

Background Information

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This unit is very important as the theme of baptism comes back often in our lessons. Help children to learn all they can from this unit so that it can be referenced later in our teaching. The students should have some prior experience with baptism in our congregation or other congregations. Don't be afraid to find out what they already know.

What Luther Says
(Taken from *Luther's Small Catechism*)

1. What is Baptism?

Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's Word.

What then is this Word?

In Matthew 28 our Lord Jesus Christ says: "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."

Note: The Lutheran Definition of a Sacrament—an outward sign of God's grace using an earthly element and commanded by Christ.

2. What gifts or benefits does God give in Baptism?

It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the Word and promise of God declare.

What is this Word and promise of God?

In mark 16 our Lord Jesus Christ says:
"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

[b[How can water do such great things?[/b]

Clearly the water does not do it, but the Word of God, which is with, in, and among the water, and faith, which trusts this word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit."

St Paul writes in Titus:

“He saved us...in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure.”

What does Baptism mean for daily living?

It signifies that daily the old person in us with all our sins and evil desires is to be drowned through sorrow for sin and repentance, and that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

St. Paul writes in Romans:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized unto his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by Baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of God the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

Other Tips for Teaching:

John the Baptist was a prominent part of the lectionary readings for Advent. The children can most likely tell you what they remember from Children’s Sermons.

Refer to their experiences with baptism in our congregation. What do they know about what happens when a baby is baptized? Do we always baptize babies? The older children can look at the service in the hymnal to find out about the promises made for them in baptism.

Use pictures from children’s Bibles, art books, etc. as you feel comfortable. Also, feel free to talk about how water is important in our daily lives. This may help them to remember what they learn when they see water in the future. As Luther said, “when you wash your face, remember your baptism.”

When we make the sign of the cross we are remembering our baptism. Younger children especially can benefit from learning how to do this, and encouraging them to make the sign of the cross in worship.