

Preparing for Baptism

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In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is our conviction that “No one can come to [Jesus Christ] unless the Father who sent [Him] draws him,” (St. John 6:44). It is our profound hope and desire to help you explore the gift you seek in Baptism through this study.

As you prepare to explore the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, you will need a copy of the Bible, Luther’s *Small Catechism*, the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW), and *Remember Who You Are: Baptism, A Model for Christian Life* (RWYA) by William Willimon.

By God’s grace you have come to this point in life. The Holy Spirit has instilled within you the urge and desire to seek out Baptism, whether it be for yourself or for your child(ren). We invite you to commit yourself, then, to prayerful study and to study prayerfully the Sacred Scripture and Tradition of holy Church. For the promise of our Lord is “If you ask Me anything in My Name, I will do it” so that “the Father may be glorified in the Son” (St. John 14:14, 13).

+ Soli Deo Gloria! +

Introduction

Pages 9-13

William Willimon says, “This is a book about the Christian life, therefore it is a book about Christian Baptism, therefore it is a book about water” (*RWYA* 9).

What connection(s), if any, do you see between the Christian life, Baptism, and water? Why do you think Willimon connects these?

Reflect on the author’s conviction “that in a Christian’s Baptism we see the mode and the model for a Christian’s life.” Or, said another way, “A Christian is someone who by ‘water and the Word’ has begun to live the Death and Resurrection of Jesus in his or her own life” (*RWYA* 9). What is the mode and model of which he speaks and how does it speak of the Christian life?

Luther’s salty response to the inquiry “How do I know I am a Christian?” is “You know you are baptized — that’s all you need to know” (*RWYA* 9).

How does Luther’s response strike you and what do you think he was driving at?

Does you think his response answers the question? If so, how? If not, why not?

The early Church Father, Tertullian, is credited with the phrase used in the book, “Christians are made, not born” (*RWYA* 11).

What do you think he means?

Why do you suppose he said such a thing?

Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

The author says that Baptism is intended for “committed adults or for committed adults and their children” (*RWYA* 11).

Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

What does he mean by “committed” and why do you think he emphasizes commitment?

Reflect on the comment that becoming a Christian is a “serious and awesome decision.” Jot down some thoughts and reactions (*RWYA* 11).

The author advocates for a lengthy period of formation before Baptism (known as the ancient catechumenate) consisting of three stages (*RWYA* 11-12):

1. Inquiry into the Faith and its personal ramifications,
2. Spiritual formation through worship, prayer, Scripture, and service, and
3. A more focused instruction in the sacramental life.

Do you think this is too much to ask if Baptism is a “serious and awesome decision”? Does it seem like a reasonable expectation? Why or why not?

What do you suppose might be the value in and wisdom of a deliberate and intentional Christian formational process such as the one proposed above?

It is said that “the community” of Faith should help determine one’s readiness for this “serious and awesome decision to become a Christian” (*RWYA* 12).

How does this notion that Baptism is “best understood as a communal event” and corporate decision strike you?

Why do you think “the community” so important?

The Rock from Whence You Were Hewn

Pages 15-23

Before you read this chapter, please take a few minutes and look over the Rite of Baptism found in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW 121-125) to become familiar with it.

Willimon imagines two hypothetical Baptisms: one in the early Church and one in the 20th century Church. How do they strike you? Try to compare and/or contrast them in the space below.

Early Church

Modern Church

An ancient maxim has it that “the rule of prayer is the rule of faith” (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), which, is to say, our prayer and worship reveal the Faith we hold. In other words, if we want to know what the Church believes, then worship and pray with her. Drawing on this ancient maxim, then, what would you say is the baptismal belief of the early Church and that of the modern Church as indicated by their practices described in the chapter? Are there any surprises here for you? What?

Read Willimon’s assessment of the early Church’s baptismal understanding and practice again (*RWYA* 22-23). Do any of these points challenge your own perceptions at this time? What? How? Why?

Reflect on the Rite of Baptism in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW 121-125) and the Pastoral Guidelines you were given regarding Baptism. Go ahead and hazard a guess as to our baptismal understanding based on the Rite of Baptism and this congregation’s pastoral practices. Does our understanding and practice here come closer to the early Church’s or to the modern Church’s in Willimon’s hypothetical scenarios?

How does our practice preserve the importance of Baptism as a “serious and awesome decision” by both you and the Church?

Royalty

Pages 24-31

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Ponder the Apostle's words (you may also wish to consult Deuteronomy 7:6 as well) and write here what it is he's saying to you.

Christ or messiah means anointed one. Jesus Christ, then, is God's Messiah, God's Anointed One — Prophet, Priest, and King. We who are baptized into this Anointed One of God are called Christ-ians or little Christs, to use Luther's words. Through Baptism into God's Anointed One, we, too, have been made with Him prophets, priests, and kings. As God's little anointed ones what are we called to do (*RWYA* 26-27)? For additional help, read again 1 Peter 2:9-10 above and the baptismal rite (*LBW* 124, rubric #16 and #18).

Read of our Lord's own Baptism in St. Matthew 3:13-17:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'

What does the heavenly Voice proclaim as truth about Jesus?

If we have been yoked with God's beloved Son in the waters of Baptism, what might the truth be about us as well (*RWYA* 29)?

The Chosen

Pages 32-42

What does Baptism do? Read Luther's *Small Catechism* on Baptism for help and refer to the baptismal rite (*LBW* 122, rubric #9).

Who commands Baptism?

Who is the actor in Baptism and who is acted upon?

In St. John 6:44 Jesus says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" and in St. John 15:16 He says, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you"

What does it mean to be chosen by God?

What does it mean to you to know that your desire for Baptism doesn't come from you but from God who has implanted it in you?

Even faith itself can't be claimed by us! It's a gift from God! Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and Luther's *Small Catechism* on the third article of the Creed. How have we come to know Jesus Christ as Lord?

Even if we could decide for Jesus, as the old song goes ("I have decided to follow Jesus"), where do we get the power to decide?

Do you grasp the stark contrast of the Sacrament of Baptism as a divinely ordained means of grace over and against the notion of it as mere "symbol" (*RWYA* 33-35)? Put simply, does Baptism do anything? Article V of the *Augsburg Confession*, "Concerning the Office of Preaching" or "Ministry in the Church," states:

To obtain such [saving] faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the Gospel and Sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the Gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.

Now, does the Sacrament of Baptism, as a means of God's grace, do anything or is it a merely "an outward and visible sign"?

According to Article V of the *Augsburg Confession* above, how do we get faith? Where does it originate?

In Baptism, as in any other Sacrament, are we achievers or receivers (*RWYA* 35)? In other words, is the emphasis on us or on God?

Read Romans 5:6-11 and Ephesians 2:1-10. Name the Gospel or the Good News of God for us from these Scriptures.

Talk about the contrast Willimon makes of the slogans “I Found It” vs. “I Got Found” (*RWYA* 39). For additional help, reflect on the stanza below from a hymn in the *Service Book and Hymnal* (*SBH* #473):

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true;
No, I was found of Thee.*

How do you feel that the Gospel won't allow us to claim as our own the decision to follow Jesus?

Reflect on 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,
whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with
a price. So glorify God in your body.*

According to the Scripture above, what is your body? Why? To whom do you belong?

What does Willimon say about ownership (*RWYA* 41-42)?

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that “you were bought with a price”. How much are you worth according to the Scripture? For additional help, read Luther's *Small Catechism* on the second article of the Creed.

Any final thoughts on or reactions to the chapter?

Come On In, the Water's Fine

Pages 43-50

Everyday all of us are being formed by forces outside of ourselves — forces we are oftentimes quite unaware of — from our taste in clothing to our view of the world. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, formation of body, mind, and soul happens.

However, we do not have to be merely passive in the process, but can actively take part in how we are being formed, conformed, and transformed (Romans 6:12-19; 12:1-2). As Christian parents, we have influence in the spiritual formation of our children albeit there are never any guarantees that they will “turn out” just the way we want. Nevertheless, we do not have to sit idly by, but can exercise influence and engage in the purposeful spiritual formation of our children — body, mind, and soul.

What should the Christian parent's responsibility and role be in the spiritual formation of their child(ren)? For help consult Deuteronomy 6:8-9, Proverbs 22:6, and Ephesians 6:4. Note also in the baptismal rite the prayer for parents (*LBW* 124, rubric #17).

Can you list some things that might get in the way of the Christian formation of your child(ren)?

What message do parents communicate to their child(ren) when they:

Drop their child(ren) off for church and/or Sunday School while they themselves run errands or do other things?

Choose sports events over worship and/or Sunday School?

Never mention Jesus or talk about God in the home? or

Don't pray or tell the biblical stories?

Do you agree or disagree with Willimon's assessment that “many of us parents suffer from a failure of nerve in regard to the nurturing of our children's faith” because we lack “faith in ourselves, our values, our tradition, our own witness” (*RWYA* 47)? Defend your answer.

In short, he says, “we suffer from a lack of trust.” If we are trying to pass on a faith we ourselves do not possess, believe, or half-heartedly cling to, what do you suppose the outcome might be?

Reflect on your own spiritual upbringing.

Do you come from a faithful Christian family?

If so, how were you raised in the Faith?

Did you rebel in your youth only to return to the Church at some point? Why?

What do you think kept you linked to the Church, even in your rebellion?

Had you not been raised in the Faith, where do you think you'd be right now?

What do you hope for your child(ren) for whom you are seeking Baptism?

If you were not raised in the Faith, why are you now seeking Baptism for your child(ren)? Do

you wish you had been raised as a Christian? Why? How do you think Baptism or the Christian Faith might have made a difference for you?

Willimon talks about the grace of “letting our children go” into the hands of God when everything is said and done (*RWYA* 48-50). Is this the same thing as doing nothing to form them spiritually or allowing them, when old enough, to decide for themselves without attempting to influence their religious decision? What comfort, if any, can parents take in “letting our children go” “into the everlasting arms of God Himself”?

In Baptism, we are “marked forever with the Cross of Christ” (Rite of Baptism). We can wash the chrism (oil) from our foreheads afterwards, but the brand of the Cross, which has already claimed us, is indelibly imprinted deep within whose mark can never be erased no matter how far we stray from God. How does this “inescapableness” from God impact you? What does it say to you about this God? about you?

What does it mean to you that Luther called parents bishops over their households (sometimes referred to as the domestic Church)?

What are some ways that you as a baptized parent can constructively, intentionally, and deliberately form your child(ren) in the Faith realizing, however, that there are no absolute guarantees? For help, refer to the parental promises in Baptism (*LBW* 121, rubric #6).

Remember, you are not alone in this holy vocation of parenthood. You have been baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity! (Look at *LBW* hymn #188). You have been placed in the congregation, the Body of Christ, who surrounds you with their prayers and presence as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Finally, note the mission of the baptized expressed in the rite (*LBW* 124-125, rubric #18; *LBW* 201, rubric #14).

The Cleansing Bath

Pages 51-61

Before reading this chapter try to define sin. What is sin and what do you think it has to do with Baptism?

Reflect on the chapter after reading it. Note here what sits well with you and/or what disturbs you? Why? Any insights?

What is the distinction between sin and sins?

Refer again to the baptismal rite (*LBW* 121, rubric #2). Consider also the phrases from our Corporate Confession that “we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves” (*LBW*) and that “we are sinful by nature and unclean” (*SBH*). What does it teach about sin? about us? about Baptism?

What is the sole requirement or pre-condition for Baptism, according to Willimon (*RWYA* 59)? Why? Does this surprise you?

Read Luther’s *Small Catechism* on Baptism. What does it have to say about Baptism? about sin? about us?

Read 1 John 1:8-9:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

How is Baptism like a cleansing bath? From what are we cleansed? What do we have to do to be cleansed? Why do we need to be cleansed?

Having read this chapter, would you change your original definition of sin? How? Why?

All in the Family

Pages 62-72

A Gallop poll (other than the one Willimon mentions) confirms the religiosity of Americans, but it also says that worship attendance is lamentably low among these same religious Americans! What does this incongruity between faith (belief) and life suggest? In other words, how can Christians confess faith (belief) in God and yet not worship this God?

Respond to the following quotes:

- (a) “The Christian Faith is neither a set of lofty ideals and noble propositions, nor is it a system of ethics and guides for behavior. The Christian Faith is a corporate endeavor, a way of life together under Christ with His holy ones” (*RWYA* 62).
- (b) “One cannot claim to be ‘in Christ’ without being in the ‘Body of Christ.’ There is no solitary Christian, no way of doing the Faith by a home correspondence course in salvation. Nor . . . in the cozy comfort of your living room watching an evangelist do the Faith on television. He who does not know the Church does not know the Church’s Lord, and he who does not know the Lord does not know God. And Baptism is the door” (*RWYA* 62-63).

St. Cyprian is credited with saying, “We cannot have God as our Father [and I might add, Christ as our Brother] if we do not have the Church as our Mother.” What do you think he was trying to say?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ Now you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it.

To whom are believers inseparably connected? What are these connected believers called, i.e., what is the image St. Paul uses to describe these connected believers? Why?

Refer to the Rite of Baptism (*LBW* 121, rubric #2). What is our Christian growth “in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God” dependent upon?

Read Ephesians 1:20-23. Note how God has made Jesus Christ the Head over all things for the sake of the Church!

According to the Apostle, what is the Church? Is the Church a mere empty vessel? What do you think St. Paul means when he says that the Church is “the fullness of [Christ] who fills all in all”? For additional help, read Ephesians 5:21-33 as well.

Scripture speaks of our adoption as sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:15). What does the image of adoption convey to you and what does the biblical image infer about our relationship to God (*RWYA* 64, 68-69)? How is infant Baptism a fitting image for the Church (*RWYA* 69-72)?

You've Got Spirit

Pages 73-81

Read St. John 3:1-10. In order to enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus says we must be born of what?

When we are baptized, we are baptized with water and the Word of God (Luther's *Small Catechism* on Baptism). Through this water and Word, what (who) do we receive? Read Titus 3:4-8.

Read Luther's great prayer over the waters (also called the Flood Prayer) found in the baptismal rite (*LBW* 122, rubric #9). Notice the strong presence of the Holy Trinity. Who do we specifically implore Almighty God to pour out upon "these who are here baptized"? Why?

In the same baptismal rite, what is prayed for in rubric #13?

What does it mean for us that God pours out upon us and into us the gift of the Holy Spirit's seven-fold graces: "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in [God's] Presence" (*LBW* 124, rubric #13)? Re-read Willimon for help (*RWYA* 78-81).

Baptism is a once-in-a-lifetime event. It is the moment of salvation. So, if some time later on you should experience an emotionally powerful, life-transforming conversion experience, how would you explain it in light of your Baptism (*RWYA* 79-80)?

How to Be Born Again

Pages 82-93

If someone were to ask you “Are you born again? Are you saved?”, how would you answer?

Read the story of Jesus and Nicodemus found in St. John 3:1-21. In their exchange, Jesus tells the Pharisee that “unless one is born again [or from above] he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

How does Nicodemus understand Jesus at first?

But, what does Jesus mean by being born again or from above? For assistance, read St. John 1:11-13 and re-read Willimon (*RWYA* 83-86).

Read Titus 3:1-8. Why has “God our Saviour” saved us? How?

Note the regeneration and renewal emphasis in Titus. Some translations use rebirth. What does it mean to regenerate someone or something (you can refer to a dictionary if you desire)? What does this say about Baptism and about us? In whose power is our regeneration accomplished?

From what to what does God call us in Baptism? Read Ephesians 4:17-24 and Colossians 3:5-11 for help.

How can Baptism save, renew, and regenerate? Read Luther’s *Small Catechism* on Baptism.

Read Willimon’s assessment of the born again experience so often touted by other Christian traditions (*RWYA* 86-87). The emphasis is generally on an emotionally charged, once-in-a-lifetime, datable religious experience. However, from your reading of Willimon, Luther, and the baptismal rite, are we ever only born again once in our lives?

For Luther, Baptism is an objective reality, i.e., it is a tangible fact that has happened to us. Why might he emphasize this objective reality of what God has done to us and for us over the subjective and emotional experience, i.e., the feeling of being born again? 2 Corinthians 5:7 may be of help.

Is Willimon’s assessment and response to the born again experience helpful to you or not (*RWYA* 87-91)? How? Why?

Is it helpful to understand Baptism as a divine reality which we live and grow into? Note how it is that we must respond to God’s gracious overtures by saying “yes” to Him. Read Colossians 2:6-7.

Death by Drowning

Pages 94-104

Willimon says, “Whenever anybody asks me, ‘What does Baptism mean?’ I always respond, ‘Baptism means everything which water means’” (*RWYA* 94).

What does water mean to you? Can you share some images of water that come to mind and what they say to you?

What biblical images of water does the Rite of Baptism draw on (*LBW* 122, rubric #9)? What do these images communicate?

You can read of our Lord’s own Baptism in St. Matthew 3:1-17. Why does Jesus need to be baptized and how are His Baptism and our Baptism connected (*RWYA* 95-96)?

In St. Mark 10:32-40, James and John are zealous for a favor from the Lord. In their enthusiasm they make of Him a request, but first Jesus asks them a question: “‘Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’”

What is Jesus asking? What is He inviting these enthusiastic “Yes, Lord, we’re able!” disciples into?

Like James and John, we come in our zeal for Baptism, yet our Lord’s invitation to “take up the Cross and follow Me” still stands (St. Mark 8:34-38) as does His question, “‘Are you able . . .?’”. Do we really understand what we’re asking and do we understand the radical nature of our request for ourselves and/or for our child(ren)? If necessary, look again at the Rite of Baptism (*LBW* 123, rubric #10; *LBW* 124, rubric #14) and read Philippians 2:5-11 for connections. When we ask for Baptism, what are we asking for?

In response to our Lord’s saving work, what is the Church commanded to do in St. Matthew 28:16-20? Note here also the baptismal rite (*LBW* 122, rubric #9).

What is a disciple (go ahead and consult a dictionary if needed)? How are disciples made according to Jesus in St. Matthew? (Remember Tertullian’s adage, “Christians are made, not born.”)

How long does the school of discipleship last (*RWYA* 101)?

The author claims that “above all, Baptism is death.” Death to what? Death to who? How is Baptism death?

Read Romans 6:1-11. What does the Apostle say here about Baptism and death? What is its consequence for our daily lives (*RWYA* 99)?

Re-read the *Small Catechism* on Baptism. Do you see the moral and ethical consequences of Baptism? What are they?

Again, Willimon says, “Baptism is the passageway into discipleship, the fitting response to the proclamation of the Gospel, the model for what the Christian life is: a life of obedience, servanthood, love, and faithfulness — even unto death” (RWYA 98).

How is Baptism the model for the Christian life (RWYA 98)? What is being modeled?

Read Willimon again (RWYA 100-102). Do you see the baptismal connection and flow of the Cross and Resurrection, of baptismal dying and rising?

How do you feel about death as a baptismal emphasis, especially the quote of Ortiz (RWYA 102-104)? Does it make you uncomfortable? Why?

Look at the Rite for the Burial of the Dead in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW 206). How does the Church link Baptism with our end of life as Christians (rubric #4)?

Remember Who You Are (105-114):

“Who are you?” is a question we oftentimes are asked. How do you answer? “Why, I’m Mrs. Tucker from just down the street” or “I’m Mr. Smith the dairy farmer” or “My name is Terry Brown and my family’s belonged to this church for generations!”.

Who are you? How are you called? How are you known and identified?

Now read over the Rite of Baptism one more time (LBW 121- 125). In light of the rite, who are you? How are you called? How are you known and identified?

When you were baptized a Pastor traced the Cross on your brow, named you, and declared, “_____, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever.”

Trace again the sign of the Cross first imposed on your forehead and remember who you are . . . and, most importantly, whose you are. Does it make a difference? How?