

## Narrative Baptism Service - *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

### Presentation

The Service for Holy Baptism begins with a paragraph that describes everything we, as Lutherans, believe happens in baptism. Those who are baptized are given a new life, delivered from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and become members of the body of Christ. This happens through the Word of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the earthly sign of water. In baptism, our lives are joined to the mission of God, and we are called to a life of faith in loving God, ourselves, and others, in this life and the next.

[Read first paragraph in grey type, column A or B, pg. 227.]

When the person who is being baptized cannot make promises for themselves, a sponsor presents them for baptism. As Lutherans, we believe that in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, God is making unbreakable promises to us, so it is appropriate for children to be baptized before they can speak for themselves. Sponsors, sometimes called godparents, promise to assist the church and the parents in keeping the promises they are about to make for the child, until that child can take those promises on for themselves in the rite of Affirmation of Baptism, or Confirmation. Even if these adults are unable to keep the promises they are making, God will keep God's promises.

If the person who is being baptized can speak for themselves, they do so. Baptism is not only for infants and children, but also for anyone who has not yet been baptized, regardless of age. Baptism is once for all, though Lutherans may affirm their baptism at special milestones such as Confirmation or new membership, and are encouraged to remember their baptism daily.<sup>1</sup>

[Read the first two statements in grey type at the top of pg. 228.]

When the person who is being baptized cannot make promises for themselves, the parents are asked to make promises on their behalf. These promises are intended to help the baptized begin to know God and pattern their life after the Way of following Jesus. In many congregations, the congregation helps parents to keep these promises by offering public worship, teaching the Small Catechism, presenting Bibles to children and youth, offering mentors or prayer partners, and including children and youth in the mission and ministry of church life. The congregation also promises to support and pray for the baptized as they begin this life-long journey with Christ.

[Read the rest of pg. 228.]

### Profession of Faith

In the next section of the Service of Holy Baptism, candidates for baptism (if able), as well as parents and sponsors, reject that which is opposite of God, and profess what we as a church believe in a three-fold way. This mirrors Peter in the Gospel of John. He denies knowing Jesus three times, and then after meeting the risen Christ on the beach, he professes his love for Jesus three times and commits to feeding the faith of others.

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<sup>1</sup> See The Use of the Means of Grace, Principle 16:

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In the Orthodox Church<sup>2</sup>, candidates for baptism stand at the entry of the church and face west, the direction of the setting sun, during these questions about sin, death, and the devil. They literally spit at the devil in rejection, and then turn toward the east, the direction of the rising sun, and boldly use the Apostles' Creed to say what they believe.

[Read pg. 229, inviting those gathered into each of the responses.]

### **Thanksgiving at the Font**

Next, we move to the prayer over the water in the font. Sometimes pastors or a congregational representative, such as the Council President, will pour a pitcher of water into the font at this point. The pastor will pray a prayer known as "Luther's Flood Prayer," which has been used in our Service of Baptism since 1523<sup>3</sup>, over the water. This prayer is important because it rehearses all the ways that God has used simple water to save and redeem the people of God.

[Read the prayer at the top of pg. 230, with the following interjections.]

*The Lord be with you.*

***And also with you.***

*Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

***It is right to give our thanks and praise.***

*We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight.*

This is the very beginning of the Bible, the first chapter of Genesis, where God creates the world. God makes water foundational to our survival; we are made of between 45% and 75% water!<sup>4</sup>

*Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family,*

The story of Noah and the ark is in Genesis, chapters 6 through 9. God flooded the world with water but carries Noah and his family through the disaster to a new life on a refreshed planet.

*and through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom.*

The story of Moses and the journey of the people of God from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea is in the book of Exodus, chapter 14. God hears the cries of the people of God and responds by releasing them from slavery and bringing them through water to new life.

*At the river, your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit.*

Each of the four Gospels tells the story of Jesus being baptized. It is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.st-marymagdalene.org/parish-blog/2018/10/31/spitting-on-the-demons>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2018/02/water-word-create-new-life/>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-much-of-your-body-is-water-609406>

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*By the baptism of Jesus' death and resurrection you set us free from the power of sin and death and raise us up to live in you.*

In Romans 6<sup>5</sup>, Paul writes “Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Baptism joins us to the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the next section of this prayer, we ask for the Holy Spirit to come. In other denominations, a candidate might need to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit has come to them before they can be baptized. As Lutherans, we ask for the Holy Spirit to come in the sacrament itself.

*Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word, that those who are washed in the waters of baptism may be given new life.*

The prayer concludes with our praise of God.

*To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.*

## **Baptism**

The actual act of baptism itself is the shortest, but most significant, part of the service. The pastor uses water to baptize the person, using the names of the Trinity, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28: “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 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

In the Lutheran Church, an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament, or pastor, is the one who does the baptizing. In the case of an emergency, any Christian can baptize, using these same words.<sup>6</sup>

[Read the words under “Baptism” on pg. 230.]

After the baptism, the gathered people of God respond with an acclamation to voice their support of this baptism.

[Read the acclamation in bold print, either column A or B, on the bottom of pg. 230.]

In some congregations, the baptized person receives a baptismal garment at this time. It is white and symbolizes the clean slate and total forgiveness we receive when we are baptized. Whenever pastors, assisting ministers, acolytes, and those affirming their baptism (as in Confirmation) wear a white robe, they are showing in an outward way that they have “put on Christ” in baptism.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+6%3A3-5&version=NRSVUE>

<sup>6</sup> See The Use of the Means of Grace, Principles 22 & 23:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The\\_Use\\_Of\\_The\\_Means\\_Of\\_Grace.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Use_Of_The_Means_Of_Grace.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> See Romans 13:14. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+13%3A14&version=NRSVUE>

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The service continues with a prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, listed in Isaiah 11.<sup>8</sup> This is a prayer that is spoken at baptism and returns to the life of the baptized when they take on the promises of baptism for themselves in the Affirmation of Baptism. When an infant or child is baptized, we are asking for gifts that might take years to grow into, and yet we ask for them in faith, knowing that God provides. When this prayer returns in Affirmation of Baptism, it is often over gawky teenagers who are still trying to figure out exactly how they are gifted to serve God through their life of faith. We believe that the Spirit gifts all of us individually to contribute to the Body of Christ collectively.<sup>9</sup>

[Read the prayer at the top of pg. 231.]

The next symbolic act of baptism is anointing with oil. In the Old Testament, priests, kings, and prophets were anointed to set them apart for service to God.<sup>10</sup> In baptism, we become priests, holy people set apart for God, kings and queens as inheritors of God's kingdom, and prophets meant to speak the Word of God to all people who need God's message of love and forgiveness. The baptized is marked with a cross because they are united with Christ, whose very title means "anointed one."<sup>11</sup>

[Read the anointing statement just before the Welcome in the middle of pg. 231.]

## Welcome

The final symbolic act of baptism is presenting the baptized with a lighted candle. This candle is lighted from the Paschal candle to show that Christ's light passes to us in baptism. The baptized may light this candle again every baptismal anniversary to remember and tell stories about this special day. The congregational representative quotes either John 8:12 or Matthew 5:16.<sup>12</sup>

[Read column A or B under the "Welcome" section on the bottom of pg. 231.]

The last part of the Baptismal rite is the welcome. The gathered people of God welcome the newly baptized by reiterating this person's new place in the church's ministry and mission.

[Read the last paragraph at the bottom of pg. 231.]

*When this service is used and no one is baptized, conclude the service by encouraging everyone to affirm their baptism, either by corporate aspersion or by personally dipping their fingers in the baptismal font and tracing a cross on their own forehead. The pastor or assisting minister may proclaim, "Remember that you are baptized" during this time, individually or corporately. The service may conclude with the Passing of Peace.*

<sup>8</sup> See Isaiah 11:2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2011%3A2&version=NRSVUE>

<sup>9</sup> See Romans 12:4-8. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12%3A4-8&version=NRSVUE>

<sup>10</sup> Read more about this practice here: <https://www.learnreligions.com/anointing-oil-in-the-bible-5270379>

<sup>11</sup> See The Use of the Means of Grace, Background 28A:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The\\_Use\\_Of\\_The\\_Means\\_Of\\_Grace.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Use_Of_The_Means_Of_Grace.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> See John 8:12. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%208%3A12&version=NRSVUE> or Matthew 5:16 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205%3A16&version=NRSVUE>

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