptism is commanded by God. Jesus said: *“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”* [Matthew 28:19]
  2. Baptism is the gift of God. The Apostle Paul said: *“All who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on the character of Christ, like putting on new clothes.”* [Galatians 3:26]
  3. Baptism is the action of God. The Bible proclaims: *“God our Savior... saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.”* [Titus 3:5]
  4. Baptism is the promises, presence, and power of God in your life. The Bible says: *“For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.”*
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What does that mean? That we may live new lives?

When I was a little boy I spent time with my Grandfather in his workshop. We would build things like a birdhouse. Grandpa would say, “This is how it is done.” He would begin the project to show me how to plan and measure and cut and sand. Then he would watch over my shoulder as I labored on the birdhouse.

When I was done – and my birdhouse looked like a shed for a slug – I looked around for my Grandpa. He was standing right over my shoulder – he was always present for my fiascoes.

I would say, “I lift up my eyes... From where will my help come...” Actually, I just said, “Grandpa, help?!”

Grandpa would use his hands to make it right.

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That is our life. God gives us the gift of life and says, “This is how to live life.” Then we make an absolute mess of it and have to yell, “Help!” We look around God is still right there with us. God makes things right. That is the gift of your Baptism, for every day of your life.

If you have not been baptized and would like to be, give me a call.

Would you bow your hearts and make this prayer your own this morning:

Lord God, even before I could respond to you in faith you were in my life. You found ways to let me know that you created me, that you loved me, that you had plans for me. Your Holy Spirit has built bridges and opened doors so that I might come to believe in you. It is not my own doing – it is the gift of God.

Today I am able to respond to you. And my response is: I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who has come into this world, and into my life. And I am overjoyed to realize that I am a Child of God. May your Holy Spirit work in my life again this week, to bring me assurance and hope, and to find ways to serve my brothers and sisters. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry King Transcripts on CNN Website. January 30, 2003