

## Titus 3:4-7

Baptism of our Lord, January 13 & 14, 2019

### The Miracle of Baptism

The date was May 6, 1962. On that date, the U.S.S. Ethan Allen submarine fired a live nuclear-armed Polaris missile while submerged in the Pacific Ocean. The missile traveled over 1,100 miles downrange over the Pacific Ocean and was detonated at an altitude of 11,000 feet over the South Pacific. In fact, that test was the only complete operational test of an American strategic missile with a live warhead. That test also showed that if ever needed during a nuclear war, the U.S. would now have the capability to retaliate if attacked. They now had a powerful weapon that could be used in war.

On May 6, 1962, there was a war going on within me. Jesus went to war with the devil. Instead of firing a nuclear missile from underwater, Jesus would use water and the Word to strike a defeating blow against the devil. As my parents stood up at the baptism font, and as the pastor applied the water of baptism, the devil lost the battle of my heart. It's beyond amazing what happens in baptism. This is a violent, life-life changing battle between chaos and order, good and evil, the Creator and all the forces of darkness in the waters of baptism. And Jesus wins. That's what baptism does.

The Apostle Paul wanted his readers of this short letter to know that nothing short of a miracle happens in the waters of baptism. Through that water and the Word of God, God adopts us into his family. In Baptism God found you and claimed you and brought you into his family to give you a new life and a changed identity and a beautiful hope. That's what baptism means for us.

The letter to Titus is a small letter – 3 chapters, about 2 pages long. In this letter to Titus, the Apostle Paul is encouraging a younger pastor whose name was Titus that he needed to keep teaching sound doctrine and encouraging the people to live their faith in every aspect of their lives. This new congregation was located on the island of Crete. Yet, it was also a tough one. There were people who were rebellious and deceivers. There were people who were gluttons. There were people who were drinking to excess. There were people who did not listen to those who were in authority. They liked to slander people. They enjoyed pleasures to an excess. The people really needed a miracle to wash themselves clean of their sin. That's what baptism does for us.

The story is told of a little girl who was sitting and watching her mother do the dishes at the kitchen sink. She suddenly notices that her mother had several strands of white that stood in contrast to her brunette hair. *"Why are some of your hairs white, Mom?"* say asked. Her mother replied, *"Well, every time you do something wrong and make me cry or unhappy, one of my hairs turn white."* The little girl thought about this a little while, then she asked: *"So, how come ALL of Grandma's hair is white?"*

If that was true, we would all make our parent's hair white. We sin against people. People sin against us. We all sin against God. We don't keep all of God's commandments perfectly. We don't put God always in first place in our lives. The words that may come out of our mouths are words that we would not repeat here in church. We gossip and complain. We are not always ready to share our time, talents and treasures like our Lord would like us to. Just like the new Christians on the island of Crete needed their sins washed away, we need our sins washed away. That's what baptism means for us.

Yet, God did not leave us alone in our sin. The miracle of baptism is simple. The Apostle Paul speaks about that miracle when he tells Titus: **"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior."** Through the miracle of Baptism, the Holy Spirit does what is impossible for us to do. He enters dead hearts, and he performs a miracle – he washes and renews. Through that sacrament we are born into a new relationship with God. We are no longer his enemies. We are alive in Christ. As we continue to hear that Word of God in our lives, the Holy Spirit keeps us in that relationship as we believe and trust in Him.

Why would God do that? Paul answers that question in our text: **"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."** Think of the kindest, most loving person you know. Why did you choose him or her? My guess it is

someone you know well. Someone you have seen kindness in many times. The same God, who demands that we be perfect in order to enter heaven, is the same God who showed his kindness and love in sending his Son into the world to die for it. And yet, why did he do it? It is not an obligation that God owes to us. It is not our reward for leaving a good life. The truth is: we can't fully understand the "why." We can't explain it fully. But it is what we trust and believe. Every day we trust that miracle that God has done in us through the water of Baptism.

God washes away our sin so that we will be washed clean for eternal life. The Apostle Paul tells us what this washing through Baptism means: **"so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."** Imagine this picture for a moment – a garbage dump full of broken bottles, old appliances, bundles of outdated papers. Yet, right there in the middle of all that garbage there is a rose growing. What a contrast between the rose and the garbage.

What a picture of what God did at Christmas. Into a world full of broken hearts, shattered dreams, guilty consciences and feelings of worthlessness, he sent his Son – a rose growing among the garbage. That rose has covered up all the garbage in our lives. Through faith in Jesus, our heavenly Father only sees a beautiful bed of roses. Since he doesn't see the garbage that has been washed away, we are washed clean for eternal life.

That's the blessing that God gives us through the water of baptism. So, that you can know that, no matter how you feel on any day, no matter how your life looks in any way, no matter how others judge you tomorrow, yesterday, or today; your God, who hears your heart confess everything you are and have been, has already poured his cleansing Spirit out on you so generously that God can't find a single record of any dirty thing you've ever done. That's your God. That's his grace, and that's what we have to live with every day. Amen.