

**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**The Rev. P. Stevens Lynn – Sermon**  
**Sunday, January 7, 2018**  
**Baptism of Our Lord – Mark 1:4-11**

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*

January 17, 1954. That's the day I was baptized at Grace Lutheran Church in Bellwood. I will celebrate my 64<sup>th</sup> baptismal birthday in 10 days. On that day, 64 years ago, I was made a member, adopted, included into the family of God – the body of Christ – the church. Baptism is the beginning of the Christian life. The entrance into the body of Christ. That's why we placed the old baptismal font at the new entrance to our church – now the main entrance. As baptism is the entrance to the Christian life, it is good to see the font and be reminded of our baptisms every time we enter our church. That font was in Grace Lutheran when our building was down on Atherton & College until 1965. How many of you were baptized at Grace before 1965? It was at that font where your baptism happened.

Baptism is such an important event for us. So important that it is a sacrament – a sacred thing – meaning something God has commanded us to do. Matthew 28-Go into all the world baptizing; also something that has promise attached to it – the promise is we are now God's child and always will be; and something that has a physical element (water) attached to it. Baptism is important.

First, let's look at Jesus' baptism, then ours. John baptized Jesus. John did washings for repentance. Jesus didn't need to repent. So Jesus' baptism changed the nature of baptism. All our baptisms today are like Jesus'. These are the things that happened at Jesus' baptism. As he came out of the water, the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus – something like a dove fluttering down, then a voice said: You are my Son – the beloved – with you I am well pleased." Jesus was God – incarnated into a human. Jesus was God in the flesh and God was well pleased with the plan.

As I understand it, these are the things that happened at Jesus' baptism. He was given an identity – God's son. He was identified as the focus of God's love – and was pleasing to God; and, He was given the Holy Spirit – and Jesus was immersed into a new group – those of the baptized.

The same things happen to us in our baptisms. We are given a new identity – we are claimed as God's daughter or son. We are the focus of God's love and God is

pleased with us. We are given the Holy Spirit in our baptisms, and once baptized we become immersed into a new group – the body of Christ. The word baptize means to immerse or initiate into something. In baptism, that something we are being immersed into is the church, the body of Christ. To immerse yourself into something means, that something is very important to you – in fact it becomes you – you live it – you are into it. To be immersed into Jesus and his church means that Jesus and his church become the biggest part of your identity. That immersion has nothing to do with being dunked or having water poured over you, the method of baptism is not important, but it has everything to do with being given over to Jesus – being incorporated into Him.

In baptism, we are given the gift of God's Holy Spirit. I like to describe the Holy Spirit as the "liveliness of God," the manifestation – the visiblensness – the result of God in us. There is the expectation that God's Holy Spirit – with the help of parents, godparents and the whole church, will lead us to lives of faithfulness and liveliness to God. Even with babies and in the last 10 years, we have baptized almost 200 babies right here at our font; even with babies the Holy Spirit is given, for babies are certainly part of God's family, and all the means of grace that go with family membership. But because babies are that – babies – parents must make promises to help nurture the Holy Spirit's growth and development in their child. After baptism and the inception of the Holy Spirit, there is work to be done to nourish and nurture that growth. Baptism – God adopting us and telling us we are God's forever is pure grace – we do nothing to make that happen. But parents and godparents and we as members of the church who promise to keep those baptismal promises – that promise is pure law. Work needs to be done by parents and us the church to bring that child into the faith – and that work is the most important work parents will ever do. Parents bringing their child to worship and Sunday school and catechism and Vacation Bible School and Super Wednesday and choirs. Parents showing children by example how important the church is. Parents showing and modeling prayer for their children. And we as the church do our part by making sure all these ministries are there, by loving and accepting the child as they move in and around our building and by being a good example yourself by coming to church activities and ministries where our children are – supporting those ministries. When children sing, Crossfire, Nine Lessons & Carols, Advent Fest, The Epiphany Event, Youth Sunday, encouraging kids to acolyte, usher, greet, lector, be communion assistants, we should be present and be screaming our support in all of these. Because when baptismal promises are kept by parents and church, the Holy Spirit's liveliness and influence grows stronger and more vital in a

child's life. That's why baptism is the most important milestone ministry that we celebrate. Let's all of us help our children live into their faith.

Baptism, especially with babies is a wonderful example of God's love and grace. It's such an important way for us to realize how God loves us, adopts us and promises us to that we are God's. Baptism is the event that leads to salvation. Baptism is not salvation. If it were all that had to happen we would be out at Beaver & Garner with a firehose baptizing everyone who walked by. That's cheap. And, if we see baptism as required for salvation – it just becomes another works righteous act done to please God. That's not true either. Jesus suffering and dying on the cross and God raising him from the dead and us believing and having faith in his death and resurrection – that is salvation. Baptism is a sign of that. God's way of saying – you're part of that – immersed into that. Immersed into a life and process of nurturing faith in Jesus Christ.

In baptism, God claims you and gives you to identity of God's daughter or son – and you are loved, now and always. Martin Lutheran whenever he sensed his spiritual strength and courage faltering, he would touch his fingers to his forehead and trace the cross on his head – and he would say – “I am baptized – I am a child of God – loved and accepted.” In the earliest baptismal liturgies, after the child or adult was baptized, they appeared before the Bishop. The Bishop would dip his finger into oil and make the sign of the cross on the newly baptized person's forehead. We, your pastors, also make the sign of the cross on the babies' forehead every time we baptize. That was and is known as the signation or signature. The sign of the cross on a person's forehead is God's signature on us. As sheep and cattle are marked or branded to show who owns them, Christians are marked and branded at baptism to show who owns them.

God owns you. It might be a nice custom for you and me, as we enter and leave the church and pass that font – or as you come for Holy Communion and pass this font to dip your finger into water and retrace God's signature on your forehead, the signature placed there when you were baptized.

But making the sign of the cross on your forehead or not making that sign is not the important thing today; the important thing is – Remember that you are baptized. You are adopted, included as part of God's family. God loves you and God will never let you go.

Thanks be to God! Amen.