

Baptism Devotional by Pastor Eric

Central Community Christian Fellowship

Baptism - how it is going to happen

Monday

That, by the way, is what baptism pictures for us: In baptism we show that we have been saved from death and doom by the resurrection of Christ; not because our bodies are washed clean by the water, but because in being baptized we are turning to God and asking him to cleanse our hearts from sin.

1 Peter 3:21

The first question we might ask ourselves as the day of baptism gets closer is, "Why am I doing this?" A valid question. There are lots of good answers in the scriptures. Jesus was baptized, so it makes sense that we should be baptized as well. Jesus told His disciples to go into the whole world to teach, preach and baptize. It would make sense that we be among those being obedient. Peter writes about this question and talks about Noah... He says our baptism sets us apart from the world by God, with water, the way God set out and saved Noah to re-populate the planet.

Remember the story of Noah? The people of the world were living in great sin. God had come to His limit. He had been pushed to the point of scrapping the entire creation plan. And then He considered Noah. Listen:

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6:5-8

Imagine all the work of creation ready to be dumped because people rejected their Creator. There was no way that they could save themselves. The hole was too deep. But God saw Noah. His heart was softened. And through Noah all mankind was saved.

After the flood, people threw away their second chance. But God still loved us. So He sent His Son, Jesus. In Jesus and His resurrection from the dead we are pulled out from the flood of sin that has covered our world. In The Blood of Jesus our sins are washed away. In the water of baptism we are cleansed, not of physical dirt, but of the spiritual dirt that we turn over to God. In looking to Him we become like Noah, a person of great promise, set apart by the water and The Blood to do great things.

This is going to be a great week in our lives. Today pray that God prepares your heart to become the person He wants you to be. Your world, your family and your friends need you. Sunday will set you apart. Give thanks to God that through Jesus you have found favor in His Eyes.

Baptism - how we do it

Tuesday

After his baptism, as soon as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God coming down in the form of a dove.

Matthew 3:16

John 3:16 . . . far and away the most famous verse in the Bible. From the Super Bowl to The Master's Tournament, from Martin Luther to **Central Community's** youngest Sunday School class, it is the verse that gets the press. For good reason. It is easy to understand and it explains the plan of salvation with efficiency:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Thousands of people, if not millions, have memorized this verse. Thousands, if not millions, have given their hearts to Jesus by trusting its precious promise of eternal life. Thousands, if not millions, have never read Matthew 3:16. You could go a lifetime, probably have, without ever seeing a sign for it at a sporting event or ever being asked to memorize it. But it is a precious verse. And it is one of the many verses that explain how baptism is to be done.

When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened, The Holy Spirit came down like a dove, and all of this happened when Jesus came up out of the water. Now for Jesus to come up out of the water, He had to go down into the water. He was not sprinkled, splashed or taken as an infant to the river side. He went

in obedience to Our Father. He went into the river of his own free will, understanding what it was all about and trusting The Father for the outcome. John the Baptist put Him under the water, completely immersed Him (the word actually means “buried”) and then lifted Him up out of the water.

In Siberia, I watched adults be baptized in a little church with no heat while the weather was 20 below zero outdoors and not a lot better inside. They stood in pails of water and the priest dumped water over their heads, trying to simulate immersion. They were freezing. It was beautiful to stand in a church that only nine years before had been a prison in an atheist nation and share in these people’s commitments. I will never forget it.

God has blessed us. We have a heated building. A pool in the front of the auditorium - with a heater! We have no excuse not to follow Jesus and be baptized just as He was. When someone asks you why you have to be “dunked” all the way under the water, tell them it was good enough for Jesus and it is the only way you want to have it done in your life! Today, take time to thank God for this opportunity. He is calling you. Listen to His voice today.

Baptism - what we need

Wednesday

As they rode along, they came to a small body of water, and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! Why can’t I be baptized?” “You can,” Philip answered, “If you believe with all your heart.” And the eunuch replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Acts 8:36-37

It is easy for us to fall into self-doubt. The issues that face us on a daily basis can be overwhelming: job security, school, parenting, family issues, personal problems, the sins of our past... These and many other challenges can force us into deep personal evaluation: “Do I have what I need to be baptized?” The story of this eunuch can help us.

The man was one of great education and stature in his society. According to the Acts of the Apostles he was Treasurer of all of Ethiopia, a great and wealthy nation in those days. He sat with Candace the Queen. A woman of power and of might. On his way home from Jerusalem he was investigating the scriptures, reading the book of Isaiah, when Philip overheard him. Philip, quick to share the Good News, stepped forward and began to tell him about Jesus and how even Isaiah the prophet this man was reading had foretold His coming. The man believed.

In that moment it didn't matter that he and Philip had never met before. It didn't matter that Philip was just a traveling preacher, without home or stature and that the eunuch was a man of great wealth and political clout. It didn't even matter that they were from different countries and different religious backgrounds. All that mattered was Jesus. Philip had shared the Good News, and the Eunuch had been quick to respond. He wanted to know if when he saw water, he could be baptized. No classes. No confirmation. No catechism. No requirements laid out by religious leaders. One requirement: Philip asked, "Do you believe with all your heart?"

This is my question for you to consider today: "Do you believe with all of your heart?" Don't let personal failures or self-doubt stand in your way. They will always be roadblocks. One question really counts: "Do you believe with all of your heart?" If so, you are ready to be baptized. If not, you have a bigger issue to deal with than baptism. You need to go to God about salvation. He wants to give you faith to believe.

Today in your prayer time, talk with God about your doubts and close your prayer with a statement of faith. Tell your heavenly Father, from your heart, that you believe that Jesus is His Son. It's all you need to be baptized.

Baptism - the proper approach

Thursday

Here is a sample of John's preaching to the crowds that came for baptism: "You brood of snakes! You are trying to escape hell without truly turning to God! That is why you want to be baptized!" Luke 3:7

Motivation - it's an important element in everything we say and do. What's the motivating factor behind our action. If all we need to be baptized is total belief that Jesus Christ is The Son of God, it seems impossible that anyone could have a bad motivation. John's primary ministry was in preparing the way for Jesus Christ. He did this in some pretty hard-hitting preaching about sin, and in baptizing people with a baptism of repentance. That is a baptism that was telling God that they were sorry for their sins and that they wanted to be obedient to Him with their lives.

However, not everyone was truly repentant. Some were just scared. And from the way John described them they had good reason to be scared. He called them snakes. They slithered. They were lower than low. They were filled with poison. They waited in the pathways of men and women and when they

least expected it they would strike. They were the adversaries of God, busy trying to play both sides of the fence. Nailing Jesus to the cross with their actions day in and day out. But when push came to shove, they wanted to avoid hell as much as the next guy and hey, if that meant a bath in the Jordan river, they were game.

John said it wouldn't do. That without truly turning to God they would just be wet sinners. Snakes in the river. The most dangerous kind. They look like they love God. They act like they love God. They even do and say all the right "stuff." But in their hearts they are far from Him. They are scared. Instead of looking for a life change they are merely seeking a little fire insurance against an awful eternity in hell. Not enough.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He celebrated a Passover dinner with His disciples. They all looked happy. They acted like family. Yet one of them would betray Him. Would strike like a snake. One would deny Him and slither with the crowds. All would run in fear in the face of the horror of the cross. The horror of death.

As we approach baptism we must approach it as death to an old way of life. And an invitation to a new and higher walk with Him. Today, surrender your old self to Him in prayer and ask Jesus to lift you to a higher walk. To prepare your heart, mind, body and soul for baptism. Sunday's coming.

Baptism - how God changes us

Friday

For in baptism you see how your old, evil nature died with him and was buried with him; and then you came up out of death with him into a new life because you trusted the Word of the mighty God who raised Christ from the dead
Colossians 2:12

It must have been a horrible day to be alive. A day when believers and unbelievers alike recognized that Jesus was the Son of God. The day they crucified our Lord.

The scriptures tell the story of the mock trial, the severe beatings, the long walk to the hill called Golgotha, or the place of the skull. The story is told of two criminals that were hung on crosses each one

beside Jesus and then how they took Jesus, The Son of God, and nailed His carpenter's hands to the wood of a cross. A cross that a carpenter made. Probably someone that Jesus knew, possibly someone He had worked with or had sat in the shop with. The nails went through His feet, piercing His skin, long dark from the dusty roads He traveled, now covered with perfume, the perfume of a woman who broke her most precious gift to spread it on His feet before He died. They hoisted the cross high, dropped the base into a hole in the ground, tamped the soil until it stood solid; and they killed him.

From the cross Jesus forgave them. He knew that they were confused. That they would never have done it if they only would have believed. From the cross He gave His Spirit back to His Father. He had come from God and He would return to God. From the cross, the cross on which He died, He bled. And His blood washes away the sins of the world for all who would believe. Did then. Does now. And then at mid-day the skies went dark and a great fear fell across all of Jerusalem. Just as for many there is still a great darkness that covers their light. The Light of God. They live in the shadow of death and shame. We live in the shadow of the cross and The Light of Jesus Christ!

In baptism, see your old self buried with Jesus Christ. The evil nature cleansed with His power over death. In baptism, see your new life with power and glory. All the power and glory of the risen Savior and The Living God who raised Christ from the dead and who will raise you up out of the death that kills our joy and smothers all hope of life with purpose.

From the cross, Jesus had a view of the world, his disciples and all of us that had to forever change the course of our destinies. He saw us for who we are and loved us still. From baptism, God will give you a view of the world that allows you to accept His way and His will for your life like never before. Today pray that your heart will be ready to accept this great gift from God. Jesus did it for you.

Baptism - how good it is!

Saturday

Your old sin-loving nature was buried with him by baptism when he died, and when God the Father, with glorious power, brought him back to life again, you were given his wonderful new life to enjoy. Romans 6:4

Usually when we lose something it is not a good thing. From our car keys to a fish on the line, losing something is not much fun. We don't like to lose games or to lose in relationships. We like to win, even when we might be better off if we were to lose.

I own an old trunk that I inherited as a teenager from a family friend. I have a weird collection of stuff in my old trunk. Ticket stubs from concerts, movie stubs, pictures of friends, ceramic class projects, poetry, pennants from Disneyland, soda bottles, junk - my junk. The older I get the more valuable it becomes to me.

My children love that old trunk and consider trips down memory lane with Dad a real luxury. As I pull out old memories they claim each one as their own. I always laugh and tell them, "Someday it will all belong to you..."

Some of the junk brings back painful memories, however. Some are memories that I would like to keep locked up in that trunk forever. Memories that I would rather not share with my children or anyone else for that matter. Things I would like to lose.

In baptism, we get the opportunity to bury an old life that most of us have carried around too long. We get the chance to lose a list of habits and issues that need losing. Our old life, the one that has caused us unhappiness, can be left behind. Our new life, a life of peace, joy and power in Jesus Christ, can begin. The scripture says, "You were given his wonderful new life to enjoy."

Not all old habits are easy to lose. New Life is not always a quick fit or an easy adjustment. It is no longer just a shallow life we grapple with but now we are dealing with the wonderful life of God, given to us to enjoy. This is quite a change for most of us. We have been stuck in our routine. Buried in a list of habits that have built a lifestyle that we have grown accustomed to. It is hard to imagine any other way to live. Imagine it. It is God's plan for your life! Enjoyment beyond imagining.

Today say a prayer of thanksgiving for that which you are losing. That which you will leave behind. It may be some pretty big stuff for some of us. For others it may be the most liberating moment of our lives. Prepare your heart for tomorrow. Take a mental inventory of your life's trunk and then give it to God. You will be surprised at what He considers a treasure worth keeping and what He will help you throw away. He knows what is best in these issues. Today is a day to prepare to release. A day to pray.

Baptism - your personal miracle

Sunday

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its' parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free... 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Today is the day. The day when you will be baptized. This morning is a time for praise.

Praise Him - He has invited us into His Body - the church

Praise Him - He invites us to be ourselves - and to be one with each other

Praise Him - It doesn't matter who we were - we are brand new in Him

This morning write your thoughts on the day of your baptism in the place below. Save them. This day will be yours forever. You are now His, forever.

Think about one thing you might want to share before I baptize you. God bless you in your obedience to God. I am excited! He is Good.